



NO. 1 · JANUARY 2009

Alive

M A G A Z I N E

THEME

Work-Life
Balance
— global

**Tomorrow
I will come
later**

Professionals break
with the traditional
work rhythm



B FOR BALANCE · TIME TAMING · BALANCE AND MEDITATION · SUPER NAVIGATOR
WHAT'S HOT AND NOT · THE VIRTUAL OFFICE REVOLUTION · FROGS FROM HEAVEN



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for Balance

Your first job really does take its toll. It affects you for the rest of your life. This is probably why I have never been employed: the fear of meetings at 8 o'clock in the morning, and experiencing time pass in the treadmill, until you wake up one day ready for retirement.

For me, the most important thing is freedom and flexibility. I want to choose my own work hours, and where I need to work. I would probably die in a 9 to 5 job. It means the world to me having quiet mornings and beginning work after 10 am. The most important service you can do for yourself, is determine how you would like to work, and what your demands are in terms of work hours and work places.

In this edition of the B-alive Magazine, we will be focusing on the art of navigation in modern (work) life. At the same time, the magazine marks a new era for the B-society. We are re-launching the B-society under a new slogan: B for Balance. Why? Because the primary aim of the B-society is creating flexible societies for all, societies that support different family forms, work forms and daily rhythms. We want to unite quality of life and productivity, and give each individual the opportunity to live and work in their own unique rhythm. Our daily rhythm is determined genetically. Our family forms are multiple, and our work forms are becoming increasingly global. We need to adapt our work hours, so it is possible to meet for



work at 10 or later. We need to let our kids have the opportunity to meet at their institutions and schools at either 8am or 10am, and introduce new opening intervals in one out of four institutions. We want balance in life for the people – from cradle to rest home.

Also in this edition, B-alive is becoming more global than ever before. Our contributing writers include American author Dr. Randall Barolet, who writes about how to find balance through meditation practice. German writer Markus Albers talks about his new book, where the focus is how freedom in work can be incorporated. Finnish Anja Kulovesi has written a contribution on how to become a "time tamer." And one of the Danish contributors, Pernille Rasmussen, writes about what to do if work takes over.

We are also giving you two specific cases in more Balance, one from the Danish Internal Revenue Service - who are making their rooms smaller and yet their world bigger through an "office revolution" - and international health care company Abbott, who recently received an award for being Denmark's Best Workplace for Work-Life Balance in 2008.

Enjoy your read,

Camilla Kring
President



Taming Time in Finland

by Anja Kulovesi, Finland

According to research in European organizations we Finns are the busiest people in the EU. By now, we have learned that doing more, and doing it faster, takes a toll.

More and more people are searching for a better work/life balance and quality of life. The big question is 'how?'. *The TimeTaming concept* was born out of a need to discover new ideas on the topic, and to further develop tools for both individuals and teams who are learning from this contemporary challenge.

Nine styles, nine intimate relationships with time

After several years of experience in hundreds of companies and teams, we have recognized and summarized nine typical reasons that drive people into an unbalanced relationship with time. The pressure also comes from within, not always from outside. It would

be so much easier to place the blame on our boss, or on lack of sufficient resources, but this is not always the case. A few examples of the inner archetypes of time pressure are:

Perfectionists keep quality level high and often it is difficult for them to delegate a job to someone who is less skillful. It is difficult for them to recognize how much is enough. It is also hard for them to enjoy a modest job accomplished today as their goal aims for perfection.

The eternal dreamer is an idealist who is a font of ideas. Some of them reach for the stars. They can't possibly have the time, skills or energy to realize all dreams. We need their visionary skills, but they also need support in designing the micro-steps for the process, and in some cases actually taking action.

The commitment-chal-



It would be so much easier to place the blame on our boss, or on lack of sufficient resources, but this is not always the case.

lenged have many irons in the fire at the same time. There might be a long list of half-finished and rushed jobs. Their challenge is to give full attention to one person, one task at a time - at least every now and then. Without being fully present, it is difficult to catch those unspoken messages between the lines, as creative opportunities may only be revealed to those who are fully alert.

When people recognize some of their own behavior related to their experience of not having enough time, they also find some keys to their own time taming. It is often through humor that they start to understand the dynamics of their teams. When the eager **future-gazer** deals with **the believer in the safe past**, the only place for them to meet between future and history is the precious moment of NOW. Sometimes the jour-

ney to this tangible reality of the present moment is the greatest challenge of time taming.

The power of a metaphor

Time Taming is a holistic concept inspiring individuals and teams to insights by a visit to an imaginary House of TimeTamers. This is a journey of discovery, so that each of us can make a difference not only for ourselves, but also within the organization.

In the room of prioritizing we often open The Stock Market of Well-Being. Some Bank of Happiness currency is provided in order for one to make various time investments. The choices help to put first things first and maintain focus, be it an individual choice or a priority for team development. Care needs to be taken with each investment. The team investments also need di-

alogue, agreements and commitment. The TimeTaming coaches are well aware of the trends in Finland, and have a good grip on cultural differences, too. The fact that Finns often buy the stocks of Time to invest in my own well-being, Time to be present and Time to enjoy simple daily things, gives us great hope. Keeping that focus and staying that course can only lead us to better life balance. **B**

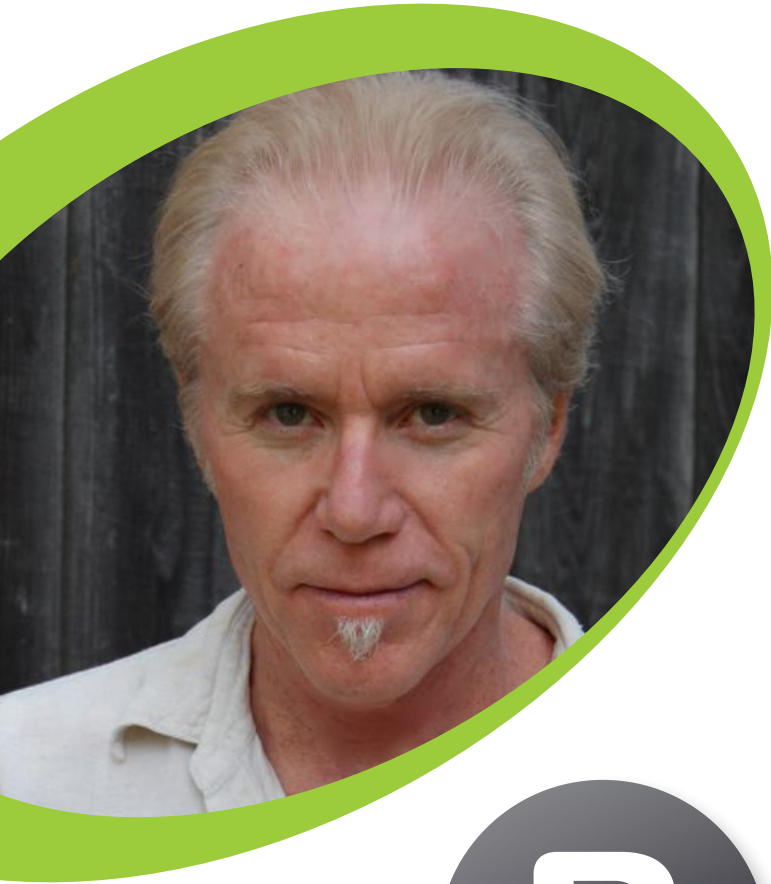


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Inventor of "The Well-Being Stock Market Game".

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www.timetaming.com



*You say you want a revolution
Well, you know, we all want to change
the world*

*You tell me it's the institution
Well, you know, you better free
your mind instead*

John Lennon, Revolution

B-alance

Create

**in Life through Balancing
Consciousness**

by Dr. Randall Barolet, USA

Free your
mind by
B-eing Aware

One of the Buddhist monks with whom I've gone for meditation retreat, is the Venerable Ajahn Samedho, a teacher much

loved and respected for his wisdom, compassion, and playful sense of humor in all aspects of life. He taught me something that became a key to understanding the nature of finding B-alance in life, which is so simple that it is perhaps the most easi-

ly overlooked. This teaching reaches directly to the heart and core of the way we utilize our consciousness in daily life. What he taught me was based on the story of a simple observation, which he had made about the nature of his own mind. Speak-

ing with his characteristic sense of humor, he said:

“I found an incredible reluctance in myself in the beginning to just rest in awareness! I thought I should be using some special technique...! Because at first it didn't seem like anything – it seemed like you were doing nothing; you were supposed to be doing something. But that kind of doubt fades.”

I had traveled across an ocean to sit and study with this wise teacher in his monastery, and the emphasis of his transmission was this: “Just rest in awareness.” In essence, he was telling all of us to observe ourselves from a calm and resting state of mind, and above all to drop “compulsive doing,” and to just rest in awareness. Resting in awareness and being attentive, or mindfulness meditation, is at the core of meditation practices, and is the ability to observe with clarity and insight the very fabric and essence of our own human lives; the breath, the body sensations, the emotions, and the thoughts — all of which are constantly arising, lingering for a time, and then passing away.

Find B-alance by B-eing with things as they are
Real meditation is learning to allow, in a very natural way, whatever thoughts, emotions and feelings arise;

in essence it is to learn to let it all just B-here now. We let it come up. We stop fighting it. We drop the implicit aggression, as our first step, so that whatever thoughts or emotions arise, we first simply observe them, and clearly recognize that these phenomena are all changing moment-to-moment. In this way, we begin to notice that they are impermanent. A thought or emotion comes up and then later it goes. A body sensation comes up and then goes. Our minds are just like that — manifesting and changing all the time! Amazing! Wonderful! This fundamental idea of awareness and allowing remains the basis for each step in the development of a balanced mind through meditation practices — a mind with the qualities of equanimity, peace and wisdom. A balanced mind is naturally a stable mind, a mind filled with peace and compassion.

When we do not cultivate awareness through this kind of mindfulness in daily life, so much of our life becomes ruled by the autopilot of compulsive actions. These actions are driven by our desires and aversions, which create the wish for things to be “other than the way they really are.” As we continue the practice of self-observation of our mind, there is an opportunity for these compulsive



3 simple steps for good Meditation



1 Take a comfortable posture, on the floor or in a chair. Allow your eyes to close and become simply “present within your body” by taking two or three deep relaxed breaths, releasing each time spontaneously and naturally, without any attempt to manipulate the breath in any special way.

2 Rest your attention on the movement of the breath, and simply notice the inhalations and exhalations as “rising” and “falling” or “in” and “out,” or perhaps counting cycles up to ten.

3 Whenever you realize that you have become lost in preoccupation with the surface chatter of the mind, gently, without judgment, return your attention to the breath. If some other sensation or experience becomes so strong that you find it difficult to remain attentive to the breath, let go of the breath and allow the stronger sensation to be the center of attention, taking this as the new resting place for your awareness. When you notice it subsides, return to the breath.


What is important is to remain present as fully as possible for whatever experience is being noted.

energies gradually to exert less control over our thoughts and actions. When these compulsive roots are given the space and time to arise into awareness, in the “space between thoughts” created through the practice of allowing things to be just as they are, we then have the chance to come into real contact with them, to know them, and thus to under-

stand the process of our own consciousness. This is literally our “in-sight” through mindfulness, which gradually reveals the context, relationship and connectedness of all things. To know this is to know both the impermanence and interdependence of things. To know this interdependence of things is a key that can open the doorway to the realm of B-alance in our lives. It is a

kind of eco-wisdom, an insight found in direct experience.

All of this is made possible by creating a small amount of daily, dedicated time and space for quiet self-reflection in one’s life. By practicing calm observation of breath, body, and mind, we may discover our interdependence with our surroundings and all things. We slowly cultivate not only direct knowledge

and insight about our own mind and how it works, but we see that it is no longer necessary to approach life with a kind of implicit aggression or fear, but rather to B-aware and simply create B-alance. By creating and practicing in a space of self-reflection, peace can really be here now, -- or as John and Yoko once said, “War is Over! If you want it! All we are saying is give Peace a chance!” 

Randall Barolet

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- Cornell University (B.S. in Environmental Engineering)
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He practices and teaches meditation, integrative healing and Vedic astrology, in the USA and Scandinavia.

Read more:
<http://web.mac.com/barolet>



Become a member of
B-society

We want Balance in life
for the people

Read more: B-Society.org



IS YOUR WORK LIFE HOT OR NOT?

Get warm in this cold wintertime: To Be or not to Be – hot or not!

WHAT'S HOT

WHAT'S NOT

WIN SOME TIME

Get a good overview of the week's 168 hours: move your hours around, like driving to your work outside of rush hours. Control over our own time makes us more relaxed, creative and productive.

CHOOSE A DIRECTION

Focus on what matters most to you: a social life? Then spend ample time with friends. A healthy life? Exercise more. Your career? Apply some new knowledge.

DESELECT

Make some de-selections – this way you will end up with the right choices left.

SLOWNESS

Find the balance between slow and quick activities: take time to act instead of just reacting. Decrease your tempo, and get your time back.

CALMNESS

Prioritize half an hour during the day for self-reflection, contemplation and some alone-time with yourself. Give life to you, so you can give life to others.

CLOSENESS

People with many close relationships throughout life live longer. So nurture your friendships.

TIME POCKETS

Make a strategy of placing time pockets in your daily/weekly schedule, where there is no planned content. This will give you a sense of being wealthy with time.

THE LITTLE THINGS

Happiness is often found in the little things in our daily lives. So be aware of 'now' and enjoy – a good cup of coffee, ice cream, or a trip to the movies.

MINIMIZE INTERRUPTIONS

It can take up to 20 minutes to get back to a task, every time you are interrupted. So create some time and space without interruption for you and others and save time; readjustment time.

ENERGY

Invest and share your life with an appropriate amount of partnerships. Prioritize that and those that give you energy.

WASTE TIME

Make sure you are in the traffic jam every day with all the others going to work, let people interrupt you at work, and let others decide what your spare time should involve – then you can always find yourself half an hour late for everything.

CHOOSE ALL DIRECTIONS AT ONCE

– this way you will end up with nothing and be back at square one. – Try to prioritize everything – except a focus

SELECT AND SELECT...

...and drown yourself in an ocean of chaos!

PACING

If you always keep yourself moving, you can avoid thinking and having control of your actions.

NEVER BE ALONE

Forget yourself – Sacrifice yourself for your work, the kids, your partner, etc. Then you will be loads of fun to be with!

TOO CLOSE

... The TV! We watch on average 14 hours of television a week – why not more? Become an isolated TV-addict!

TIME STREAMLINING

Slice your time into bite sizes and fill them up; why not overfill your time, chase and attempt to realize everything everyone else has? – this way time goes faster and faster...

THE BIG THINGS

Big things are good, so bigger things must be even better: you can lean back and enjoy life when you finally retire.

MAXIMIZE INTERRUPTIONS

Let yourself be interrupted, and make sure you interrupt your colleagues. This way they will be doing as little as you do, but your jumping around will look like you all have lots of energy!

EVERYTHING AT ONCE

"Invest" all of your life in work "stocks" – if you get fired or retire, your best friends will be former colleagues ...



Free employee

Neither historically nor biologically are we doomed to force ourselves out of bed every morning at the same time, simply to sit at a desk at the other end of the city. The office is a part of our culture, and as such is subject to the normal evolution of social norms.

by Markus Albers, Tyskland

There have, however, been many reasons to go into the office in the past: it was the place where we found the working tools that we had never been able to afford at home, let alone that we had no space for these tools. There was the photocopier we used daily, the document that we needed to look

at, the shelves and archives we worked with, and the colleagues with whom we shared the gossip from our weekends.

Today all these reminders of typewriters and overhead projectors, linoleum floor and company cafeteria, are hopelessly old-fashioned. These days we have online access to most information and archives. Electronic documents are run through the digital workflow,

replacing large office equipment through a small computer. We contact our colleagues by phone, Skype or e-mail easier than we could in our office's coffee-kitchen. In short: the good old office with single rooms to the right and left is an institution of the last century. As a consequence, our daily way to work is as obsolete as the "rush hour."

I have written a book on this topic: *Morgen komm ich*

später rein (Tomorrow I will come later), which was published last August in Germany. The basic thesis of the book is the following: Nearly unnoticed by most of us, a flexible form of work has evolved, which I call "Easy Economy." Even permanent staff members are increasingly working whenever and wherever they would like. According to calculations by the Institute of the German Economy, telecommuting currently is supported by 18.5 percent of German companies – in 2003, this support was extended by only 7.8 percent, while in 2000 it was a mere 4 percent. This development, described as "digital nomadism," or "Bedouining," has been predicted since the times of the New Economy. However, it is only in the last several years that we've been enabled to work together without being in the same place through the widespread advent of affordable broadband internet connections, phones that enable the receipt of emails, and the collaborative software that enables us to work together without being in the same place. According to EU figures, two-thirds of companies are willing to implement telework practices in the near future.

Many companies in Germany, as well as all over the world, are discovering the benefits of no longer calling their employees into the office on a daily basis. Deutsche Bank is implementing a program called "New Work Space" in which their employees are supplied with laptops and Black Berries. This will mean that 40 percent will soon be work-



Markus Albers

is a German journalist and the author of the book *Morgen komm ich später rein* (Tomorrow I will come later).

Find out more about the book at:
www.morgenkommichspaeterrein.de

ing as "Mobile People," while around 20 percent of "Super-Mobile People" will be given the opportunity to complete work whenever and wherever they want. If you phone the administration of the new BMW factory in Leipzig you will be directed to a wireless extension, without knowing where that person is currently located - perhaps he or she is even on vacation. At the Duisburg medical manufacturer Stryker, even their executives are working from home. And the first thing you learn when joining German software giant SAP, is that many offices are empty. Only relatively few communications are made face-to-face, but are rather done by e-mail, mobile phones, wikis, and online conferences.

And work is becoming even more mobile. The latest invention from T-Systems, the corporate-customer's subdivision of Deutsche Telekom, is an office that can be carried in your pocket. All applications, passwords and programs required for work are saved on a USB stick.


Plugging it into any computer with Internet access, anywhere in the world, opens your familiar work environment, including databases, email, current projects and mobile Internet telephony. When done, one saves all documents, closes all applications and unplugs the stick, leaving no electronic traces on the computer.

This is just one example of many. We are the first generation to be emancipated from the daily grind enacted while chained to the office desk. For the first time in history employees are enabled to work in a way similar to freelancers — without attendance requirement. I call these people die neuen "Freiangeestellten" — the new "Freememployees."

In the future we will still use offices from time to time. We will not be there every morning at nine, but perhaps arrive only at twelve o'clock, perhaps only on two days per week, or for three hours a day. We will be able to sleep-in, go to the movies and run errands during the daytime. Additionally, we'll

have time for friends and family. The need no longer exists to spend the major part of our lives in front of the monitor in the office, where most of the time we are distracted anyway, by annoying colleagues, phone calls, e-mails and meetings — so it often becomes hard to work properly.

Many studies show dramatic losses in productivity through inefficiency and distraction in the office. If on the other hand we work on our own terms, whenever we feel most productive, it is possible to get the work of nine hours done in five hours. The rest is free time. This, by the way, also increases our relative hourly rate dramatically. The book includes many examples on how to increase productivity and reduce distraction.

The bottom line - we live in the information society, but often we still work by the rules of industrial society. This has to change and the good news is this: It is already changing rapidly and dramatically, and for the better. 

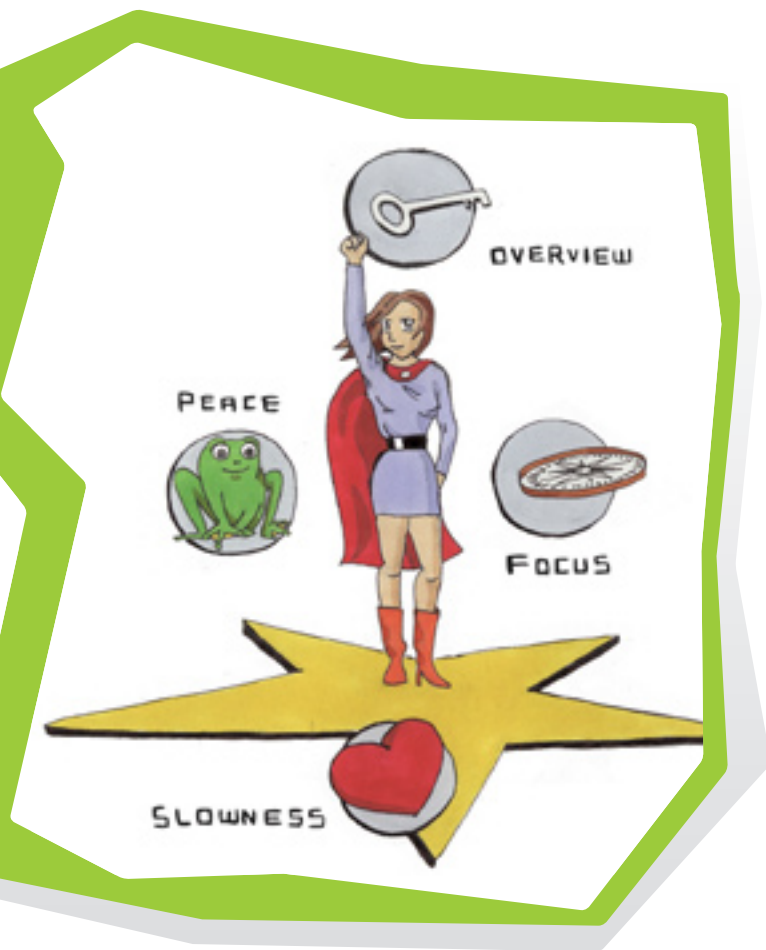


Super Navigator

by Camilla Kring

Everyone is talking about the balance between work and private life. But what is it that needs to be balanced? How do we create a balance? Is it when work is fun? Are we working when we are checking our emails in the evening? Do your register your work dreams as work, or?

Family life and work life have been radically changed for good. It is a futile struggle trying to re-create the former boundaries between work life and family life, as they once existed. Meanwhile, the present and the future are about finding the necessary balance between work and private life. We have to face the fact that the old notion of industrial time and body control, as manifest in the attitude "I see you, therefore you work," has become rather meaningless; if only because knowledge-work and



GOOD TIPS FOR YOU

- Find time for you — people who give life to them selves, are able to give more life to others.
- Set up 3 or 4 focus points in your life — people who do not have a direction are constantly bouncing around in a pinball machine.
- Find balance between slow and fast activities. Slowness is needed to be able to act, rather than just to react.
- Be a time realist — live by the 168 hours that exist in the week. If you like, you can keep a time log, to register how you actually spend your hours, and thus enhance your navigation.

thinking-work can take place anywhere and anytime.

Each of us has our own biological rhythm and sense of time – which was inhibited initially by the medieval monks, and later by industrial clock time, along with clock-based train schedules, regular clock-based work periods, and the demand of physical presence as the signification of “work.” In an innovative workplace, however, true value lies in individual performance, not in the hands of the clock – which is why we have to design individual work times, work areas, and work rhythms that suit each individual. More than 80% of a company’s value is immaterial – its value lies in concepts,

ideas, innovation, creativity, management and brands. Furthermore, in the future, it is most likely that a typical company’s value will become even more invisible.

Thus the challenge for companies and societies is to create a culture that supports individual ways of organizing life. As a collective, we can support the individual to find his or her own direction and balance in life. As individuals, we must regain power over time. We must set our own goals and skillfully navigate by them; otherwise others will take control of our time.

A Super Navigator is a human being who is able to maneuver through the everyday

inferno of opportunities, demands, and information. But for the individual to be able to do this, and take responsibility for one’s own working life, certain navigational tools are necessary. Let’s take a look.

FOCUS – SLOWNESS – TRANQUILITY

Focus

A person, who doesn’t have a direction in life, is a victim of momentary whims; this person is trapped in an “opportunity tsunami” and is controlled by the surrounding’s interests. Using our inner compass, we can find our life strategy: do you know where you are going? Set

up 3 navigation points: (1) what do I want to achieve, (2) which priorities does this specifically demand, and (3) what actions right now do you need to take to start changing.

Long-term thinking improves short-term decisions.

Slowness

It is unrealistic to think that we can work constructively in a constant, hectic tempo. Strategic thinking and creative thinking demands slowness. It is important that we incorporate slow activities into our lives and take the time to contemplate, especially if we need to think new thoughts. When we find balance between quick

activities and slow activities, it becomes easier to sustain our focus – and thereby navigate the opportunity tsunami.

So ask yourself, at what times of the day do you have most energy? Are you a “dromedary” or a “camel;” meaning does it suit you best to perform innovatively once a day, or does your energy peak twice during the day? At what time of the day does it come naturally to you? Try to become aware of, and to feel, what your essential personal rhythms really are. When you start to be aware of your own rhythm, you can help yourself to plan and control, or simply to flow with, your natural workday energies. Are you a morning person or an evening person? Do you want to have quiet mornings or quiet evenings?

Tranquility

We navigate in a turbulent and changeable time, which requires individual time, that personal time which allows us to focus and offers the

slowness to think reflectively. Therefore it is important that you also find time to experience tranquility — the time with no interruptions. Time for you, is time for your life course. Individual and personal time is a necessity. It is here, when you are fully living, that you have the energy to give life to others.

Take a break, shut off the mobile phone, pull out the plug, close the mailbox, put your foot down (gently, if possible), and sometimes say “No, thank you.” Maybe 30 minutes tranquility is all you need to regain your energy for being — and being there for others.

When you have focus, slowness, and tranquility in your life, you will have an overview too. You will know when you are in balance, as you will realize that you are working and living in your own rhythm. Balance is about uniting productivity and your quality of life at the same time. Balance is about resourceful navigation. To live is to navigate.

Happy Navigation! ☺

GOOD COMPANY CULTURE CHARACTERISTICS

- Employees can largely work in their own chosen times.
- A flexible work culture with respect for individual wishes and choices. The culture is always characterized by flexibility, trust, respect, and recognition.
- Clear goals are set up for the company as well as the individual employee.
- Employees have the opportunity for work without interruptions — for example, by working at a distance or in a home office.
- The company’s management finds time for reflection and absorption — if the management does not have time to think and act long-term because of time pressure, the whole organization will turn into an “emergency central” where human resources are swept up and drowned in a project tsunami.

Expert in Life Navigation

Camilla Kring is an independent consultant and an expert in Life Navigation. She is dynamic and challenges the way we think about work and societies. She has a Master of Science in Engineering from Technical University of Denmark and a PhD in Work-Life Balance.

www.frau-k.dk



We Make the Room Smaller

– and the World Bigger

by Camilla Frydenlund

The fall sun's last rays fall like a soft glow through the large window section. The smell of fresh coffee hangs in the air, and soft jazz tones mix with the cozy café atmosphere. Around in the cushioned furniture, people are sitting and relaxing, speaking in deep concentration or just silently pondering.

It could have been any Tuesday morning on a cozy café in the heart of a bus-

ting city, but we are actually in the coffee shop at the Danish Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) new headquarters. It is here a B-alive journalist has turned up to meet HR representatives Anni Ehlers and Hanne Christensen for a chat about the significance of room design for future workplaces.

The virtual office revolution

In 2005, IRS initiated the project "The Future IRS", which aimed





to discover how they could create more effective workspaces through distance work and office hotels. “The project dealt with finding ways to put colleagues from different locations together, and yet for them to still be close to home or the client. We realized through this process, how important the actual room or physical space becomes”, Anni Ehlers explains.

When the people at IRS started to talk about distance work, it became obvious that there were many assumptions and preconceptions about distance work that had to be cleared up, such as, “If you can’t see people, then you do not know if they are working.” During a visit to “LynFabrikken,” an entrepreneurial community and office space in Aarhus, Denmark, Anni Ehlers and Hanne Christensen

were surprised by the atmosphere and spirit in the coffee shop around which the entire office environment was built. “We thought to ourselves, what would happen with our culture, if we introduced the same thing?” remembers Anni Ehlers. They succeeded in convincing the executive staff that this was a good idea, and set off to create a similar coffee shop in IRS in Copenhagen.

The coffee shop at IRS is connected to a bigger plan of saving square meters and utilizing the building in a different way. “We would like to make a house that supports project work and knowledge sharing, as well as use the opportunity to increase the number of people per square meter. We believe that through new office spacing, we can change the culture of our work. The experience so far

with the coffee shop has proved this thought to be true”, says Hanne Christensen.

The conversation office

The co-workers’ first introduction to the coffee shop was a big experience for many. The space had changed from being a very dull smoking canteen to a modern, relaxed café environment. “We are seeing co-workers coming here with their family, friends, and external business partners to show off the room with pride.” Hanne Christensen continues, “We had many thoughts about how the space could be used, and how we could give it an identity and purpose for the co-workers. But we’ve hardly said anything. They found that out all by themselves.”

Anni Ehlers adds, “We are experiencing great knowledge sharing, while people

sit here. One of us will just go down there with a colleague for a cup of coffee, and before we know it, several people join our group for a discussion on a particular professional issue. There are so many things going on in the room.”

The design of the coffee shop includes modern furniture in different heights so that one can choose to either lounge or stand in the room. Opening hours for all are between 9.30 am and 2.30 pm. At other hours the space can be booked as a meeting room. This option is already being heavily used, with one particular case being the weekly meeting between office managers. “During the meeting they all stand up, and this enables things to progress more quickly as well as adding some informality to the meeting. In other words, a significant

group in the house have already changed their meeting culture, because of the room's design," says Anni Ehlers. Hanne Christensen agrees: "The room is a really good business case, because so many meetings are held here, saving so much space elsewhere in the building."

I have my office all over the country

Anni and Hanne hope that the coffee shop will spread to other strategic places in the organization, and provide some natural centers for many people. "Because we need to save square meters, we need to think differently," says Hanne Christensen.

"We jokingly call it an office revolution. By thinking differently about the office, we aim to cultivate another work culture, such as individual work-life adjustments and a better balance between work and family life without feelings of guilt," Anni Ehlers comments. The

IRS will receive a new structure on January 1st 2009, with virtual organization as a major part of the deal. With the new organizational structure, the hope is to create better work possibilities anywhere and at any time. Ultimately, the virtual side means that even if you structurally belong to a unit that works in Copenhagen, that during the summer you could spend 4 weeks working at the IRS department on Bornholm (small Danish island south of Sweden), because the workspaces are created for many users. Or if you have an ill mother in a local county, it is possible to move there for a period of time to take care of her, and work there at the same time.

The art of balancing individual and organizational

The co-workers themselves acknowledge the existence of a greater level of flexibility, and a better balance between work life and private

life. "It has become possible to work when and where one sees fit. We are now working on getting the collective acceptance of flexibility up to speed", Anni Ehlers adds.

"What we are doing now, is lifting the virtual to the organizational level. Instead of dividing the country into geographical units, we are organizing ourselves in more specialized units; for example, one region taking care of all motor taxation in the country. This means that those colleagues, who have been working with motor taxation either have to move to this particular region, or else they can choose to continue working in different locations across the country."

The hope is that there will be an overlap between the virtual and physical space. In the future, one can have online communities, followed by social meetings in the coffee shop with other colleagues, who do not necessarily have an im-

mediate, professional link to one another, and thereby spreading and connecting the work communities. The virtual organization will itself contribute to this cultural change.

While we talk around one of the high tables, lunch hour is getting closer. The number of coffee-thirsty tax workers is increasing significantly in the coffee shop. The same goes for the level of sound and atmosphere. There is just time for a last question on how far IRS intends to go with its office revolution in the next two years. "By that time we will have six coffee shops in strategic IRS departments across the country, and the virtual office units will be fully implemented. It is going to be more fun to be a tax employee. In IRS we are making the office smaller and the world bigger," Anni and Hanne agree, before they hurry off to continue their work on available PC's in the coffee shop. **B**



Because we need to save square meters, we need to think differently



When WORK takes control

by Pernille Rasmussen

You probably are familiar with this, either from your experience or from your partner — the deal with just checking the mail, right before you go to bed. Or perhaps it's calling your colleague in the evening, or feeling like you have to read up on some professionally related literature on the weekend. Then there is constantly talking about the job. Or somehow, again, postponing dinner, because work drags on...but that's only this period, this pressure is "temporary," it will all be over soon. Or will it?

If work takes over, you feel inclined to constantly work. It's just not possible not to, and you feel a sense of guilt if you relax for a little bit. But why should it be illegal to feel committed to your work and prioritize it a little? Of course there is nothing wrong with this. It is a privilege to have work that you feel is exciting and fun. The problem occurs when your life gets out of balance, and work begins to fill every corner of it — when family, friends, hobbies and exercise are neglected or dropped. This is when life starts to become one-sided,

Work can be fun, interesting and challenging. And we Danes really love to work. For some, work becomes so important that everything else is moved to the background, and then the balance is tipped. It happens to both men and women, for the mechanic, teacher, consultant, doctor, and...



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and maybe even lonely. You risk higher levels of stress. Because having a healthy life includes components such as sufficient sleep and getting your exercise, one loses essential factors for robustness and resistance towards stress when these items slip to a lower priority level.

What can you do to avoid "work taking over"?

Part of the problem is that it can be hard to realize that it is happening at all, simply because the imbalance may develop gradually. So, it is important that we pay some notice to what others are saying to us in this respect. Some of the signs that one is working too much may come from our surroundings, such as when family and friends begin to complain.

What you can do:


- Put a mark in your calendar — and decide to
- It is important to prioritize your time at your job

take a break that day. No matter what!

- Get a hobby. It forces you to physically and mentally get away from work. Perhaps you meet new people other than your colleagues, and grow a new network. Try to think back on what you previously loved to do, perhaps a sport or hobby, and try to revive it.
- Be involved in the chores at home. If you have a family, it is important that you take part in the daily chores — this helps you avoid working too much.
- Make appointments with your friends or partner in the weekend. If you have dates or something to look forward to, you lessen the risk of falling back to work.

and take breaks. There is unlimited work most places, which is why it is important to prioritize tasks every day. Distinguish between what is nice and what is need.

- Speak to your colleagues about the work culture. Do you work in a culture where people give you funny looks when you leave early? And where people send emails to each other in the weekend and almost compete about who is working the most? If so, it is probably time to have a debate about what kind of values are prevalent at the work place, and whether or not this culture of work really results in benefit to the individuals' balance of life, and thus to the company.

Have a great (and balanced) work! 

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for Balance

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Abbott Denmark is the Danish division of the American pharmaceutical company Abbott. The company works with a wide range of health and disease products and services; some may recall that they were the first company to launch the HIV test. However, what the employees are most happy about these days is the achievement of the award "Family-friendly Company – Best at Work Life Balance 2008."

Frogs Don't Just Fall from the Sky

by Maj Rørbaek Damgaard

The award is not just a result of coincidental good fortune for the company; it involves a long-term internal effort for change, which began with a workshop day in 2006. That year, in connection with the

inauguration of the company's new building, they spent an entire employee-related day, taking part in different workshops in the still-naked office rooms, and thus making the move not only physical, but also mental. The question was, which work habits (and relationships) would they take with them in their moving boxes, and which would they leave behind?

One workshop in particular, which dealt with the balancing of work life and private life, resonated especially well with the employees. And so the company chose to take this much further. During the following two years, all employees, from the receptionist to the management executive, went on a five-week Life Navigation course*. Right up to the present day, they still take part in follow-up courses and improvement sessions in order not to fall back on previous habitual patterns.

Before all this happened, the employees had experienced constant interruptions that significantly disrupted overall work performance, as the nature of their work demands quiet immersion and time. Many were also experiencing long, unproductive hours in rush hour traffic, and were aware how this affected their work hours. They even feared sharp remarks from other staffers, if they turned up late for work or chose to leave early once in a while.

The Life Navigation course opened up a new way of thinking about work and work hours, and taught the employees how to successfully plan a more flexi-

ble life. It really comes down to the simple message of using the work hours in a completely different way, and thus making them the most effective. As the Director Alexander Würfel says, "For me, these were very new thoughts. And yet I understood it, as soon as I heard it. I could just take one look at myself. I prefer to work in the evening, so it made perfect sense for me that I needed to change my general view. People should work at the time of day when they are the most productive. It is really all about a human diversity in work cycles and respecting that we are different."

Today, there are no longer any guilt feelings or funny looks from colleagues at the work place; everyone knows that those who are arriving late are responsible people, who are working hours that suit him/her best, and which easily can be in the evening when the children have been put to bed. Distance work and home office days are now also fully accepted.


The acceptance of different rhythms and the respect for a colleague's request for immersion in a task is of course easier said than done. It demands a change in collective awareness, changes in habits, and not the least, the helpful tools with which to do it. Common sense isn't always common practice, unfortunately.

Among other things, this meant for Abbott the development of a new email culture, now written on the mouse mats. Or the importance of writing letters to oneself, and preparing and



following one's most important goals. And the introduction of a frog: as soon as an employee receives the Life Navigation certification, he or she immediately receives a frog too (the teddy bear kind in vibrant colors), with the right to use it. The employee can place it on the computer, on the desk, or even on the door handle; no matter where, the signal is the same: "do not disturb, because I am trying to swallow a frog," meaning in Life Navigation terms that they are working on one of those tasks that has a tendency to grow, and ultimately become almost "inedible," if you let it lie too long on the desk. Thus, a green frog signals a green card for total work peace.

That the employees feel a greater mutual trust to-

day, a growing respect for differences, and the remarkable benefits of "frog time" for immersion and innovation when tasks need to be solved, has paid off financially too: the number of spontaneous applications has grown 300% in the period 2007-2008, and the work-life balance satisfaction has grown from 39% to 90% between 2006-2008. More importantly, the staff turnover has diminished from 34% to a current level of 17%. In other words, employees are no longer running from the fat frogs, which are falling from the sky and building large piles on their desks. The fat frogs no longer exist, now that everyone has been equipped with concrete tools to keep the work flow-and-demand in check. 

* The consultant behind Abbott's Life Navigation course is Camilla Kring, Ph.d. in the balance between family- and work-life. She has written the Danish titled book *Livsnavigatøren*, with the expanded and revised English version, *The Super Navigator*, soon to be released.



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