



The FlexAbility self-learning training

How to organize your flexible work arrangements

baua: Guidance

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Foreword

The world of work is characterized by constant change. Even before the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic, many professionals worked at different locations and at different times on a temporary or even permanent basis. To some extent, this was also their preference. This trend toward flexibility of location and time in work arrangements and hybrid working was then reinforced by the pandemic. Where possible, professionals worked from home to protect themselves and others from Covid-19. Even after the pandemic, this trend is continuing: hybrid working with a colorful mix of office and work from home is no longer the exception but the rule.

Location- and time-flexible working entails benefits for both professionals (e.g. better work-life balance, organization of working time according to individual preferences) and organizations (e.g. higher employee satisfaction, increased productivity) as well as challenges. When the boundaries between work and personal life become blurred, it can be difficult to (1) switch off mentally from work, (2) separate work and personal life, (3) create relaxing breaks in everyday life, and (4) effectively organize work from home or work on the go.

The FlexAbility online training was designed as part of a project of the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (BAuA) aiming to develop and evaluate health-promoting interventions for workers and teams with flexible work designs (Project F 2454). Training participation should support workers and teams in mastering challenges associated with flexible forms of work regarding place and time. Prof. Dr. Alexandra Michel and Dr. habil. Anne Wöhrmann were the principal investigators in this research project and supervised the development and evaluation of the training, which is based on well-known theories and findings of occupational health psychology. In the training, participants learn to consciously set boundaries between their work and private life, to ensure that breaks and leisure time in a restful way, and to effectively organize their daily work routine in a healthy way.

We have now successfully tested the training with over 1,000 participants from a wide range of industries and professions. It has been proven to be effective in promoting well-being, work-life balance, recovery, and engagement at work. Accordingly, with this publication, we are now pleased to make the scientifically evaluated FlexAbility online training available to the general public as a self-learning training.

This training was originally developed in German. With this translation and the English version of the self-learning training, we now aim to reach an international audience. The training was published in German by Althammer, Wöhrmann and Michel in June 2023. All intervention materials, audio and video exercises are now available in English. We hope to inspire both researchers and practitioners with our work in successfully addressing the challenges posed by flexible work designs and hybrid work.

Our thanks go to all participants in our studies. It was only because of their committed participation in the training and accompanying surveys that we were able to prove that this training is effective. We would also like to thank Eva Schneider, Julia Goedeke and Princela Biyaa, who actively supported us in programming and designing the online training and conducting the studies. We would also like to thank Steffen Schulz for his support in conducting the studies as well as his collaboration in designing this publication of the FlexAbility online training. We also thank Johanna Maletzki for her help in designing the English version of our training manual.

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Alexandra Michel, Anne Marit Wöhrmann and Sarah Elena Althammer

Introduction

Digitalization and the associated increase in the use of information and communications technology are **making location- and time-flexible working models possible** (e.g. working from home, remote work). Increasing numbers of people thus have the flexibility, to some extent, to decide when and where to work. The effects of location- and time-flexible work can be described as a double-edged sword: while professionals benefit from spatial and temporal flexibility in a variety of ways, this often gives rise to challenges at the same time.

One of the **advantages of flexible working hours and location** is that working hours can be arranged according to individual needs. Commuting times are reduced, resulting in more time for private life. This makes it easier to balance work and private life and people experience fewer conflicts between work and private life. Some professionals also report that working at home means greater concentration and fewer interruptions.

But, at the same time, spatial and temporal flexibility creates **particular challenges**. For example, people have to structure their own work, at least partly. Professionals who work flexibly in terms of location and time then often report overtime, difficulties in taking breaks, and a lack of rest during breaks or in their free time.

The constant mental preoccupation with work can have a negative impact on health and well-being. In addition, the boundaries between work and private life often become blurred, and professionals then have to manage them themselves. If they do not succeed as desired, they experience more conflicts between their work and private life and are more dissatisfied with their work-life balance.

So how can **location- and time-flexible work be organized in a healthy and effective way?**

First and foremost, employers are responsible for occupational health and safety and the appropriate **design of working conditions**. In addition, **self-regulation** is an important competence for the design of location- and time-flexible work. The FlexAbility training addresses this issue and promotes self-regulation in location- and time-flexible work. If employees are able to organize their work in a more self-determined and health-promoting way, their well-being, recovery, and work-life balance can be improved.

The FlexAbility training

For this reason, the FlexAbility training was developed in a BAuA research project led by Prof. Dr. Alexandra Michel and Dr. habil. Anne Marit Wöhrmann on the basis of well-known theories and current scientific findings and was scientifically evaluated in several studies. It was developed specifically for professionals who work temporarily or even permanently independently of fixed work locations and working hours.

The self-learning training presented in this *baua: Guidance* allows learners to work independently on the FlexAbility training. Originally, the training was offered as a six-week online training. This self-learning training provides a variety of strategies and suggestions with the help of practical exercises, videos, and audios. Thus, as in an online training, these can be worked on independently, step by step.

This enables learners to further develop their own strategies for organizing work that is flexible in terms of location and time, and to strengthen self-regulation in this context. This allows professionals to organize their work in a self-determined and health-promoting way that suits their wishes and needs. Well-being, recovery, and satisfaction with work-life balance can thus be improved.



The goals of this training

By participating in FlexAbility training, you will learn to

- Consciously set boundaries between your work and private life
- Effectively organize yourself and your workday in a healthy way
- Consciously take breaks and spend free time in a relaxing way
- Make better use of your skills and strengths to shape your location- and time-flexible work
- Make your workday healthy and effective in the long term

Target group and requirements

FlexAbility training is aimed at people who work at least partly from home, at different locations or on the go, who would like to deal with the challenges of location- and time-flexible work within the framework of a training and who would like to change the design of their work.

Benefits

- You are participating in a training that
 - has been specially developed for professionals who work flexibly in terms of location and time
 - is based on scientific knowledge and theories
 - has already been scientifically evaluated
- You will not incur any costs
- You will receive information on topics such as switching off from work and recovery or finding your own work-life balance
- This training helps you acquire strategies for dealing with the challenges of location- and time-flexible work

The training contents at a glance

The FlexAbility training consists of six modules with different focuses. The authors recommend working on one module per week. Experience shows that each module takes about 40 to 60 minutes to complete. Each module is supplemented by a daily exercise to help integrate what has been learned into everyday life.

Module 1 | Working flexibly – being happy and healthy

After processing this module:

- You will know the structure and objectives of FlexAbility training
- You will have formulated your motivation and your personal goals for the training participation
- You will have looked at the strategies you are already successfully using to manage your location- and time-flexible work
- You will already know the first exercise on how to deal with circling thoughts

Module 2 | Finding my personal balance

After processing this module:

- You will know how to set a boundary between work and private life according to your ideas
- You will know why boundaries between life domains are important
- You will know strategies for setting clearer boundaries between your work and personal life

Module 3 | Switching off from work – setting boundaries

After processing this module:

- You will know how to switch off from work
- You will know how mindfulness can help you to switch off from work and focus on the here and now
- You will be able to use a strategy to mentally distance yourself from thoughts of work

Module 4 | Staying focused – working with concentration

After processing this module:

- You will have expanded your competence of self-regulation and, as a result, know ways to organize yourself better and focus more on your work
- You will know strategies to formulate and achieve your goals in everyday work life

Module 5 | Looking after myself – everyday rest and recharge

After processing this module:

- You will know why recovery periods are important
- You will have found out what recovery means to you
- You will know possibilities for recovery in your free time and during breaks in your everyday life

Module 6 | My strategies, my sources of strength

After processing this module:

- You will have reviewed what you have learned in the last six modules in the FlexAbility training
- You will know your sources of strength, which you can use to shape your location- and time-flexible work
- You will see at a glance which exercises in the FlexAbility training you liked best

What can I expect of this training?

Modules and daily exercises

To achieve the goals mentioned above, you will learn new exercises and strategies in each **module**. Some exercises may look familiar. Nevertheless, it is helpful to repeat them and refresh your knowledge.

In each module, we also present a **short daily exercise for the upcoming work week**. You should include this exercise **every day** during the following work week, if possible, as this is the best way to reinforce what you have learned. You should plan about 5 to 10 minutes a day for this.



You can decide for yourself when you want to work on the module. In testing this training, it has proven successful to work on one module at the end of each week for six weeks in order to be able to practically apply the short exercise directly, starting on the following Monday.

Engaging with the modules requires your time! Participants usually take about 40 to 60 minutes to complete a module but you may need a little more or less time. This depends, for example, on the extent to which you use the supporting information such as fictional characters and videos.

Work on the modules at your leisure, not on the go or in between. **Consciously make the most of this time – it belongs only to you. You are doing something good for yourself!**

View the training as a resource that you can use in a way that makes sense to you and suits you. For example, if after the first self-reflection exercise you realize that you don't want to write anything down, then just think about it next time.

Fictional characters

Throughout this training you will meet Sofia, Ahmet, Hannah, and Alexander. Through their examples, you will get ideas on how other people in similar life circumstances use the training. This can help you work through the exercises. These fictional people are based on real people and their experiences. Therefore, you will certainly recognize one or the other, even if you do not completely identify with any particular person.



Sofia

Sofia (31) completed her traineeship four years ago and has been working as a teacher ever since. She is sure that she is following her vocation.

She still finds teaching children and young people motivating. Sofia often sits at her desk at home in the evenings and on the weekends, correcting papers and preparing school lessons. She is beginning to realize, however, that she would like to have a whole weekend to herself without thinking about school. Her boyfriend also wishes that Sofia and he would spend more time together again. Sofia also hardly has time for her friends

any more. She used to meet them almost every day. Now she only manages once a week, if at all. She also doesn't go to the gym as regularly as she used to. Otherwise, she feels she hasn't given her all and worries that she won't be able to complete her tasks with the quality she is used to.

Sometimes she deliberately tries to relax for an evening and switch off completely. But then when she sees her desk, she notices how she gets nervous inside. She just can't get rid of the feeling that she might get something done after all. For these reasons, Sofia decided to sign up for the FlexAbility training.

Ahmet

Ahmet (36) works in a medium-sized company in a job that many would describe as a "classic office job". For the past two years, Ahmet has had the opportunity to work from home once or twice a week. He likes to take advantage of this as he can concentrate better on certain tasks at home and he doesn't have to commute to his company.

Ahmet always thought it was great that he could clearly separate his work and private life – when he left the office at the end of the day, he left his work there and didn't have to deal with it anymore. Lately, however, he has noticed that the line between work and private life seems to be getting increasingly blurred – more and more often, his work keeps him busy even in his free time. While at work, he often feels guilty about taking breaks. He fears that his colleagues might think he is not working effectively.

For many years, Ahmet was an active volunteer in his town's soccer club and enjoyed playing himself. Meanwhile, he lacks the time and, above all, energy to train after work. At the end of the day, he often feels exhausted. For these reasons, Ahmet decided to sign up for the FlexAbility training.





Hannah

Hannah (43) is a freelance consultant and has two children. She loves her job and the opportunity to work independently and creatively while still being able to respond to her family's needs.

However, she often finds her daily life stressful. Every day she feels she is juggling her tasks and doesn't know where to start. She often works on several tasks at once. In the evening, she is often exhausted and at the same time has the unsatisfying feeling of having accomplished and completed nothing at all. She is constantly working. Lately, she notices how her thoughts still revolve around her customers and projects even when she

wants to spend time with her family. This annoys her, and her husband and children also wish that her thoughts were completely with them more often. For a long time, they have wanted Sundays to be a family day where their mother doesn't disappear into the study. For these reasons, Hannah decided to sign up for the FlexAbility training.

Alexander

Alexander (57) is an executive in a medium-sized family business, is married, and has two children who have already moved out. He works virtually everywhere and at all times – on the road, in the office and at home. It is important to him to be available at all times for his customers and line managers, but also for his employees. Because of his fear of missing something important, he also reads his emails at the dinner table or during family breakfasts.



Although he feels like he's working all the time, he hardly ever gets around to doing really important tasks because his smartphone rings or a new email pops into his inbox every few minutes. His work and his employees are important to him but he notices how his wife becomes more and more annoyed when he looks at his smartphone. He and his wife had planned to spend a lot of time together once the children had left home. Instead, she now accuses him of only thinking about work and increasingly shortchanging her. This makes him sad and he feels guilty towards his wife.

Alexander perceives the conflict between his role as manager and husband as increasingly stressful. His body is increasingly sending him warning signals but Alexander does not want to listen to them. Although he feels tired every evening, he often lies awake for a long time before falling asleep. He also experiences palpitations and dizziness from time to time. His doctor has already advised him to make regular relaxation a priority. For these reasons, Alexander has decided to sign up for the FlexAbility training.

Audio files and videos

During the FlexAbility training, there will be many opportunities to listen and watch various media. We invite you to do the same. You may find it more comfortable to listen to the videos and audios with headphones, that is up to you. Moreover, we always provide the texts of the film and audio recordings in writing in case you cannot or do not want to watch or listen to them at the moment.

The audios and videos are for private use only.



Exercise overview

You will learn many new exercises and strategies in this FlexAbility training. It may be that not every exercise we introduce will suit you and your personal situation. If you don't get much out of an exercise at first, just try to find your own approach to it. Give each exercise a chance, even if it feels unfamiliar at first.

In the chapter "Exercise overview" you will find the exercises and strategies from all modules. After you have tried out the exercises, you can tick off exercises and strategies that you particularly liked. In this way, you collect your favorites over the course of the FlexAbility training. At the end of the training, you will then have your own overview with all the exercises that are helpful and suitable for you and support you in designing your location- and time-flexible work in the way that is best for you.

Tip

If you have followed a cross-reference, you can use the Alt + Left key combination to return to the previous page.



Notes

In this training you will often be invited to work on exercises in writing, to take notes or write down your thoughts so that you can also benefit from the training in the long term. You can enter your notes directly in the text boxes.

Module 1

Working flexibly – being happy and healthy

A warm welcome to you!



The objectives of this module at a glance

After processing this module:

- You will know the structure and objectives of FlexAbility training
- You will have formulated your motivation and personal goals for the training participation
- You will have an eye on the strategies you already use successfully to shape your location- and time-flexible work
- You will already know the first exercise on how to deal with circling thoughts



Hello and welcome to the FlexAbility training!

How lovely it is to have you here. My name is Sabine Ziemke and I will be guiding you through this training for the next six weeks.

The project team and I would like to support you in organizing your flexible work in a way that works best for you in terms of time and space. In this training, we will walk you through your strategies to organize your work.

This training is very important to me personally, because as a freelance journalist, anchor, and media trainer, I also work flexible hours and places – I work a lot on the road, from my office, or from home. I know from my own experience that this kind of work presents special challenges. And I know that many people feel the same way. That's why I think it's important that there are training programs like this to help you deal with and overcome these challenges.

Experts at the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health have developed this training based on the latest scientific findings.

I assume that you signed up for this training because you want to improve how you approach your daily work. Recognizing that you need to improve how you work may not have been easy. So first of all, I would like to congratulate you on your decision! This training is a first step in the right direction towards better work organization and improved well-being, recovery from work, and satisfaction with your own work-life balance.

Today I will explain how this training is structured and what exactly you can expect over the next six weeks. We'll also talk about how you can shape your own work and possibly organize it differently. Changing habits isn't easy. But if your goal is to change a way of working that you have become used to, it is important that you do so from a place of inner conviction. That is why today is also about formulating your motivation and your goals for participating in this training. The motto of this training is "do what you want, not what you must".

After that, you'll take a look at the strategies you already use successfully in your daily work. And by the end of today's module, you'll have learned your first practical exercise to help you mentally "switch off" from work.

I wish you success and fun in the weeks ahead!

And now it's time for your first module!

Well-being, work-life balance and health with location- and time-flexible work



In this video, I'll tell you more about what we know from a scientific perspective about well-being, work-life balance, and health in flexible work in terms of time and location.

Due to the changing nature of work and increasing digitalization, more and more professionals are working from home, in different locations, or while traveling. That is, they have flexible work in terms of time and location. Some professionals are therefore able to determine when and where they work.

There are a number of advantages to having flexibility in work in terms of time and location. For example, professionals can choose the place and time of their work based on their own wishes and needs. Some people have more free time because they no longer have to commute, making it easier to balance work and personal life. There are fewer conflicts between work and personal life, and work-life balance is improved. Some professionals are able to work at home with greater concentration. Scientific studies also show that working flexibly in terms of time and location can be associated with better health, job satisfaction, and work-life balance.

However, there is also research suggesting that this flexibility comes with risks. For example, some people may work too many hours or not take enough breaks. It can also be difficult to structure one's own work-day.

The ability to work anytime, anywhere can lead to a blurring of the boundaries between work and personal life. People who work flexibly are often available at all times. They often report that they actually have less free time and are unable to switch off mentally. This can have a negative impact on recovery, work-life balance, health and well-being, but also performance.

That's why in our FlexAbility training we show you strategies that can improve your well-being, work-life balance, and health when you work in a flexible way in terms of time and location.

How is the FlexAbility training structured?

In the next video you will learn how the FlexAbility training is structured.



You have just learned more about the impact that flexible work design can have on your health, work-life balance, and job performance. In this video, we explain the topics you can expect to learn in the next few weeks.

The goal of this FlexAbility training is to help you find your own personal strategies for dealing with flexible work in terms of time and location. To do this, it is important for us to provide you with information, because the right background knowledge will help you choose the right strategies for you. Above all, we want to give you the ability to act: we want you to be able to apply the right strategies in your everyday life.

Your “FlexiTree” accompanies you in this process. It symbolizes your personal development. Each branch symbolizes strategies and competencies that you will learn in the next six modules.

You may already be doing some things to organize your daily work in a good, self-determined, and healthy way. Through this training, you will continue to develop your competencies and personal strategies. With each module you complete, your FlexiTree will continue to blossom.

So what exactly can you expect in the various modules over the next few weeks?

There will always be a focus topic in each module.

After learning about the structure and goals of today’s training, you will formulate your personal motivation and the goals you aim to achieve through this training. You will also learn a first, practical exercise to mentally detach from work or to focus on the present moment in other situations, whether at work or in your personal life.

If you are constantly thinking about work, even in your free time, it can lead to a lack of recovery from work and conflicts between your different life domains. That’s why, starting next week, in [Module 2](#), you’ll learn strategies for setting clearer boundaries between work and personal life.

[Module 3](#) will then focus more in depth on how to mentally detach from work.

Another challenge of working remotely is organizing yourself and structuring your daily work routine. You will learn how to do this in [Module 4](#). Specific strategies will help you to formulate and achieve your goals in your daily work.

You may sometimes find yourself working too long and too hard, forgetting to take breaks and recover. In the long run, this negatively affects not only your well-being and health, but also your work performance. That's why [Module 5](#) is all about recovery.



In the [final module](#), we will look at the sources of strength in your life from which you can draw energy to make your daily work life healthy and effective.

All the strategies you learn in the course of this training can be used again and again in your daily work. In this way, you will be able to organize your daily life in such a way that you can work healthily, happily, and effectively.

These are the contents of your FlexAbility training and the steps we will take together over the next few weeks.

And now I hope you have fun!

More information on the scientific background? Effects of location- and time-flexible work on health and work-life balance

Studies show that location- and time-flexible work appears to be associated with better health and job satisfaction (BAuA, 2016). It may also reduce conflicts between work and private life (Allen et al., 2013; Liao et al., 2019).

However, some research findings also point to the risks of location- and time-flexible work. For example, people who work in a location- and time-flexible manner often work longer hours and under higher pressure – in occupational psychology, this is referred to as higher work intensity (Deci et al., 2016; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010). Many people who work location- and time-flexible jobs are also constantly available. In addition, many report that they have less leisure time, are confronted with work-related issues during their free time, or are unable to switch off mentally from work-related issues (Deci et al., 2016; Demerouti et al., 2014). What is most problematic about this is that recovery suffers as a result. This can disrupt well-being (Park et al., 2011; Rexroth et al., 2014) as well as reduce work performance (BAuA, 2018; Volman et al., 2013).

With location- and time-flexible work, it becomes more difficult to draw boundaries between different areas of life, as work and private life often merge (Glavin & Schieman, 2012). This can also become problematic if it leads to increased conflicts between work and private life and satisfaction with one's own work-life balance could suffer as a result (BAuA, 2016; Rexroth et al., 2014).

Today, you will first learn how to change your habits. After all, in order to reap the benefits of location- and time-flexible work, we have to adapt our behavior, and this can be challenging.



Good intentions, wishes and changes

You probably started this training because you want to make a change and are now motivated to get started.

There are many ways to achieve your goals and change your habits in your everyday life. You already know this otherwise you wouldn't be where you are today.

To this end, we would now like to invite you on a short journey of thought. Try to engage with it, even if it seems unfamiliar. To do so, click on the play button.

Please sit back, relax, and close your eyes. Please try to focus on your breath and be fully present in this moment. Calmly breathe in and out.

I'm sure you've made many resolutions in your life. Maybe you wanted to turn in a report by a certain date, close a deal, or change something in your daily life. Maybe you've accomplished something you've been working toward for a long time. Think back to a situation where you were successful, where you achieved a goal, where you realized a resolution.

Maybe it was an everyday situation, or maybe it was an extraordinary situation. From the situations that come to mind, pick the one you like best right now, in this moment. What were you thinking at the moment you achieved your goal? What did it feel like? Try to imagine the situation in as much detail as possible.

- Where were you?
- Exactly what happened? Exactly what did you do?
- Exactly what were you saying or doing?
- Were you alone or were other people with you? If other people were involved, exactly what did they say or do?
- Did anyone support you in this situation?
- What motivated you?

In your imagination, put yourself in the situation again. Imagine the environment you were in at the time. Visualize the situation with all your senses:

- What did you see? What colors and objects?
- What sounds, words, or tones did you hear?
- What did you sense? What physical sensations did you experience?
- Did you smell or taste anything?

Imagine this moment again very clearly and enjoy it to its fullest.

Now slowly return to the room. Bring your thoughts back to the here and now. Take a deep breath in and out. When you are ready, please open your eyes.



Listen to audio

You may have just noticed: you know ways to achieve your goals. But perhaps you also had a hard time remembering a success. That's perfectly fine.

To help you achieve your goals in this training, we will now present a few strategies.



Formulate my wish for change

As already mentioned, we recommend that you participate in this training on a regular basis. Scientific studies have repeatedly shown that participants of health-related training programs benefited especially when they made regular training a habit.

This takes time and energy. There may be situations where you encounter obstacles. Changing habits is a colossal task for anyone. If this happens, it helps to be clear about why you want to keep trying.

We now want to approach this “why”.

- Why are you participating in this training?
- What are your expectations and wishes for this training?
- What do you hope the training will help you with?

At first, note down all wishes for change in an unordered manner in key words.

Think about which of these wishes for change is most important to you. Formulate this wish for change in a sentence that sounds harmonious to you. Refer to your notes (above) or take inspiration from them. It is fine if it seems challenging to fulfill this wish for change. At the same time, you should feel that you could realistically get there.

By participating in the training, I would like to achieve ...

Now think about it:

- Why do you want to achieve this?
- Why is it worth completing this training?
- Why do you want to change the current situation?
- Write down your most important reason.

My main reason for this is ...

If you need more inspiration, feel free to take a look at how the sample characters answered these questions.



Sofia

“By participating in the training, I would like to stop my thoughts from constantly revolving around work.”

My main reason for this is that I want to spend more time with my boyfriend and friends again – without feeling guilty and without the pressure of actually having to work more.”

Ahmet

“By taking part in the training, I would like to achieve a clearer distinction between my work and private life again.”

My good reason for this is that I don’t want to feel so tired and exhausted all the time and want to get involved more actively in the soccer club again.”



Hannah

“By participating in the training, I would like to be able to organize myself better.”

My good reason for this is to fully be with my family when I spend time with them.”

Alexander

“By participating in the training, I hope to learn how to better balance my roles as a leader and as a husband.”

My good reason for this is that I want to spend quality time with my wife and be able to sleep better again.”



Remember, over the next six weeks, by attending the training regularly, you will have the opportunity to fulfill your desire to change.

Envision success

You have now considered why you are attending this training.

Now we would like you to imagine what will happen when you have fulfilled your wish for change. Sit down comfortably and begin the exercise.

Please lean back and close your eyes. Please try to focus on your breath and allow yourself to be completely present in this moment. Breathe calmly in and out. Imagine that in six weeks, at the end of this training, you have achieved your desired change.

What will have changed?

What is different?

What feeling do you have when you start the work day?

What changes do your family, friends, and colleagues notice in you?

What would be the best thing about it?

What would be the very best thing that could happen once you achieved your desired change?

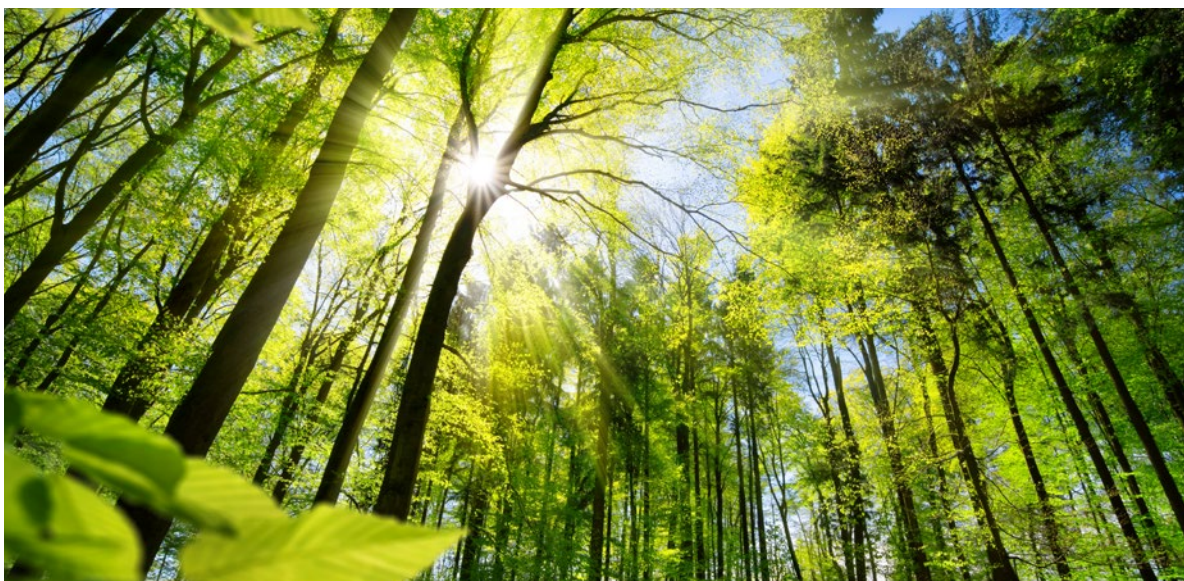
Find the most positive outcome and hold it in your mind's eye. Imagine that everything is going as planned and that you are achieving your desired change. Take a moment and visualize the best possible outcome.

- How do you feel?
- What can all your senses perceive?
- What do you hear? What sounds?
- What do you see? What colors and what things?
- What do you smell or feel?

Imagine the events and experiences you associate with this outcome. Just follow your thoughts. Please take as much time as necessary to imagine it as completely as possible. Now slowly come back into the room. Bring your thoughts back to the here and now. Take a deep breath in and out. When you are ready, please open your eyes.



Listen to audio





Please write down the best outcome and your thoughts about it in one or two sentences. You may find it difficult to describe the best outcome precisely. Just do your best.

The best result is:

Also, please write down any thoughts or images you had about your best outcome:





Sofia

“The best outcome is that I spend more time with my loved ones again. I’m sitting with my friends at brunch. There’s a pleasant café atmosphere of voices, clattering dishes, music in the background, and every now and then the hum of the coffee machine. We eat rolls with cheese, scrambled eggs and homemade jam. The coffee from the nearby roastery spreads its aromatic scent throughout the room. Mara tells us in her wonderfully excited way what crazy things have happened to her again. We laugh boisterously; it makes me happy to be part of this group. I feel secure and have the feeling of wanting to be exactly where I am. I’m also completely relaxed. We also talk about work, but that only takes up a small part of the conversation. And I don’t get caught up in it either. Most of the time we talk about what’s on our minds, what we’ve experienced, and what we’re looking forward to. We have a lot of fun together. I’m already looking forward to experiencing more of these Sundays again.”

Ahmet

“The best outcome is that I play regularly in the soccer club again. After I start coming to practice regularly again, I’m rejoining the team. The games at the weekend are among my highlights. The tense atmosphere beforehand, motivating each other in the locker room, then the exuberance at the games themselves. It feels good to be outside – the smell of freshly mown grass is in the air, the cold air may be drawing in around your ears, but the sun is already warming you up. My team and I rejoice together over the good matches and lie in each other’s arms cheering when one of us scores a goal. Although I am completely physically exhausted, my pulse is high, and I am completely sweaty, I feel full of energy and strength.”



Hannah

“The best outcome is that I can mentally detach myself from work when I spend time with my loved ones. I see myself in my mind’s eye spending time with my loved ones and not having to think about work all the time. As a result, I am less distracted, can listen better, and have more fun doing activities together.”

Alexander

“The best outcome is that my wife and I have a closer relationship again. I feel secure and understood. My wife and I are making plans together for an excursion we have been wanting to do for a long time.”



You have now formulated your wish for change for training participation. But what can you do if something comes up while you actually want to participate in the training?



Identify obstacles on the way to my goal

Sometimes things don't go the way we want them to – there are obstacles in the way. Something could get in the way when you actually want to take part in the training. Sometimes we also get in our own way.

- What could be holding you back from attending this training regularly and fulfilling your desire to change?
- What behaviors, thoughts, or feelings might get in your way?
- What is it in you that is standing in your way?
- What is the one major obstacle?

Vividly imagine how your obstacle keeps you from exercising. It may be your weaker self telling you to get more comfortable, or it may be the children demanding your attention.

What is your main obstacle? Please write it down in one or two sentences:

I might be kept from participating in training in the near future because ...

Also write down any thoughts or images you had about the obstacle:



Sofia

“I might be discouraged from attending the training over the next few weeks because I feel that I could also be productive at work during the time I am attending the training. I might get nervous and blame myself for apparently not working hard enough yet when I even have time for the training.”

Ahmet

“I might be held back from participating in the training over the next few weeks because I want to use my free time to relax instead of sitting down in front of the computer again. Often, I’m so wiped out at the end of the day and on the weekend that it might be difficult to get myself to look at a new training module. Relaxing on the couch then sounds more tempting than another commitment.”



Hannah

“I could be stopped from participating in the training in the next few weeks because I would prefer to spend the free time I have with my family and not use it for myself. Then I would have a guilty conscience. I might also feel annoyed sitting alone in my room while the others are doing something together.”

Alexander

“I might be kept from participating in the training in the next few weeks because it might happen that I have to work a lot due to deadlines set at short notice and I therefore lack the time for the new modules and daily tasks. Then, if I do try to engage in the training, my emails will distract me anyway.”



Planning how to deal with obstacles on the way to my goal

How can you prevent the obstacle you have just described from actually preventing you from fulfilling your desire to change? It helps to already think about how you can overcome your obstacle.

Please lean back and close your eyes. Please try to focus on your breath and allow yourself to be completely present in this moment. Breathe calmly in and out.

You have just imagined an obstacle that may prevent you from conducting this training. Perhaps this gave you a feeling that you could not do it or that it would be difficult. Such feelings sometimes obscure the view of possible solutions.

Now think about it:

- What could you do to overcome this obstacle and participate regularly in this training?
- Maybe you could get support from others?

Sometimes there are helpful sentences that you can say to yourself. Something like, “I can do this – and then I can rest!” or “This time belongs to me; my family will understand that.” What can you say to yourself to effectively overcome the obstacle?

- What can you do, say, or think that will support you?
- Now, imagine again how your obstacle keeps you from completing this training.

Now, in your imagination, activate beneficial feelings, such as confidence, and recall the helpful inner phrases or thoughts, or your helpful behavior. Visualize yourself successfully overcoming the obstacle.

- Have you found a successful inner script?

Now it's just a matter of actually thinking about this script, your strategy in everyday life. There is a very proven procedure for this: You set up an “If-Then Plan”. This prepares you for the next situation in which you will be confronted with your obstacle. The plan is made according to the following scheme: “If x happens, then I will do y.”

Imagine your obstacle and put it after “If...”. Place the helpful behavior after the phrase, “then I will...”. If the obstacle occurs, then I will use the following behavior to overcome the obstacle.

Now imagine your If-Then Plan and go through it in your head:

- If ..., then I will...
- And again: If ..., then I will...

Open your eyes when you feel that your If-Then Plan feels right, and when you are confident that you will think of it in a situation in which you encounter this obstacle.



Listen to audio



Write down your personal if-then plan for dealing with your obstacle that you just formulated internally:

If ... (obstacle)

then ... (effective action/thoughts)



Sofia

“If thoughts arise that I should better spend time working than doing this training, then I will tell myself that those constant thoughts were the reason I’m doing this training and allow myself to take time for myself.”

Ahmet

“If I find myself on the couch instead of in front of the laptop when I really wanted to work on the new module, then I will make myself realize that the FlexAbility training is not another commitment, but an opportunity to feel less exhausted in the long run.”



Hannah

“If I get a guilty conscience and would rather spend time directly with my family, then I will tell myself that dealing with myself now is necessary to better engage in time with my family in the future.”

Alexander

“If work-related emails keep me from attending the training, then I will close the email program and all tabs in the browser and deal with it after I complete the module.”





The WOOP strategy

In the last exercises, you learned about the four steps of the **WOOP strategy**. WOOP is an acronym, an abbreviation made up of the first letters of the words Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan. The goal of this strategy is to envision your successes, to think about what obstacles there might be on the way to success, and to consider at an early stage how you would overcome such obstacles.

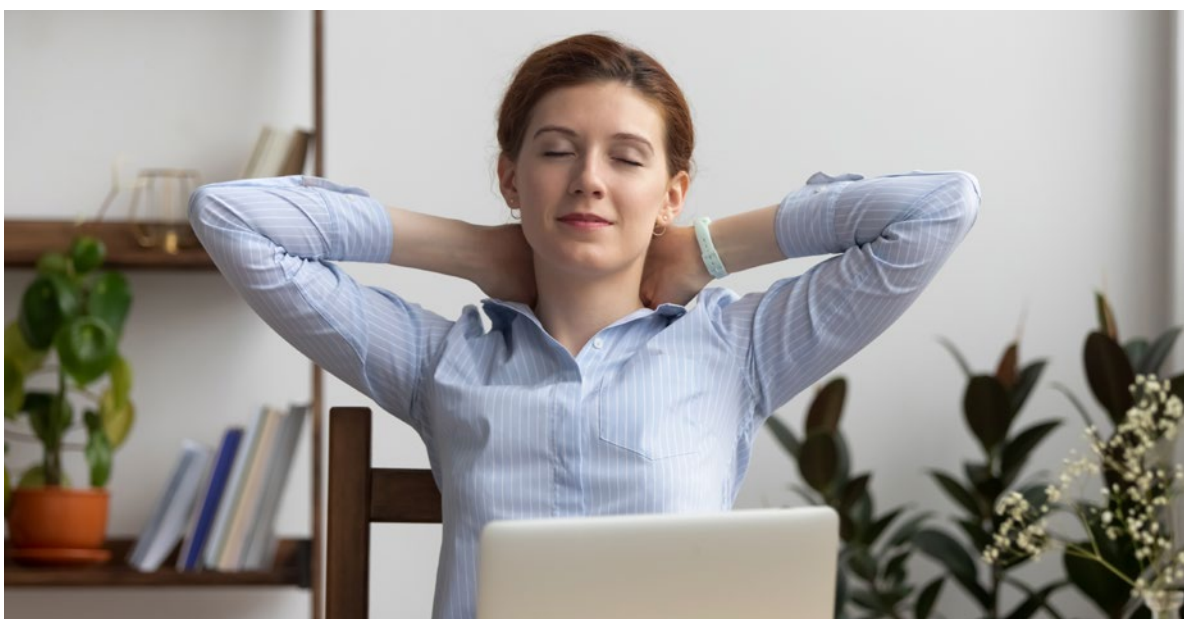
WOOP is an easy-to-learn strategy for figuring out how to fulfill your desires and change habits to achieve your goal. WOOP is applicable in all areas of life where you want to change your behavior – whether it's health or success at work, for example. It is based on 20 years of scientific research. The method has been proven effective in many studies with people of all ages and in many areas of life.

WOOP always works the same way

- W** First, name a goal that is important to you and achievable.
- O** Then determine for yourself what would be the best thing about achieving your goal and imagine it in your mind.
- O** Then, identify your biggest obstacle and mentally envision that obstacle.
- P** Last, set an if-then plan for how to overcome the obstacle.

Adapted from Gollwitzer et al., 2018 | More info at woopmylife.org

Next, you will set milestones on the path to fulfilling your wish for change. You'll also focus on the strategies you're already successfully using to shape your location- and time-flexible work.



Find milestones for my desire to change

Mountaineers have an overall goal – they want to reach the summit. And they set themselves realistic milestones every day. You, too, have an overall goal, which you formulated above: Your desire for change. But you cannot achieve it immediately. You, too, need milestones.

The best way to achieve these small steps of change is to participate in the training regularly. Many people find this easier if they think about when exactly they can integrate the training into their daily lives. After all, a concrete plan helps people stay true to their resolutions even when stressful times arise.



Formulate a SMART goal

Good resolutions should be formulated as concretely as possible. This works particularly well with the following strategy, known as the SMART goals. Perhaps you have heard of the SMART formula. It describes five criteria that a good goal should fulfill. The target should:

- S**pecific: Be formulated concretely and precisely
- M**easurable: Make it possible to check whether the goal has been achieved
- A**tttractive: Be formulated positively, so that it triggers anticipation
- R**ealistic: Be realistic to achieve because unattainability is demotivating, while high goals are motivating
- T**ime-bound: Contain a clearly defined point in time by which the goal should be achieved

Adapted from Doran, 1981





So “I will attend this training regularly” would not be a SMART goal.

Please set a specific goal for when you will complete the modules!

Tip

We recommend that you work on one module per week and do the daily exercise the following week. You should be undisturbed and allow sufficient time for processing.

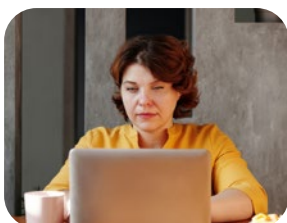


Sofia

Sofia is reluctant to deal with training on the weekend, so she decides: *“I will be taking an hour every Thursday after dinner for the next 5 weeks to work on a new module.”*

Ahmet

For Ahmet, the training seems to be a good end to the work week and a good start to the weekend, so he decides: *“I’ll be taking an hour every Friday between 5 and 7 pm for the next 5 weeks to look at the new module.”*



Hannah

Hannah, on the other hand, knows that she won’t be able to find a fixed date when she has time every week. Therefore, she resolves: *“I will take an hour for myself next week Sunday after breakfast to log into the FlexAbility training. I’m also putting it directly into my calendar when I will work on the other four modules.”*

Alexander

Alexander wants to use the time for training when his wife attends a sports class: *“I will be taking an hour every Saturday at 2pm for the next 5 weeks to work on a new module.”*





Focus on strategies that are already in place

You already bring a lot of your own experience and a great deal of knowledge in dealing with the challenges of location- and time-flexible work. Even now, you are already applying strategies very successfully to shape your everyday working life. Many people are not aware of this. Therefore, we invite you to change your perspective now!

Consider this:

- What are you already doing to set clearer boundaries between different domains of life?
- What do you already do to take your mind off things after work?
- How do you organize your daily work routine?
- And how do you recover?

Feel free to take a few minutes to think about it and write down your successful strategies, techniques, activities, or behaviors.

I set boundaries between my work and my personal life by ...

I take my mind off work in my free time by ...

I organize my workday effectively by ...

I rest during my breaks at work by ...

I recover best in my free time by ...

You can see that you're already doing some things to make your location- and time-flexible work more health-promoting. Have these strategies in mind over the next few weeks and keep doing what's already working well.

Next, to conclude today's module, you will learn the first exercise on how to deal with circling thoughts.

Now we present the first exercise that you can integrate directly into your everyday life.



The 54321 exercise

With this exercise, you can direct your attention to the here and now when your thoughts unintentionally revolve around work during your free time. After all, focusing on the present moment can help push thoughts of work out of the way. This exercise is therefore about paying attention to your surroundings and naming sensory impressions.

You can now try this exercise.

1. Name 5 things that you can see right now.
Example: I see the table, my feet, a pen, a cup, a window.
2. Name 4 things that you can feel right now.
Example: I feel the chair against my back, my feet on the floor, my hair at the back of my neck, a tingling sensation on my nose.
3. Name 3 things you can hear right now.
Example: I hear the whirring of the heater, the sound of traffic on the street, distant murmur of voices.
4. Name 2 things that you can smell right now.
Example: I smell the scent of paper, my perfume.
5. Name 1 thing that you can taste right now.
Example: I taste coffee.

Based on [Dolan, 1991](#)

The daily exercise for the coming week

Try the 54321 exercise every day for the next week.

Use the exercise especially when your thoughts revolve around work and you want to focus on the here and now.



Congratulations!

Your FlexiTree accompanies you through the FlexAbility training. It symbolizes your personal development. Each branch symbolizes strategies and competencies that you will learn in the modules.

With the completion of the first module, the first branch of your FlexiTree has blossomed.



Congratulations!

You have successfully completed the first module of your FlexAbility training.

Good luck implementing the 54321 exercise into your daily life! We are excited about the changes you will experience next week.



Review

Today you have:

- Learned about the structure and goals of FlexAbility training
- Formulated your motivation and personal goals for your training participation
- Focused on the strategies you are already successfully using to manage your location- and time-flexible work
- Learned an exercise on how to deal with circling thoughts



Outlook

Starting with the next module, you will learn even more specific strategies on how to address challenges of location- and time-flexible work. The topic of the next module will be to establish boundaries between different areas of life such as work and private life.

Summary

The objectives of this module at a glance

In today's module, you learned about the structure and goals of FlexAbility training. You also took a look at the strategies you are already successfully using to shape your location- and time-flexible work.

And you have already learned an exercise on how to deal with circling thoughts.

You also learned more about what we know from a scientific perspective about well-being, work-life balance, and health in location- and time-flexible work.

After that, you may have noticed in a thought journey: you know ways to achieve your goals.

In order for you to achieve your goals in this training, we presented you with some strategies and you applied them directly.

Formulate my wish for change and plan to overcome obstacles

First, you formulated your wish for change for this training and envisioned the best possible outcome if you fulfill it. Then you thought about possible obstacles and how you could deal with them. To do this, you used the *WOOP strategy* and formulated if-then sentences.

My milestones for my wish for change

To make it easier to implement your wish for change, you formulated a concrete goal for the training implementation using the *SMART method*.

My existing strategies

Not only did you set new goals for the training, you also realized what your own experience and knowledge of dealing with the challenges of location- and time-flexible work already is.

The 54321 exercise – dealing with circling thoughts

Today you also learned the first exercise to direct your attention to the here and now when your thoughts unintentionally revolve around work in your free time: The *54321 exercise*.

The daily exercise for the coming week

Try the *54321 exercise* every day for the next week.

Use the exercise especially when your thoughts revolve around work and you want to focus on the here and now.

Module 2

Finding my personal balance

Welcome back!



The objectives of this module at a glance

After processing this module:

- You will know how to set a boundary between work and private life according to your ideas
- You will know why the segmentation of areas of life is important
- You will know strategies for setting clearer lines between your work and personal life



Welcome back!

It's great to have you back!

Today, we're going to talk about how to separate work from your personal life and how to find your own personal work-life balance. What do we mean when we talk about the balance between "work" and "life"? How do we integrate work and personal life? Where do you set a boundary between work and personal life? And does this boundary always meet your needs?

Today we will answer these questions together. You will learn more about why it is important to manage the boundary between work and personal life and what methods can be used to do so.

Work through today's module at a pace that is comfortable for you. Take some time for yourself!

And now, have fun and success with your second module!



Review

Let's look back at the first module. In the first module, you:

- Learned about the structure and goals of FlexAbility training
- Formulated your motivation and personal goals for training participation
- Focused on the strategies you are already using successfully to manage your location- and time-flexible work
- Learned an exercise on how to deal with circling thoughts





Your favorites

To begin, we ask you to consider which exercises from the previous module were helpful for you and how well you were able to integrate them into your everyday life. If there were difficulties with the implementation, you can think about how you would like to change the exercises to fit your situation better.

Reminder – the strategies and exercises from the last module were:

- WOOP strategy
- SMART goals
- Own strategies for dealing with location- and time-flexible work
- 54321 exercise

Which exercises are your favorites?

You can mark the corresponding exercises in your [exercise overview](#) and, if you like, add a small note.



Work-life balance – what is it?

Work-life balance describes a balance between professional and private demands, needs, and desires.

Specifically, this means that people perceive the balance of their professional and non-professional roles as successful. They are satisfied with the way they handle their roles and believe that they fulfill them well and are appropriately committed to them – depending on the value they attach to the roles.

In addition, work-life balance describes a state in which few role conflicts occur and areas of life are mutually enriching.

We take on different **roles** in different areas of our lives, for example as an employee, colleague, or manager in our working lives and as a parent, partner, or friend in our private lives. A **role conflict** describes a state of tension due to conflicting expectations and demands on different roles.

To better understand why **role conflicts** occur, it is recommended to look at different types of role conflicts that are commonly distinguished.

Stress-based role conflicts arise, for example, when you are still consumed by the demands of your work life even after the end of work, or when your thoughts revolve around private matters while at work. As a result, you are still mentally or emotionally occupied with another role and therefore less open to what is happening around you. At the dinner table, for example, you might still be thinking about how best to solve a problem at work.

Time-based role conflict can occur when time devoted to one role prevents time spent in another. This can happen when you work a lot of overtime and as a result have less time to spend with family and friends.

Behavior-based role conflict occurs when the behavior that is required in one role, such as being an employee, colleague, or friend, is inappropriate in another role. For example, office demeanor and ways of dealing with professional problems are often inappropriate in private life, and likewise, private behavior may be inappropriate in a professional setting.

These conflicts can prevent you from being fully absorbed in the roles you have in your personal life or at work. Then it is more difficult to be attentive to yourself and others, to enjoy your free time, to engage in activities and to recover from the efforts of the day.

Role conflicts in location- and time-flexible work

As a result of location- and time-flexible work, these conflicts can occur more frequently. What could be the reason for this?

In location- and time-flexible work conditions, the boundaries between work and private life often become blurred. This means that professional and private roles are assumed independently of specific places and times.

A call from the supervisor and thus a requirement for the professional role is possible, even if you are already at home after work and have taken on the family role. Conversely, while working from home, family demands may have to be met at the same time. This blurring of boundaries can lead to a more frequent experience of role conflict.



In location- and time-flexible work, the transitions between roles are often unclear. The following are a few examples that may sound familiar:

- Working at the kitchen table
- Also using the PC for private purposes at the workplace
- Quickly checking your work emails on your smartphone at the end of the day
- Preparing a meeting on Sunday evening
- Scheduling conference calls when working at home at times when your partner and children are also at home.

At these moments, we may experience conflict between professional and private roles and their requirements more quickly than when the different areas are clearly separated.



Think about it for a moment: Do you also know situations like this from your everyday life?

If you like, you can jot down your thoughts here.



About the separation and connection of areas of life

Segment and integrate

Meanwhile, research has found that people differ in how much they like to separate or integrate their life domains and the associated roles. Different areas include work and family life, for example, but there are more: involvement in a club or social cause can also be an area of life, just like a passionate sport. “Segmenters” like work and private life to be clearly separate and distinguishable areas, while “integrators” appreciate an interweaving of different areas. It is important that each person may decide how much they want to separate or combine their work and private life. If people are deprived of this possibility, stress, lower job satisfaction and experienced role conflicts will result. For “segmenters” in particular, it is problematic when the boundaries between work and private life become increasingly blurred. However, research shows that the ability to separate yourself from work can also be important for “integrators”. It all comes down to balance.

Regardless of your preference, research shows beneficial effects of separating work and personal life for your well-being and exhaustion, as well as for satisfaction with your work-life balance.

For people who often work in a location- and time-flexible manner, work and private life are often not easy to separate because the spatial and temporal boundaries of their work are not clearly defined. That’s why it’s even more important for them to have strategies to set boundaries between work and private life more clearly when needed. This allows them to better align their individual preferences and working conditions.

The flexibility offered by flexible work designs often comes with the additional challenge of finding a healthy balance. In return, however, it also offers unique opportunities to plan work according to your own ideas. Therefore, in the following we will show you strategies to better distance yourself.

Before that, we invite you to think about how strongly you currently separate or integrate your areas of life.

How much do you separate or combine your work and personal life?

Please lean back and close your eyes. Please try to focus on your breath and allow yourself to be completely present in this moment. Breathe calmly in and out. We take on many different roles in life – we are, for example, professionals, friends, partners, and parents. In this exercise, we will look at the transition between your professional role and your roles outside of work.



Listen to audio

Think about the extent to which you currently separate or integrate your work and your personal life.

- Do you have fixed working hours?
- In what places do you work? Do you have distinct locations where you work and where you do not work?
- Do you write emails in the evening or on weekends? How often do you talk on the phone with colleagues or your supervisor? Are you always available to everyone on all tech devices?
- Do you clearly communicate to those around you when you are available and to whom?
- Do you take care of the household while you work? Do you take personal calls during the workday?
- Do you tell your family about your work? Do you meet with colleagues during your free time?
- How often do you think about work at home or on the road? Do you think about your personal life during work?
- Overall, do you draw a clear line between work and home? Or do the domains of your life merge or blur without your being able to clearly say where work ends and leisure begins?

Now try to place yourself on a continuum between complete separation and complete integration of the life domains.

...

Now imagine that you had already done this training. Imagine that you had spent several weeks on the training content, that you had reached the end of the training, and that you were now experiencing a complete balance between your work and your personal life.

- How would you know that your work-life balance is optimal?
- What exactly would be different then? What changes would have occurred?
- How would other people know without your telling them?
- How would you behave differently?
- How would you have changed when or where you work?
- How would you be available?
- What would be different in your communication with others?
- Would your work and personal life be clearly separated, or would you integrate aspects of your work and personal life?
- How would you like to deal with boundaries?

Now try to place this desired state on a continuum between complete separation and complete integration of life domains.

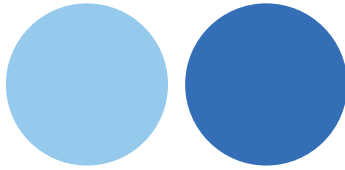
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Now slowly come back into the room. Bring your thoughts back to the here and now. Take a deep breath in and out. When you are ready, please open your eyes.

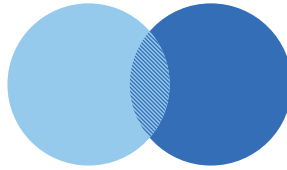


Which of these images corresponds most closely to the first state you imagined – how you currently separate or combine your work and personal life? This corresponds to your current state.

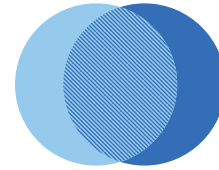
Strong separation
between work and
private life



Partial separation,
partial connection
of work and private life

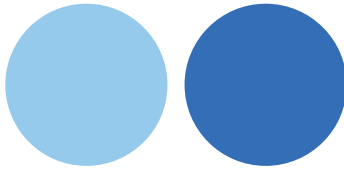


Strong connection
between work and
private life

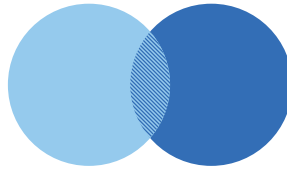


Which of these images corresponds most closely to the second state you imagined – how you would best separate or combine your work and personal life? This corresponds to your desired state.

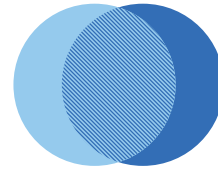
Strong separation
between work and
private life



Partial separation,
partial connection
of work and private life



Strong connection
between work and
private life



Have you selected the same image?

Then you seem to be satisfied with your current level of separation and connection of your life areas.

Are the two selected images different?

Then you seem to desire more or less separation of your spheres of life. In what way do your reality and your desire differ? Where do you feel the need for change? Do you wish for clearer separation or more integration in the future?

Whether you wish to separate more in the future, integrate more, or even feel that you are already very close to your desired state – in this exercise you have determined for yourself whether you prefer to integrate or segment, and to what extent you already shape your everyday life accordingly.

It is often the case that there is no black and white, the absolute integration and the absolute separation. For many people, these preferences differ depending on the situation, life circumstances, or mood.

Therefore, it is useful if you know strategies of how to consciously create a boundary between work and private life. This will help you to separate yourself from work, depending on your personal desires and needs. We will now present some strategies.

Strategies to set boundaries between areas of life

The following strategies can help you set the boundary more clearly between areas of your life when they flow smoothly into one another. We will present many different strategies. The point is not that you should implement them all, but that you find the personal strategies that fit your daily work routine. In each case, consider which strategies would be realistic for you to implement.

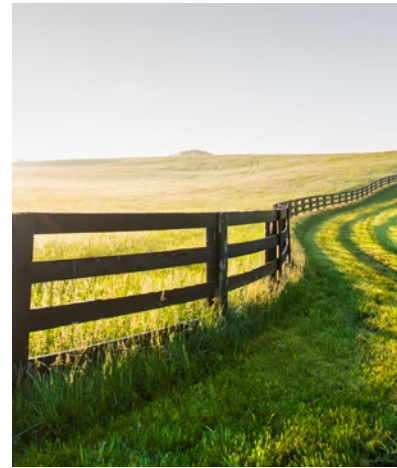


Spatial and physical strategies

One way of separating work and private life is to create spatial boundaries. Often, commuting to the office sets a very natural boundary between work and private life. With location- and time-flexible work, this boundary is often unclear. Then it's up to you to set a boundary that you feel comfortable with and that serves the same function.

A few examples of how this can succeed:

- If there is a study at home: close the door
- If there is no study at home: set up a physical workspace (an area in a room where leisure time is not also spent), delineate the workspace, e.g. with a curtain or room divider
- Dress differently for work and for leisure (especially when working at home, clothes like those worn in the office can convey a certain feeling)
- Purposefully use items to separate/mix work and personal life (e.g. calendars, keys, photos)



These spatial strategies work for me:



Sofia

“Since I am a teacher, I often have to work from home to correct papers or prepare and follow up lessons. Before, I didn’t have a fixed workspace in the apartment, and sometimes sat at the kitchen table or coffee table. Now I have created my own workspace where I exclusively work and do not do other things. Since I don’t have my own office at home, I have hung a sign above my desk that I turn as needed: “Office open/Office closed.” I also always wear my work clothes in my work area. Only after I have completed my tasks do I change into my more comfortable casual clothes. Another change is to the wall calendar in our apartment. Before, my boyfriend and I always wrote down all our personal and professional appointments. Now we have two calendars for that.”



Temporal strategies

Normally, the working day is separated from free time by explicit working hours. Some people find it easier to stop working in the evening with a clear conscience if there are attendance or regulated working hours. Often, people who work flexible hours can start later, for example, after taking the children to kindergarten, or much earlier, for example, to have more free time in the afternoon. However, they often also work longer hours.



Setting clear rules about how many hours or from when to when to work in a day can help set boundaries.

A few examples of how this can be done:

- Set regular working hours
- Document working hours (keep a time account)
- Set up a schedule (with professional and private to-dos)
- Plan lunch breaks and short breaks in between (if it is still difficult to take breaks, e.g. arrange virtual coffee breaks with colleagues)
- Plan leisure time (e.g. every Friday, finish work on time to go to sports)
- Structure working time (more on this in [Module 4](#))

These time strategies fit into my workday:



Ahmet

“For the past two years, I’ve had the opportunity to work from home one or more days a week. On the days I work from home, I find it harder to draw a line in the evening. Because it often feels like I’m not doing enough. That’s why I’ve now started keeping a personal time account. In it, I note the beginning and end of my workday and also enter my break times. As a result, I no longer forget my lunch break. To maintain a regular rhythm, I have also decided to start work at the same time as I would in the office. This way, it’s now also easier for me to find an end in the evening and plan my free time with a clear conscience.”



Transition rituals

To set the boundary between work and private life more clearly, it helps to introduce routines.

Routines are actions that clarify the transition between areas of life. Consciously experiencing a transition between work and personal life makes it easier to separate these areas of life. Through routines, you make yourself more aware that you are now taking on or discarding a certain role.

A few examples of such routines:

- Morning routines to consciously end free time (drinking coffee, reading the newspaper, changing clothes)
- Morning routines to consciously start work (set up workspace, turn on devices, read emails)
- Evening routines to consciously end work (planning for the next day, turning off equipment, rinsing coffee mugs)
- Evening routines to consciously begin free time (change clothes, change seats, reflect on or talk about the work day, plan free time, take a walk, listen to a podcast)



I find these routines appealing:



Hannah

“Every evening before I finish work, I write down exactly what I want to start with the next day. This saves me time when I start work again the next morning. I know exactly where I stopped and which tasks come next. Reading the to-dos from the previous day also serves as one of my morning rituals. In the evening, I also tidy up my desk, repack pencils, and put books back on the shelf. Then I turn off the computer and the lights and leave my office. This makes it easier for me to draw a line under the workday.”



Behavioral and communicative strategies

You can also set boundaries with the help of your behavior and communication. A clarifying conversation with colleagues can often help to communicate your own boundaries. Your own circle of friends also benefits from knowing at what times you do not want to be disturbed.

A few examples of how this can succeed:

- Define your own expectations
- Make agreements with family and friends, colleagues and supervisors about when you are available for whom, e.g. “I can only be reached at work for urgent private matters. After work, I can only be reached for urgent work-related matters”
- Communicate expectations regarding the separation of work and private life, e.g. tell colleagues that you are not available for work-related questions in the evenings and on weekends; do not talk about work-related topics with your partner over dinner
- Address boundary violations/transgressions, e.g. “I’m at work now and I’ll call you back later”
- If constant work-related accessibility is required: clarify expectations in the team, define times and communication channels
- Asking friends, family, colleagues, or supervisors for support in maintaining personal boundaries, e.g. asking others to pick up the phone
- Deal with personal matters during breaks and free time only (when working from home, this also includes household activities)



These behavioral and communicative strategies fit my situation:



Hannah

“I love the freedom that my job as an independent consultant offers me. However, it is sometimes difficult for people around me to understand when I am available and for whom. That’s why I’ve made it clear to my friends that I’m only available at work for urgent private matters – especially when I’m working with a client, I’m uncomfortable having private conversations that aren’t absolutely necessary. However, my family members know that they can always call me if they need me. If it’s not a good time, I make it very clear and say, for example, “I’m at work now and will call you back later.”

In a conversation with my colleagues, I explained that after 7 p.m. I am only available for urgent work-related matters, and I also explained that this is important to me so that I can be there for my family. Although I was reluctant to be so open about it, I’m glad I brought it up because everyone was understanding.

Turning down last-minute requests is another strategy that I now try to apply because it’s not unusual for me to receive a last-minute request from a client late at night. So far, it has always been enormously difficult for me to say no because as a self-employed person I can’t really afford to do that.

After all, the order situation could change at any time – I never know what the next year will look like. However, I also know that my health and performance should be my top priorities. I depend on both to remain able to work in the long term and to secure my income. Now I always make that clear to myself in situations like this.”





Technical strategies

Unlike 20 years ago, new technologies make it possible for us to be constantly reached these days. However, you can also use the technical possibilities to your advantage, thereby controlling your availability.

A few examples of how this can succeed:

- Use different devices for work and private life
- Set up different email accounts for private and professional use
- Turn off push function for emails
- Set a time window for receiving email or stop checking professional email after a certain time
- Use do-not-disturb function or, if possible, switch off your business cell phone
- Use digital calendars to visualize accessibility and availability for yourself and others
- Determine and communicate times and communication channels for own accessibility (see also Communicative strategies)



These technical strategies appeal to me:



Alexander

"I am always available for my customers, supervisors, and employees. Even when I am at home, my colleagues from work can still reach me. Therefore, I have now strictly separated my private and business email accounts. I have also deactivated the push function for my work emails. This means that my work-related emails no longer reach me on my private smartphone unless I specifically check them.

So that my employees always know whether I am available, I have shared my calendar with them and always keep it up to date with where I am working and when I have appointments.

However, due to my position, I have to be available around the clock, at least for the management, and I can't simply put my smartphone on silent. That's why I've asked my employees to stop calling me outside normal working hours unless there's something absolutely urgent to discuss. As a result, I am now only called outside normal working hours in the case of an emergency."



Other strategies and routines

You may know other strategies or routines that facilitate the separation between work and private life. These may be specific implementation ideas for a particular segmentation strategy (for example, how you personally create spatial separation) or they may be completely different strategies to those mentioned so far.

Are you perhaps already using strategies or routines?

What strategies and routines do others around you use?

Do your friends, colleagues, or co-workers have strategies and routines that you find helpful?

Exercises such as the 54321 exercise you learned about in *Module 1* can also be used as a routine.

What other strategies and routines can you think of? If you like, you can write them down here.

Application of the strategies for setting boundaries between areas of life in everyday life

To make it easier for you to try these strategies in your daily life, you can use the goal-setting strategies (*SMART goals and WOOP*) that you learned last week.

What two strategies would you like to try in the upcoming week?

There may also be strategies you've tried before but want to be more intentional about using.

Choose two specific strategies to try over the next week. We recommend that you choose two strategies that are as different as possible (for example, use do-not-disturb function, address boundary violations). We also encourage you to choose strategies that you find challenging but actionable.

Of course, you can also choose more strategies. However, it often helps to consciously implement a few specific strategies instead of trying to change many things at once.



Write down the two strategies you would like to try in the upcoming week. Feel free to check your notes again to see which strategies you found appealing.

Strategy 1:

Strategy 2:

Reminder – you learned about strategies from the following areas:

- Spatial and physical strategies
- Temporal strategies
- Transition rituals
- Behavioral and communicative strategies
- Technical strategies

You probably already know many of the strategies presented in this module. Nevertheless, you have not applied all of them so far. There may be good reasons for this.

Now, when you imagine trying the strategies and routines you selected next week – do you feel any inner resistance or apprehension?

Then we invite you to listen to this audio.

Please pause for a moment.

Imagine trying out the strategies and rituals you just selected next week. Take a moment to listen to yourself – do you hear any inner voices telling you not to?

Maybe you tell yourself that you should not only think about yourself? That it will never work? That it would be stupid to distance yourself from work when there is so much to do? Or maybe your inner voices are telling you something else?

Consider what resistance or concerns you feel within yourself, what you are saying to yourself, or what inner voices are stirring.

When you want to do something differently or try something new, most people experience resistance, doubts, or critical inner voices. This can often be valuable and helpful for rethinking your actions. Sometimes, however, it is also good to take a short break in order to explore the range of your own possibilities.

There are different ways to take this break. Some people can organize or reconcile their doubts or inner voices. Others imagine leaving them in a room and closing the door behind them, or they put their concerns in a package and seal it. How do you manage to give yourself a little break from your inner voices, from your concerns, from your resistance, and open up space for something new?

How does that feel? Some people feel relief at these thoughts, others feel less pressure.

For this moment, give yourself permission to consciously do something for yourself, for your balance and health.

You may wish to observe what happens when you give yourself this permission. Take a moment to do this. Many people already sense at this point how good it is to give themselves such permission from time to time.

Now slowly come back into the room. Bring your thoughts back to the here and now. Take a deep breath in and out.



Listen to audio

As you probably remember, it is easier to implement a resolution if you think carefully about how and when you will carry it out. It makes sense to think carefully about when, where and how you want to implement a new strategy in your everyday life and change your current behavior.



Set SMART goals

At the end of each module, each time we will ask you to be specific about when you will implement the daily tasks. Although the implementation itself does not take long, you should consciously take this time. To do this, we'll use a technique you learned in *Module 1*: SMART goals.



Please articulate as SMARTly as possible when you will try your two strategies each day for the following week:

Strategy 1:

Strategy 2:

Reminder:

SMART goals

- S** pecific (concrete and precisely formulated)
- M** easurable (verifiable)
- A** ttractive (positively formulated)
- R** ealistic (challenging, but not too high)
- T** ime-bound (fixed in time)

Adapted from Doran, 1981



WOOP – Present successes and plan how to overcome obstacles.

Now pick one of your strategies. Feel free to choose the one that you are most afraid you will have problems implementing.



Imagine what positive events will occur if you applied the strategies (outcome).

Imagine what might prevent you from doing this (obstacle).

Think about how you could overcome this obstacle. Formulate in one sentence how you will act if the obstacle occurs (plan): If ... then ...

Reminder:

WOOP strategy

- W** ish
- O** utcome
- O** bstacle
- P** lan

Click here for the [WOOP strategy](#) explained in detail.

Adapted from Gollwitzer et al., 2018 | More info at woopmylife.org

Reminder:

If-then sentences

An if-then sentence prepares you for the next situation in which you will be confronted with your obstacle. The plan is set up according to the following pattern: "If (obstacle) occurs, then I will (effective action/thoughts)."

If you like, you can go over the WOOP strategy again internally and relate it to your second goal for the next week.

The daily exercise for the coming week

Apply the two selected strategies or routines daily to separate your life domains.



Congratulations!

With the completion of the second module, the second branch of your FlexiTree has blossomed.



Congratulations!

You have successfully completed the second module of your FlexAbility training.

Good luck implementing your boundary-setting strategies in your daily life! We are excited about the changes you will experience next week.



Review

Let's take a look back at today's module. Today you have:

- Learned how to set a boundary between work and private life according to your ideas
- Learned why separating areas of life is important
- Learned strategies for setting clearer boundaries between work and personal life



Outlook

In the next module, you will learn concrete strategies for achieving cognitive segmentation from work in addition to temporal, spatial, and technical separation.

If you notice next week that you still have a hard time transitioning between your work and personal life – that's perfectly fine. These thoughts and ruminations are quite normal, just try to accept them and let them go. It takes time for new habits to form.

You will learn more about this in the next module.

Summary

The objectives of this module at a glance

In today's module, you learned how to set boundaries between work and private life according to your ideas. You also know why the separation of areas of life is important and you have strategies up your sleeve to help you draw the line between work and private life more clearly.

Work-life balance and role conflicts

Work-life balance describes a balance between professional and private demands, needs, and desires.

Specifically, this means that people perceive the reconciliation of their professional and non-professional roles as successful. They are satisfied with how they handle their roles and believe that they fulfill their roles well and are appropriately committed to them – depending on the value they attach to the roles.

In addition, work-life balance describes a state in which few role conflicts occur and areas of life are mutually enriching.

A **role conflict** describes a state of tension due to conflicting expectations and demands on different roles.

Segment and integrate

People differ in how much they like to delineate or connect their areas of life and the associated roles. “Segmenters” like work and private life to be clearly separate and distinguishable areas, while “integrators” appreciate an interweaving of different areas.

Today you considered how much you want to separate or combine your work and personal life, and to what extent you currently separate or combine your work and personal life.

Strategies for limiting different areas of life

You have learned strategies from the following areas:

- Spatial and physical strategies
- Temporal strategies
- Transition rituals
- Behavioral and communicative strategies
- Technical strategies

If you like, take a moment to review the second module. What strategies with what benefits do you want to try? What obstacles may arise in the implementation of your strategies and how would you like to deal with them?

The daily exercise for the coming week

Apply the two selected strategies or routines daily to delineate your life areas.

Module 3

Switching off from work – setting boundaries

A warm welcome to you!



The objectives of this module at a glance

After processing this module:

- You will recognize how to switch off from work
- You will know how mindfulness can help you in everyday life to switch off from work and focus on the here and now
- You will be able to use a strategy to internally distance yourself from thoughts of work



A warm welcome to you! It's good to have you back!

In the last module, we talked about setting boundaries between work and personal life, for example by creating physical or temporal boundaries.

But you may have noticed that sometimes these strategies aren't enough – that your mind keeps wandering after work and you can't quite let go of what happened at work. Or you might notice that you think about things at work that you still have to take care of in your personal life, and you get distracted.

Today is all about learning strategies to better mentally distance yourself from work or your personal life. First, you will learn why this is so difficult. Then you'll consider how you can unplug from work. Finally, you will learn specific exercises to help you mentally detach from thoughts of work or your personal life.

As always, see working through this module as time for yourself.

And now, have fun and good luck with your third module!



Review

Let's take a look back at the last module. In the last module you:

- Learned how to set boundaries between work and private life according to your ideas
- Learned why segmenting areas of life is important
- Learned strategies for setting clearer boundaries between work and personal life





Your favorites

To begin, we ask you to reflect on how well you have been able to integrate the two strategies for setting boundaries into your daily life.

Reminder – the strategies from the last module were:

- Spatial and physical strategies
- Temporal strategies
- Transition rituals
- Behavioral and communicative strategies
- Technical strategies
- Your own strategies and routines

Over the next few weeks, you can continue to use your current strategies for setting boundaries around work so they will gradually become a habit – you will benefit from them. Of course, you can also try another strategy.

If there were difficulties with implementation, you can consider how to adapt the strategies to better fit your daily life, or try a different strategy. If there were unforeseen obstacles, you could think about how to deal with them in the future and make a new if-then plan.

Which strategies and routines are your favorites?

You can mark the corresponding exercises in your [exercise overview](#) and, if you like, add a small note.



Switch off from work

Your workday is over. You are no longer at your workplace. It is the end of the day. Still, what happened at work just won't quite let you go.

It's not just you – one in three people has problems clearing their head after work. But even if you can switch off well most of the time, in stressful times it helps to know strategies to be able to mentally leave work behind in your free time.

Switching off refers to the mental detachment from work during free time that goes beyond physical absence. This therefore means that you are not preoccupied with work-related matters, both mentally and emotionally.

Why switching off can sometimes be difficult

Especially if you can work anytime, anywhere, and are constantly available, it becomes more difficult to mentally detach from work and focus on other aspects of life. Factors such as a heavy workload, time pressure or the expectations of others can make it even harder to switch off and lead to events at work spilling over into your free time.

There are many reasons for this:

- Maybe you're pondering how to solve a tricky issue you're dealing with at work right now
- Maybe you're ruminating about an uncomfortable situation with your manager, a team member, or a client
- Maybe you're making a mental list of all the things you want to tackle the next day and how to best approach them
- Maybe something unforeseen has happened and you are now preoccupied with it or you are worried about a difficult task

Or maybe you've run on adrenaline all day and now it's hard to just turn off thoughts of work.

What happens when you can't switch off from work?

People who can't switch off are correspondingly less open to experiences in their free time. This can manifest itself in very different ways. Perhaps you can only listen to the stories of a family member with half an ear, are in a bad mood, impatient, tense or irritable. Maybe you forget half of what you were going to buy while shopping for groceries because your mind was elsewhere.

In psychology, as you already learned in [Module 2](#), if you continue to be absorbed by professional roles and the associated tasks even after you have left work, this is known as role conflict. These role conflicts prevent you from being completely absorbed in the roles you play in your private life, be it as a partner, friend, parent, or simply someone going about their leisure. It is more difficult to be attentive to yourself and others, to enjoy your free time, to engage in activities, and to recover from the exertions of the day.



Reflection

Think about the past work week for a moment. When did you find it particularly difficult to switch off from work in your free time? Try to find two or three specific situations at work that keep bothering you even after work is over.

How do you express yourself when you can't switch off well? Using your examples from just now, think about what your mood is like. For example, are you depressed, powerless, restless...? How do you behave in such cases? Do you withdraw, watch TV ...?

Feel free to jot down keywords.

There will always be events at work that spill over into your free time. If you become more aware of when it is harder and when it is easier for you to switch off, and how this manifests itself, you will be in a better position to counteract it.

Work takes hold of us in the form of thoughts, moods, and stress that are carried over from work into our private lives, leading to brooding about the past and worrying about the future. Most of the time, our thoughts go round in circles without coming to a conclusion.

Thus, work unintentionally intrudes into private life, affecting the interplay between work and private life.

Why is switching off important?

It is a central aspect of recovery to stop thinking about work and professional issues during leisure time. This replenishes energy reserves used up at work. Those who can switch off from work therefore feel less stressed and exhausted.

In addition, people who can switch off are more satisfied with their work and their private lives. It can also have a positive effect on their work-life balance if they don't worry about work-related issues in their free time. They are also healthier, for example, they are able to sleep better. And finally, they are also more productive.

How do you then manage to consciously use your non-work time and not be preoccupied with work? There are numerous strategies for this. The good news: you certainly already know one or two strategies for switching off in your free time.



How do I switch off?

Some people can switch off particularly well and no longer think about their work when they are engaged in creative activities. Others completely distance themselves mentally from work when they are physically active. And still others distance themselves from work during completely different activities. What is it like for you?

In the first column, note what activities you do in your free time.

Now consider how well you can switch off during these leisure activities using the following questions. For each activity, assign points from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well).

- How well do you gain distance from your job demands in this activity?
- How well do you forget about your work in this activity?

Activity	Switching off	Forgetting about work	Total

Idea generator for leisure activities

- Go for a walk
- Exercise
- Cooking
- Read a book
- Listen to music
- Meet friends
- Meditate
- Watch a movie
- Relaxation exercises
- Take a language course
- Voluntary work
- Sing in a choir
- Yoga
- Decorate your home
- Attend a concert
- Take a bath
- Club sport
- Sitting in the garden
- Jogging in the forest
- Chatting to family
- Massage
- Play an instrument
- Visit a museum
- Baking
- Visit an exhibition
- Hiking

The activities with the highest score are the best for you to switch off.

Make a note here of the activities that enable you to best switch off:

Based on Hahn et al., 2011



Sofia

“These activities are the best way for me to switch off:

- *Plan a new do-it-yourself project and be totally absorbed in making something new*
- *Read a book*
- *Take a gym class”*

Ahmet

“These activities are the best way for me to switch off:

- *Exercise*
- *Lie on the couch and watch TV*
- *Cooking”*



Hannah

“These activities are the best way for me to switch off:

- *Gardening*
- *Talk on the phone with friends*
- *Play with my children”*

Alexander

“These activities are the best way for me to switch off:

- *Solve the Sunday puzzles in the newspaper*
- *Listen to music*
- *Do the dishes*
- *Go jogging*
- *Watch soccer with my friends”*



So you see, you can already switch off. Remind yourself to do this intentionally. If you notice that your mind is at work and not at rest, you can consciously pursue your switch-off activities to clear your mind.

Another way to switch off

Maybe you are already a pro at consciously switching off. Maybe you noticed during the last exercise that you switch off during some activities, but rarely do them. Or maybe you felt during the last exercise that you didn't really know how to switch off properly.

To expand on the many positive effects that letting go mentally can have, we'd like to give you another strategy that can help you switch off anywhere, every day, and in a very short time. In the following, we will show you how you can use mindfulness as a strategy for switching off.

Understanding mindfulness – what being mindful means

Mindfulness – you have certainly heard of it. After all, in today's society, the word “mindfulness” is on everyone's lips. But have you ever asked yourself what being mindful really means? And did you know that there are hard scientific facts behind this apparent trend?



Now I would like to explain what mindfulness is and how you can benefit from a mindful attitude in your work.

Mindfulness has two parts: one is to focus on the present moment, the here and now. The other is to approach thoughts with a certain inner attitude.

The first component involves consciously focusing attention on the current experience. It is not about thinking about something in particular or nothing. Instead, you simply perceive the inner and outer events as they occur.

The second component focuses on the inner attitude. Having a mindful attitude means not judging, but instead **accepting, letting go, and not striving**.

Most people immediately evaluate what they see, hear, experience, think, or feel. **Not judging** means that experiences are not categorized as good or bad, right or wrong, but are simply observed.

Accepting things as they are means not fighting against the unchangeable, but this does not mean resignation or unconditional approval.

Letting go means allowing thoughts, feelings, and experiences to happen, but also letting them go rather than continuing to dwell on them.

Not striving means not having to constantly attempt to reach a goal or fulfill an expectation. It is about being present in the moment without wanting anything.

The practice of mindfulness is historically rooted in Buddhist meditation. But mindfulness can also be practiced as mental training, in a non-spiritual, universal way. Thus, everyone can benefit from it.

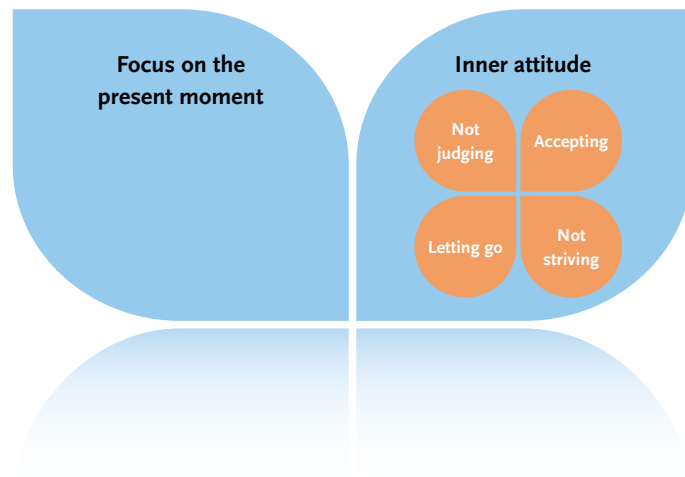
Mindfulness can help you cope with stress. People who are more mindful in their lives have been shown to experience fewer symptoms of stress, such as nervousness or loss of appetite. They also sleep better, feel more energized, and are more satisfied with their work-life balance. Mindfulness can also help you unplug from work by focusing on the here and now.

There are exciting research findings from the field of neuroscience, showing that the regular practice of mindfulness is associated with neuroplastic changes in the brain. These changes in the brain can be a sign of greater mental health.

People who are mindful tend to be healthier and more productive. Mindful people are better able to control their attention and behavior.

The mindfulness exercises in this module have been tested by our research team in several studies. We were able to confirm that these exercises are an effective way to be present in the moment, to focus your thoughts, and to cognitively and emotionally separate yourself from your work or personal life.

Now, as you try these proven exercises, I hope you have fun!



More information? Effects of mindfulness on the brain

Psychologist and neuroscientist Dr. Britta Hölzel has found in several studies how mindfulness changes the brain. For example, participants in an eight-week mindfulness stress training program showed more gray matter (an essential component of the central nervous system that primarily contains cell bodies of neurons) in the hippocampus (part of the cerebrum) (Hölzel *et al.*, 2011) and less gray matter in the amygdala (part of the cerebrum) (Hölzel *et al.*, 2010). The seahorse-shaped hippocampus is associated with learning and processing memory and emotions. The amygdala is important for the sensation of fear and stress.

There is a lot of evidence suggesting that the hippocampus also plays an important role in resilience, that is, the ability to withstand psychological strain – an ability that is needed in today's professional life with its high demands. But another structure is also of interest to professionals – the anterior part of the anterior cingulate cortex (or ACC for short). This area of the cerebral cortex is responsible for many cognitive processes, such as the control of attention and behavior, also called self-regulation. Experienced meditators also show more gray matter in this brain area (Grant *et al.*, 2010).

Try mindfulness

How can you make everyday life more mindful?

The basic exercise is to anchor the attention in the present by directing it to an object. This can be anything, for example, an object, a sound or a bodily sensation.

After a very short time, you will notice that your attention begins to drift. Without you intending it, your thoughts wander. For example, to what happened yesterday, what you have already experienced today or what still needs to be done. Or even to things that worry or frighten you.

That's perfectly fine. In fact, it's unavoidable. Being mindful means noticing that your attention is no longer in the here and now, but somewhere in the past or future. Because then you can bring your attention back to the present by turning to the object again.

And so you proceed every time you become aware that your thoughts are wandering. This returning to the present is as much a part of the exercise as concentrating on the object itself.

The simplest and most effective way to practice mindfulness is to focus on your breath. It is always available and its dynamism makes it easier to stay attentive.



Mindfulness breathing exercise



Listen to audio

Below you will find instructions for a mindfulness breathing exercise. Please take your time for this exercise. In doing so, encounter everything that arises with a benevolent attitude (accepting, letting go, not striving, and not judging).

1. Sit comfortably without leaning back. Place your feet flat on the floor, not crossing your legs. Make sure your back is straight. Let your shoulders hang down a little.
2. If you wish, close your eyes.
3. Be aware of where your body makes contact with the seat. Notice how this feels.
4. Become aware of what is going on inside of you. What thoughts are there? What feelings? What bodily sensations?
5. Now become aware of your breathing. Feel how your belly rises when you inhale and how it lowers when you exhale. You may wish to place your hand on your belly for a few breaths to feel how the breath flows in and out of your body. Notice the sensation of slight expansion as your belly rises with each inhalation and slight contraction as it falls with each exhalation. Follow these sensations as the breath flows into your body and as the breath leaves your body as you exhale. You may notice the little pause between the inhalation and the following exhalation, and between the exhalation and subsequent inhalation. Allow your body to breathe at its own rhythm. There is no need to change or control anything. Just observe from moment to moment. Keep your attention on your breathing, breath by breath.
6. Sooner rather than later you will notice that your attention wanders away from the breath, and thoughts and feelings appear. This is perfectly fine. Notice what is distracting you and bring your attention back to the movement of your belly. Do this again and again. Even if your mind wanders away from your breathing countless times, bring it back just as often without getting annoyed, without getting impatient. This is the normal process. Use your breath as an anchor with which you can bring yourself back to the here and now each time.
7. Finish the exercise by expanding your attention back to your whole body and the space in which you are sitting.
8. Open your eyes or let your eyes wander around the room and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.

Adapted from Michel et al., 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.



And – how did it feel? What experiences did you have? Feel free to think about it for a moment.

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

Using mindfulness to switch off

When you can't let go of work tasks and the feelings that come with them in your free time, mindfulness can create distance by bringing you back to the presence of the end of the day. Scientific studies confirm that mindfulness helps to detach from brooding and worrying.

Use mindfulness to mentally separate your private life more consciously from your work life and to shape your free time in a self-determined way.

Central to mindfulness exercises is directing one's attention to the here and now – so instead of focusing on the breath, you can also focus on the current action.

Be mindful of habits, especially those activities that you do routinely and almost automatically. Try to do things mindfully, for example, when you get up in the morning, brush your teeth, shower, and eat, but also while driving to work or going for a walk. Be present when you interact with your family, your partner, your friends, when you relax and pursue your hobbies, but also when you do your chores or other private tasks.

Based on Michel et al., 2014 and Kabat-Zinn, 2006.

Encourage switching off after work through mindfulness

You have probably found that your mind is quite active and it is unusual to spend time at rest and with yourself without doing, thinking or getting anything in particular done.

A mindful attitude, as you learned in the video, includes **not striving, not judging, but being curious and first accepting thoughts and feelings as they are, then letting them go**. This is exactly what is hard to do when you can't switch off from work. That is why we are now dealing with how we encounter the things to which our attention wanders, and especially with letting go.

Dealing with thoughts and feelings

Imagine greeting your manager in the hallway and she doesn't return your greeting. You may react angrily, thinking to yourself how rude and inattentive she is. Maybe you're insecure and worried about whether you've done something wrong. Or maybe you are amused because you attribute her behavior to the fact that she is once again wandering around the office lost in thought.



This example should make two things clear:

1. Thoughts are not facts, but interpretations of reality.
2. Feelings are the result of evaluative thoughts and thus depend on our interpretation of the situation.

When thoughts and feelings are based on interpretations, it can be worthwhile not to let them affect us so much. Mindfulness supports us in this by creating a distance towards thoughts and feelings. In this way, we succeed in identifying less strongly with our thoughts and feelings.

Through the mindful attitude, you can curiously observe and register how your thoughts and feelings arise, develop, and disappear again without having to analyze and judge them or change them and follow them up or take action otherwise.

Thoughts are always only part of the experience, a part that can be important, but does not have to be important.

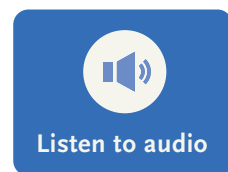
Being mindful with thoughts and feelings

You now have the opportunity to consciously practice your mindful attitude. In the next mindfulness sequence, you will be guided to watch from an observer's perspective how your thoughts and feelings come and go.



1. Sit comfortably without leaning back. Place your feet flat on the floor, not crossing your legs. Make sure your back is straight. Let your shoulders hang down a little.
2. If you wish, close your eyes.
3. Focus your attention on your breathing for a few breaths. Observe how the air flows into your belly, how it flows out again, and how it flows into your belly again. Try to keep your attention on the breath.
4. Now let go of your breath and observe thoughts and feelings coming and going, appearing and disappearing from your awareness. You can imagine that you are lying in a meadow and that your thoughts and feelings are like clouds that you are watching pass by in the sky. Do not hold on to your thoughts or feelings. Do not follow them. Just observe them as they come and go.
5. Now return your attention to your breathing and the movements of your belly.
6. Finish the exercise by expanding your attention back to your whole body and the space in which you are sitting.
7. Open your eyes or let your eyes wander around the room and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.

According to Michel et al., 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Siegel, 2010; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.





How did it feel? What experiences did you have?
Feel free to think about it for a moment.

If you like, you can note down your thoughts here.

Encourage switching off after work through mindfulness

Mindfulness helps to consciously separate leisure time from work life by bringing you back into the present. But mindfulness also creates distance from work because, through mindfulness, you are less preoccupied with work-related thoughts and feelings. The “trick” here is to view your inner processes calmly as something that comes but also goes away.

Use mindfulness as a source of strength to distance yourself from demands in your work life during your free time and in this way find peace to be fully present in your private life, with all the challenges and positives.

Mindfully start leisure time with the three-minute breathing exercise

To help you get off to a mindful start in your free time and manage to be present in your everyday life when automatic and disturbing thoughts arise, we will now show you a three-minute breathing exercise. It is similar to the breathing exercise you have already learned, but a bit shorter. You can now try this exercise directly.



1. Assume an upright, comfortable posture. Ask yourself, “What is my experience in this moment... thoughts... feelings... bodily sensations?” Acknowledge your experience, even if it is unwanted.
2. Focus your attention on your breath, on each inhale and exhale. If your mind wanders, bring it back.
3. Expand your awareness to your entire body.
4. Finish the exercise and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.

Adapted from Michel et al., 2014; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.



Listen to audio

The daily exercise for the coming week

Please do the three-minute breathing exercise at the beginning of your free time in the upcoming week. Choose a time and place that works well for you.

Use the exercise to let go after work and consciously experience your private life. Additionally, use the exercise whenever you notice that your mind is at work during your free time.

When your attention shifts from breathing to other things, accept these thoughts without judging them. Do not try to change your thoughts, but let them move on and return your attention to your breath.

Developing a mindful attitude takes a lot of time and practice. So be patient with yourself if something does not succeed straight away. The point is not to do it particularly well and not to digress, but to try seriously, not tensely, to come back to the present after each digression.

The more often and regularly you practice, the easier it becomes over time.

Application of the daily exercise in your everyday life

Just like in the last module, we recommend that you now think about when you want to do the breathing exercise at the beginning of your free time and what SMART goal can support you. In addition, we recommend that you also think again about what might prevent you from doing it and how you will then react. You already know these steps.





Set SMART goals

When at the beginning of my leisure time next week would I like to use the three-minute breathing exercise?



Reminder:

SMART goals

- S** pecific (concrete and precisely formulated)
- M** easurable (verifiable)
- A** ttractive (positively formulated)
- R** ealistic (challenging, but not too high)
- T** ime-bound (fixed in time)

Adapted from Doran, 1981

Tip

It helps some people to think of a link for when they will do the exercise, for example, “When I shut down the computer in the evening, I will do the three-minute breathing exercise.”



Present successes

What positive outcomes will occur if I manage to do the three-minute breathing exercise every day?



Plan to overcome obstacles

What might prevent me from using the exercise in everyday life?

How can I overcome this obstacle?

What is the corresponding if-then plan?



Reminder:

WOOP strategy

- W** ish
- O** utcome
- O** bstacle
- P** lan

Click here for the [WOOP strategy](#) explained in detail.

Adapted from Gollwitzer et al., 2018 | More info at woopmylife.org

Tip

Link an object or symbol to the breathing exercise. Place this object visibly in a place in your home. When you see the object, take a moment to return to yourself with the help of the three-minute breathing exercise.

Congratulations!

With the completion of the third module, the third branch of your FlexiTree has blossomed.



Congratulations!

You have successfully completed the third module of your FlexAbility training.

We wish you success in implementing the three-minute breathing exercise in your daily life. We are excited about the changes you will experience next week.



Review

Let's take a look back at today's module. Today you have:

- Recognized how to switch off from work
- Learned how mindfulness can help you in everyday life to switch off from work and focus on the here and now
- Learned a strategy for distancing yourself internally from thoughts of work and associated feelings



Outlook

Sometimes it is also difficult to switch off from work because you still have many important tasks in your head and have to organize yourself – so the next module will be about how you can manage to work in a more focused way.

Summary

The objectives of this module at a glance

In today's module, you identified how to switch off from work. You also learned how mindfulness can help you in your daily life to switch off from work and focus on the here and now. You can now also use strategies to internally distance yourself from thoughts of work.

Switch off from work

Switching off refers to the mental detachment from work during leisure time that goes beyond physical absence. This therefore means that you are not preoccupied with work-related matters, whether mentally or emotionally.

Why switching off is important

It is a central aspect of recovery to stop thinking about work and professional issues during leisure time. This replenishes the energy reserves used up at work.

For this reason, you've thought about when you find it difficult to switch off from work and how this manifests itself. You have also collected activities where you can switch off well.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness can be used as a strategy to switch off. Mindfulness consists of two components: one is focusing on the present moment, the here and now. The second component focuses on receiving thoughts with a certain inner attitude. A mindful attitude includes **not judging, accepting, letting go, and not striving**.

Mindfulness can help bring thoughts from the past or future back to the present at the end of the day and thus more consciously separate leisure time from work life. Being mindful also creates distance from work by causing you to be less preoccupied with work-related thoughts and feelings.

You have learned about three exercises today.

The first exercise was about concentrating on your breath and thus focusing on the here and now.

The second exercise was about adopting a mindful attitude, that is, observing thoughts and feelings without judging them, and then letting them go.

The three-minute breathing exercise

Today, you also learned the three-minute breathing exercise and set a *SMART goal* for using it.

To solidify your plan, you also applied the *WOOP strategy* by thinking about possible obstacles and how to overcome them, and formulating a corresponding if-then plan.

The daily exercise for the coming week

Please do the *three-minute breathing* exercise at the beginning of your leisure time in the coming week. Choose a time and place that works well for you.

Use the exercise to let go after work and to consciously focus on your private life. In addition, please use the exercise whenever you notice that your mind is at work during your free time.

When your attention moves from breathing to other things, accept these thoughts without judging them. Do not try to change your thoughts, but let them move on and return your attention to your breath.



Module 4

Staying focused – working with concentration

A warm welcome to you!



The objectives of this module at a glance

After processing this module:

- You will have expanded your competence of self-regulation and can thus better organize yourself and work with more focus.
- You will know strategies to formulate and achieve your goals in your everyday professional life.



Welcome back! Thank you for joining us again.

Over the last few weeks, you have learned how to set boundaries between work and personal life and how to detach mentally. If you work remotely, you are responsible for structuring your workday on a regular basis. It can easily happen that, due to many small distractions and interruptions, important tasks are postponed from one day to the next or even forgotten. Often, we lack an overview of our own tasks. The challenge is that, when we have these to-do lists and postponed tasks swirling around in our heads, it is particularly difficult to separate ourselves from our work and switch off.

There are many techniques and strategies to work more effectively. Maybe you already use some of these strategies. Today, we are going to introduce you to a method that will help you organize yourself better and that you can apply to all of your goals.

Good news: you know it already. Since the first module, you have been using various strategies – such as setting goals and imagining successes – and in this module, you can apply these strategies to your professional life. This way, you will be able to direct your actions towards being more organized and working with more focus in the future.

As always: treat the time you are spending working through this module as time for yourself.

I now invite you to do your three-minute breathing exercise to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life. This will help you focus on the content and exercises of today's module.

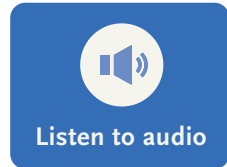
And now, we wish you much fun and success with your fourth module.



The three-minute breathing exercise

You can start your three-minute breathing exercise now.

1. Assume an upright, comfortable posture. Ask yourself, “What is my experience in this moment... thoughts... feelings... bodily sensations?” Acknowledge your experience, even if it is unwanted.
2. Focus your attention on your breath, on each inhale and exhale. If your mind wanders, bring it back.
3. Expand your awareness to your entire body.
4. Finish the exercise and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.



Adapted from Michel et al., 2014; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.

Tip

You can use mindfulness exercises not only to switch off from work, but also when you want to focus on a new task at work.



Review

Let's look back at the last module. In the previous module you:

- Recognized how you can switch off from work
- Learned how mindfulness in everyday life can help you switch off from work and focus on the here and now
- Learned a strategy for distancing yourself mentally from thoughts about work and the feelings that come with them





Your favorites

Take a moment to reflect on how often you used the three-minute breathing exercise at the beginning of your free time and what you found helpful about it.

If the implementation did not work so well, what could be the reason? Did the obstacles you foresaw occur, and did overcoming them work as planned? What are the options for responding to similar situations?

Which exercises from last week are your favorites?

Reminder – the exercises and strategies from the last module were:

- My activities to switch off
- Mindfulness breathing exercise
- Being mindful with thoughts and feelings
- Three-minute breathing exercise

You can mark the corresponding exercises in your [exercise overview](#).

Manage yourself, achieve your own goals



We constantly and unconsciously manage ourselves to achieve our goals. Self-management describes the ability to regulate our own thoughts, feelings, and actions. In psychology, the term “self-regulation” is used to talk about this. For decades, numerous studies have been conducted on self-regulation strategies. These strategies have proven to be very useful in changing behavior.

They help in managing work organization and completing tasks efficiently. But these strategies can also be used to achieve personal goals in other areas, such as exercising more, losing weight, or quitting smoking.

No matter what our goals are, the process is the same. It consists of four phases.

Goal-setting

In the goal-setting phase, we set individual goals. Often this phase is preceded by an observation of our own behavior.

Self-observation

In the self-observation phase, we reflect on our own behavior. You may know this from the health sector – more and more people are counting their daily steps or documenting their sporting activities. We observe whether we already exhibit the desired behavior and, if so, to what extent.

Self-evaluation

In the self-evaluation phase, we compare our behavior with our goals. Have we achieved our goals? What have we already achieved? What can we work on in the future? You can best imagine this as a target-performance comparison.

Self-reward

In the self-reward phase, we steer our own behavior. If there is a mismatch between our behavior and our goals, we create incentives and motivate ourselves.

If the exhibited behavior and our goals match, we should reward ourselves. The rewards can be tangible. It can be as small as a nice walk or a delicious dinner after a hard but successful day at work. But a positive sense of achievement when reaching a goal can also be the reward, for example, satisfaction over what we have accomplished can feel great. Many people automatically reward themselves in this way.



Self-regulation – a new term?

Over the past few weeks, at the end of each module, you have resolved to integrate daily exercises into your everyday life, for example, to set clearer boundaries between your work and private life, or to mentally detach from work. To do this, you have set specific goals (*SMART goals*), imagined what positive outcomes will happen if you achieve your goal, and thought about how you will deal with potential obstacles (*WOOP strategy*).

These strategies are used for self-regulation. They can also be used excellently in the work context and help you to organize yourself better.

We will now show you how to apply the strategies you know to improve your work organization. In addition, you'll also learn a few new strategies that have proven useful in achieving your own goals.

These strategies are highly effective and will benefit you in many situations in the future, but require your full concentration, especially the first time. This module may be a little less fun than the previous modules. Nevertheless, these strategies have a great benefit for you – so stay tuned! You may want to start thinking about how you might reward yourself when you reach the end of this module.

In this module, you will learn how to increase satisfaction with your own work performance. After the last modules were about separating yourself from work in your private life, the focus now is on how to separate yourself from distractions, for example, from your private life, during work and thus concentrate better on your work.

As in all previous modules, make this training yours by engaging with it and seeing what you can take away from it.



Achieve my work-related goals

As you learned in the video, self-regulation occurs in four phases. In the following, you will learn strategies for each of the four phases in order to achieve your goals in the best possible way. However, we don't just want to tell you theoretically what the different strategies look like. You can apply the strategies directly.



Phase 1: Set specific goals

The first phase is about setting the goals you want to achieve. This involves three components:



Formulating a concrete and specific goal (*SMART goal*)



Envisioning the success it will bring and planning how to overcome obstacles (*WOOP strategy*)



Reminding yourself of your goals

The first thing to do now is to think about what you want to change in your daily work organization.

Most people already know what bothers them and what they would like to change about their daily work routine. This could be, for example:

- No dispersal during the processing of tasks
- Setting daily goals
- Structuring and prioritization (ordering by importance) of tasks
- Using concentrated phases for difficult tasks
- No longer postponing unpleasant tasks
- Fewer interruptions at work
- Not reading emails ad hoc, but at set times
- Set availability times
- Not being distracted by household chores when working from home

If you feel you can organize your work more effectively, it helps to use SOC strategies. SOC stands for selection, optimization, and compensation.

Selection – choose what is important

This includes strategies to help select, structure, and prioritize goals.

Set goals and formulate them specifically

In the first step, it is important to set specific goals. What tasks need to be done and which do you want to complete today? You have already learned that it is good to formulate these goals as specifically as possible, and you know the SMART formula that does this well.

Set daily goals

Starting the day with a short plan can prevent you from getting bogged down because of a full email inbox and interruptions. Also, in case long-term goals come to mind that will take several days to achieve: break those big tasks into smaller subtasks and then set interim goals for each day.

Prioritize goals

After that, you should focus on the most important goals. It's best to think about this first: which tasks are the most important and urgent? You should work on these tasks first.

You can cross off tasks that are neither important nor urgent – have the courage to make a not-to-do list. Or consider whether someone else could take on this task (see “Delegate tasks”).

Important tasks without a fixed deadline often get lost in everyday life. It is best to set deadlines for yourself, if necessary for subtasks, and work on these tasks regularly.

Focus on the most important goals

Start by working on the most important tasks. Only then turn to other activities. It is best not to work on several tasks at the same time and avoid interruptions. Complete routine tasks at the end.

Focusing on important goals also involves not pursuing certain goals, if necessary in consultation with supervisors.



Do you perhaps already use these strategies? When do you find them helpful?

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

Optimization – strengthen what is already there

This includes strategies to help you achieve your goals in the best possible way, making the most of your investment of time and energy.

Review and adjust goals

It may be necessary to adjust your goals. In doing so, you can consider which tasks are really important. Do all tasks need to be completed the same day? Can you set new, more realistic goals?

Allow for buffers and plan realistically

Many people tend to take on too much when planning. Therefore, plan with buffers. Also keep in mind that your attention wanes after a certain amount of work time and you need sufficient breaks. Realistic planning requires practice – only gradually will you find out how long you realistically need for some tasks.

Achieve more with less effort

Perhaps you have also heard of the Pareto principle. In terms of time management, usually 80% of the results are achieved in 20% of the time spent. To achieve the remaining 20%, about 80% of the time is invested. Of course, this rule cannot be applied to all tasks, as some need to be carried out meticulously. However, some tasks allow you to forgo perfection (e.g. animations and formatting subtleties in a presentation). Then the remaining time can be better used to complete another task.

Avoid interruptions

Often people report many interruptions at work. The problem with interruptions is that you always have to get back to the task you were doing when you were interrupted. This results in enormous loss of time. We are often distracted by certain circumstances in our environment; examples of this are phone calls or incoming emails.

Consider for a moment whether you can control or block out these distractions. You can make a resolution:

- Not to check your emails at certain times and to turn off notifications for new emails
- To put your smartphone aside
- To redirect your phone
- To close all other tabs in the internet browser
- To close the office door or retreat to a quiet room
- To tell others that you do not want to be disturbed for the next half hour

Bundle task types

Once a task is started, it allows you to work through it faster than jumping back and forth between tasks. Example: if you are reading emails, read all that are relevant. One of the main advantages of emails is that, unlike calls, you don't have to deal with them immediately – take advantage of this to avoid interruptions.

Create order

Get into the habit of regularly cleaning up your workspace as well as the folder structure on your drive, preferably at the end of every day. This will save you time in finding certain documents and notes again – and you can directly introduce the few minutes of tidying up as a ritual at the end of your working day (as discussed in [Module 2](#)).



Do you perhaps already use these strategies? When do you find them helpful?

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

Compensation – make up for what is initially missing

This includes strategies to help you deal with difficulties in achieving your own goals. You may encounter unforeseen problems in completing tasks or be unable to complete your daily plans because you have taken on too much. Then consider whether there are other ways of achieving your goals.

Request support from others

One possibility could be to ask others for advice and help. Think about how your friends, your family, or even your circle of colleagues could support you. For example, tell people close to you about your goals.

Ask them to follow up to see whether you are already closer to your goals (for example, via Messenger).

Or think about how colleagues or friends would act in a certain situation.

Delegate tasks

Perhaps tasks that do not correspond to your strengths can be transferred to others. Anything you don't do yourself saves time. This should be considered especially if the task is neither particularly important nor urgent. Of course, it should always be weighed up whether the instruction will take significantly longer than the completion, and therefore other tasks are better to hand over. It may also be worth training others in order to leave similar future tasks to them independently.



What are you already doing? How do you know this from your everyday life?

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.



I'm sure you're thinking time and again about how you want to organize your day-to-day work. Maybe it's something you've wanted to tackle for a long time. Or you have just realized that you want to apply a specific selection, optimization or compensation strategy.

Think about what you would like to change in your daily work organization and write it down.



Sofia

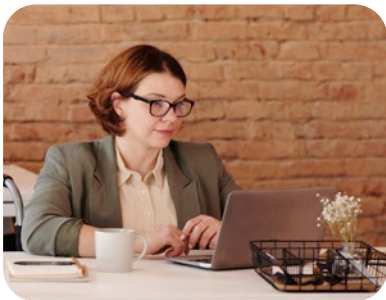
“I don’t want to have to work past 8 p.m. Actually, I’d like to have a real finishing time, but I rarely manage it. Most of the time, the problem is that I distract myself during activities at home, such as correcting papers, by repeatedly looking at my smartphone or doing a few activities on the side.

As a result, many things take longer than planned and I’m still sitting at my desk very late.”

Ahmet

“I often get interrupted at work and then it takes me a long time to get back to my actual task and continue working on it.

The most distracting thing is when my phone rings every few minutes or a new email pops up in my inbox and then a notification tone sounds and a notification window pops up.”



Hannah

“In everyday life, I often get bogged down. I simply take on too many tasks, and when a few unexpected requests and emails come in, I get stuck trying to work through everything.

I also often think of other tasks while I’m working, which I then want to quickly complete in between. I want to change that – I want to keep track of my tasks in everyday life and focus on what’s important.”

Alexander

“It often happens that longer-term tasks get lost in the everyday chaos and I then put these tasks off. Therefore, I want to work on important, long-term tasks every day.”



In the previous modules, you have already learned two strategies for setting specific goals (*SMART goals*) and paving the way to achieve them (*WOOP strategy*).



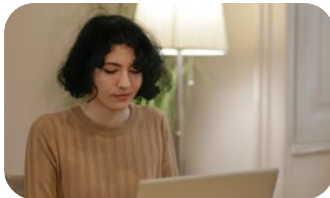
Now phrase the resolution you just formulated as a **SMART goal**.

Reminder:

SMART goals

- S** pecific (concrete and precisely formulated)
- M** easurable (verifiable)
- A** ttractive (positively formulated)
- R** ealistic (challenging, but not too high).
- T** ime-bound (fixed in time)

Adapted from Doran, 1981



Sofia

“As long as I’m working on a task, I only look at my smartphone during my predetermined breaks.”

Ahmet

“I read my emails every two hours.”



Hannah

“Every morning, right when I start work, I think about what I want to work on that day.”

Alexander

“I take an hour every day from 8 to 9 a.m. to devote to my important and long-term tasks.”





Envision success and plan to overcome obstacles

As you learned in the last modules, after setting a goal it is helpful to think about what might prevent you from implementing your goal and how you react. You learned about the *WOOP strategy* for this.

Reminder:

WOOP strategy

- W ish
- O utcome
- O bstacle
- P lan

Click here for the *WOOP strategy* explained in detail.

Adapted from Gollwitzer et al., 2018 | More info at woopmylife.org



Imagine your success.

What positive effects will occur if I achieve the goal I just wrote down?

It often happens that you have an alternative to a desired behavior and these options conflict with each other – for example, looking at the email inbox instead of focusing on a task. Controlling your own behavior in such a situation is called self-control.

There are several ways of dealing with such situations.

Before you are even tempted ...

- **Await temptations**

List situations and times when and where you expect temptations (do this with the help of the [WOOP strategy](#)).

- **Plan how to overcome obstacles**

Plan how to deal with an obstacle or temptations and write yourself a reminder list to do so (do this with the help of the [WOOP strategy](#)).

- **Formulate dealing with an obstacle as a goal**

Formulate dealing with an obstacle as a goal (e.g. coping with stress, smartphone distraction).

- **Expect errors**

Expect mistakes – learn from them and move on.

- **Avoid temptations**

Avoid situations where temptations await you.

- **Reduce temptations**

Reduce the strength of temptations in certain situations.

- **Choose a conducive environment**

Choose an environment that is conducive to your goal.

- **Invest a lot in the beginning**

For example, do all the exercises, or make a promise to another person. This way it will be easier for you not to give in on achieving your goal.

- **Get others on board**

Ask others to remind you of what you are doing.

- **Keep “escape routes” open**

Allow yourself “escape routes” – consider situations in which you deliberately do not want to change your behavior.

If you are already in a tempting situation ...

- **Distract yourself**

Distract yourself.

- **Break event chains**

Interrupt the chain of events early.

- **Remember your goal**

Remind yourself of your goal – it was your own decision to set it.

- **Confront long-term consequences**

Call to mind the delayed and long-term but negative consequences of your behavior. Ask yourself whether momentary gratification is worth it.

Specific examples of how to deal with obstacles are described by the sample characters:



Sofia

“It’s tempting to take a look at my smartphone in between. The first step for me is to set a conscious way of dealing with it as a goal for my work organization (formulate dealing with an obstacle as a goal). I turn off the sound on my smartphone when I’m working so I don’t get distracted by incoming messages (reduce temptations).

I also put my smartphone out of sight so I don’t even see it and get tempted to pick it up before I take a break or finish my tasks (avoid temptations, choose conducive environment). In addition, I told my

boyfriend about my plan, and at my request, he now asks me every night how it went (get others on board). If things don’t go optimally and I look at my smartphone in the meantime, I’m not annoyed, but simply carry on (expect errors).”

Ahmet

“To avoid the temptation to read new emails, I turn off the notification tone and disable desktop notifications (reduce strength of temptations). If I catch myself opening the email inbox in between out of habit, I try to remind myself directly not to do so until I have completed a task (break event chains).

Since my colleague Sonja also feels strongly distracted by many emails, we have agreed to have a short phone call every Thursday to exchange ideas – this way we remind each other of our intention (get others on board). I also anticipate that there will be days when important decisions are communicated – on those days I deliberately don’t want to stick to my goal (keep escape routes open).”



Hannah

“Some days it may seem too much effort to set new daily goals. Then I remind myself what it is all about – that I’ve set myself the goal of getting less distracted (remember my own goal). And I call to mind how much it has burdened me not to have an overview of my tasks (confront long-term consequences). Then I realize that the ten minutes of planning are definitely worth it.”

Alexander

“It is likely that I will be distracted or interrupted during this time. To prevent this, I set up a “silent hour” when I won’t be disturbed. During this time, I forward or mute my phone, close my email inbox, and disable desktop notifications for incoming emails (avoid temptations, choose conducive environment). I also let my co-workers know that I am only available for emergencies during this hour (get others on board). In addition, acute tasks may be pending and I run the risk of falling into old patterns and postponing work on longer-term tasks. Then I weigh up whether I can spend an hour on my long-term project before turning to the day-to-day business. If the acute task is very important and very urgent, I postpone the work on my long-term project to another time slot and block it in my calendar (keep escape routes open). Then, if I don’t reach my goal on every day of the work week, I don’t get mad, I just try again the next week (expect errors).”



Think about how you will deal with obstacles.

As in past modules, you can now consider what obstacle is preventing you from organizing your work more effectively and how you can deal with it.

What might keep me from reaching my goal?

How can I overcome this obstacle?

What is my corresponding if-then plan? (If ..., then ...)



Remind yourself of your goals

At this stage, another useful strategy can be applied: reminding yourself of your own goals. A self-reminder creates awareness of your personal goal, makes it easier to keep your goal in sight, and prevents you from falling into old habits.

Therefore, it is useful to think of signals that will continuously remind you of your own goals. These cues can be very different in nature.

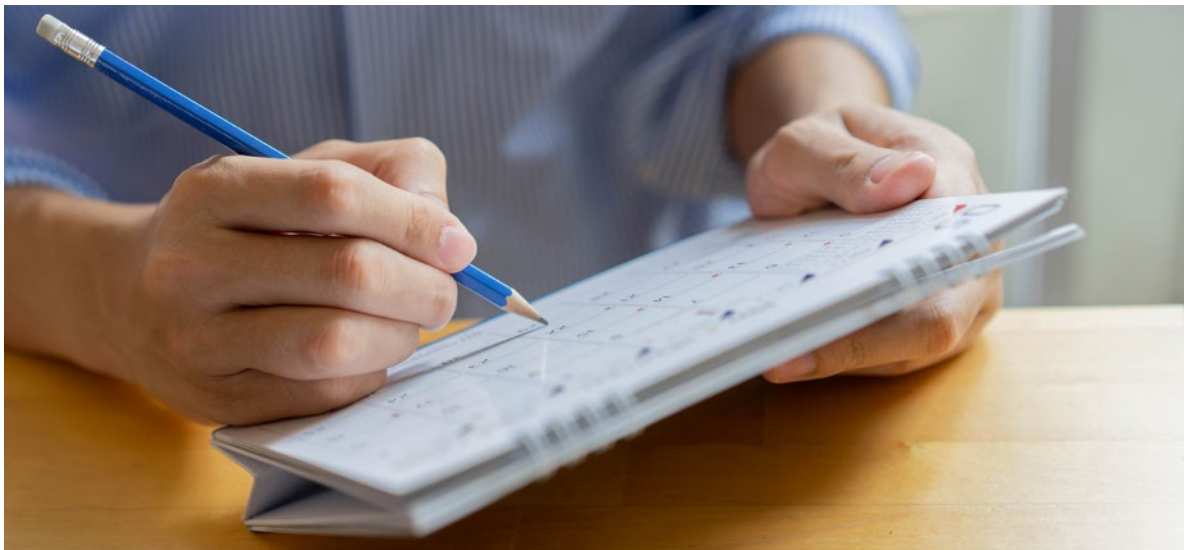


How can I remind myself of my goals?

How could you remind yourself of your goals? Write down any ideas you can think of to do this.

Then choose the strategy you want to use to remind yourself of the goal you just formulated.

To remind myself of my goal, I will ...



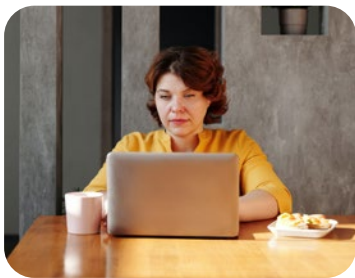


Sofia

“I like to work with small sticky notes. That’s why I designed a few of them with motivational quotes and pictures and put them on the wall next to my desk. When my gaze wanders to my smartphone, they remind me that I want to work in a concentrated way so that I can finish faster and really enjoy my free time afterwards.”

Ahmet

“The weekly phone call with my colleague Sonja is always in my calendar – it reminds me on the other days what my goal is.”



Hannah

“I set up a lock screen for myself that says “Keep calm and make a plan” against a background in my favorite color. That way, when I boot up my work laptop, I always remind myself to make a plan for the day first.”

Alexander

“I block the date for my “quiet hour” in my digital calendar and set an automatic reminder. This reminds me to actually take the time, and it reminds me to forward my phone and close my email program.”



So far, the focus has been on formulating a precise goal, making the motivation for it clear to yourself, and considering how to overcome obstacles to achieving the goal.

In today’s module, in addition to goal-setting (Phase 1), we will now add three new self-regulation strategies that we have not yet looked at in depth: self-observation, self-evaluation, and self-reinforcement. The basic principle is simple: check whether you have already successfully changed your behavior and set yourself personal incentives and rewards if this is not yet the case.



Phase 2: Observe yourself

In order to monitor your success, you first have to observe yourself. You may be familiar with this from sports under terms such as self-monitoring or self-tracking. More and more people are counting their daily steps or documenting their sporting activities in this way.

Observing and being aware of your own behavior is an often underestimated step in achieving your goals. But if you don't know exactly how you are behaving, how can you counteract it? That's why it's important to closely observe the behavior you want to change.

You probably already observe your behavior frequently – perhaps you are just partly unaware of it. Therefore, the point now is for you to make a conscious effort to observe your own behavior and consider how this could be done concretely in everyday life.

You can observe behavior in different ways. It can be your target behavior (that you want to achieve) or the disruptive behavior (that you want to avoid). You can describe it or just note how often or to what extent you display it (x times per day, x pages per day ...). However, it is important that you note it down immediately and as accurately as possible. It is helpful to do this by writing it down. This can be done, for example, in a kind of diary but also on simple tally sheets or apps. Think about a system that is as simple as possible and that you can easily integrate into your everyday life.



Phase 3: Evaluate yourself

To check whether you are actually moving in the desired direction, the behavior shown must be compared with your target behavior.

Here you will benefit from your previous observations. The easiest way to think of the self-evaluation phase is as a target-performance comparison.

Have you reached your goal? What have you already achieved? What can you still work on in the future?

When you observe and evaluate your target behavior, you can, for example, make a note in a weekly schedule of the days of the week on which you achieved your goal. You can also make notes about what you have already achieved and what you can still work on.



How can I check if I have reached my goals?

How can you observe and evaluate whether you have achieved a goal? Feel free to think about it for a moment and then jot down your ideas.

Then choose one of these strategies for how you will check to see if you have achieved the goal you just stated.

To check if I have reached my goal, I will ...



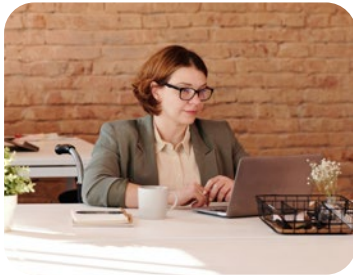
Sofia

“I created a simple template for myself in which I keep a tally for each day of how often I look at my smartphone during my scheduled work time. If I’ve managed to avoid picking up my smartphone, I draw a smiley face behind the day. To check how often I generally engage with my smartphone, I also use an app that shows me when and how much screen time I’ve spent with certain apps.”

Ahmet

“Before I shut down my laptop in the evening, I ask myself whether I’ve kept to my email blocks that day. If this is the case, I enter a check mark in my calendar. The check marks also allow me to check directly how many times I have achieved my intention in a week.”





Hannah

“I now write my tasks in a digital to-do list in table form. This helps me keep track of what I’m doing because I can directly see all the tasks and goals I still have ahead of me. This way, no chores get lost, even when there’s a lot going on. If I think of another task in between, I write it directly on the list but I don’t interrupt the work on the current one. In the column behind the tasks, I note behind each one how important and how urgent it is. Then I can sort the tasks so that the most important and urgent appear at the top. In addition, the list always lets me see if

I’m reaching my goals. As soon as I have completed a task, I mark in a column in my list that it is done. I can check off the completed tasks and thus check how much I have already done.

To check my primary goal – daily planning at the start of work – I write this down as a to-do in my list. This way, I can directly check and evaluate whether I have implemented my plan.”

Alexander

“I create a table for myself in which I check how often I have taken my “quiet hour”. I create a row for each day on which I have resolved to do this. In the column next to it, I enter “Yes” if I did an hour of focused work. If I spent less than an hour on it or got distracted, I enter “No.” I always fill in the list directly after my “silent hour”. Through this observation, I can also directly evaluate how often I have managed to take my “quiet hour” in the overview.”



Phase 4: Reward yourself

You can now see exactly whether you have reached your goal. Provided you have achieved it, you should reward yourself. In psychology, we call rewarding behavior positive self-reward.

Positive reinforcement means that a certain desired behavior is followed by a pleasant consequence.

Originally, this principle comes from learning theory and states that the probability of occurrence of a certain behavior is changed by the subsequent consequences.

The consequences of a behavior can therefore “reinforce” it. Behavior that results in positive consequences, in other words, rewards, is exhibited more often.

This method is suitable for acquiring certain new habits (e.g. daily use of a switch-off exercise at the end of work) or for motivating yourself to achieve work-related goals.

It is important to choose a suitable reinforcer to reward yourself for achieving your self-chosen goal. In addition, you should remind yourself every now and then how you reward yourself – this has a motivating effect on many people.

Positive emotions

If our behavior and our goals coincide, this has positive consequences. These can be positive emotions, for example, such as satisfaction or pride, which we feel when we achieve a goal.

However, a positive reaction can also result simply from the fact that the goal achieved has positive consequences in itself. For example, if the goal was to specifically relax more at the end of the workday, and this is achieved, then this alone will increase well-being.

Many people reward themselves automatically in this way. This type of positive reinforcement is best integrated into everyday life.

Tangible and intangible rewards

However, they can also be concrete rewards, such as a nice movie at the end of an exhausting but successful day at work. Rewards are things that make you feel good and that you enjoy. Praise from others or self-praise is also a reward.

Natural reward

Even tasks that you enjoy can be a reward. Therefore, complete tasks that you like doing only after you have completed a less enjoyable job.

If possible, you should redeem your reward immediately after your success – then rewards have a particularly strong impact. Rewards can also be small things, such as a cup of coffee or a short walk.



How can I reward myself? How might you reward yourself for achieving your work-related goals? Gather all the ideas you can think of.

Choose how you will reward yourself when you reach the goal you just set. You can also reward yourself differently on different days.

I will reward myself once I reach my goal by ...

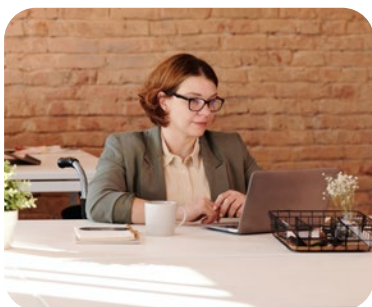


Sofia

“I downloaded an app where a tree grows when I’m not using my smartphone. Seeing the tree grow makes me happy every time and motivates me to pick up my smartphone as little as possible. After a week of working without the distraction of my smartphone, I treat myself to a visit to the spa on the weekend and can consciously enjoy my free time because I get my tasks done faster.”

Ahmet

“When I’ve managed to check my email inbox only every two hours, I’m much more productive and that makes me feel good. When I’ve managed that for a month, I’ll buy a ticket to a soccer league match with my friends when my favorite club is playing.”



Hannah

“If I have managed to get less bogged down in my tasks, this already gives me a very good feeling. In addition, I have set the field to turn green automatically when I check off a task in my to-do list. Seeing more and more boxes turn green motivates me. Another benefit of my to-do list: my successes remain visible. It’s nice to look at the things I’ve already accomplished, and not just see what’s still ahead. As a reward for a major task that I’ve completed after a few hours, I get some exercise in the fresh air.”

Alexander

“When I spend an hour each day focused on my important, longer-term tasks, I no longer feel uncomfortable putting things off – that alone triggers a good feeling in me. At the end of my “quiet hour,” I always reward myself by making a cup of coffee, which I then drink consciously. If I’ve managed to keep up the “quiet hours” for a week, reward myself with a delicious piece of cake.”



You have now learned about the four phases of self-regulation and have thought of strategies for each, which you can apply right away next week.

Finally, imagine again how you will implement all the things you have just resolved to do in your everyday life. Think about your goal, its positive consequences, and how you will overcome possible obstacles by remembering your if-then plan. Also, make yourself aware again of how you plan to monitor and remind yourself of your goal. Further, think about the evaluation you would like to achieve and the reward if you are successful.



The daily exercise for the upcoming week

Apply the self-regulation strategies daily to achieve your goal to change your work organization.

Observe your behavior, evaluate whether you have already achieved your goal, and reward yourself if you have. You may find this easier if you have previously done the three-minute breathing exercise.

In the long term, you can of course use the phases for other aspects of your work organization but in the next working week you should first focus on the goal you have just written down.

You may not succeed in reaching your goal every day. Think about what the reason was and simply try again the next day.

Tip

If you want, you can come up with a ritual for starting work. It could look like this, for example: while my laptop is booting, I close my eyes and do my breathing exercise. This way, I focus on the here and now and get in the mood for my day. Then I think about what goal I want to achieve today and go through the four phases of self-regulation. Then I open my eyes and start working.

Congratulations!

With the completion of the fourth module, the fourth branch of your FlexiTree has blossomed.



Congratulations!

You have successfully completed the fourth module of your FlexAbility training.

We wish you success in implementing the self-management strategies in your daily life. We are excited about the changes you will experience next week.



Review

Let's take a look back at today's module. Today you have:

- Expanded your competence of self-regulation and can thus better self-organize and work in a more focused way
- Learned strategies to formulate and achieve your goals in everyday work life



Outlook

The next module will focus on how to integrate breaks and recovery times into your daily routine.

Summary

The objectives of this module at a glance

In today's module, you expanded your self-regulation skills and learned strategies for achieving goals.

Self-regulation

Self-regulation describes the ability to regulate your own thoughts, feelings and actions. Self-regulation strategies can be used excellently in the work context and help you to organize yourself better.



Phase 1: Set specific goals



The first phase is about defining the goals you want to achieve. To do this, you have learned about strategies for selection, optimization, and compensation, and have selected strategies that are suitable for you in each case. You have also used the *SMART method* to formulate a desire for change in your work organization and have thought about how to deal with possible obstacles and how to remember your goals.



Phase 2: Observe yourself

In order to monitor your success, you must first observe yourself. To do this, you can observe either your target behavior or the disruptive behavior and ideally record the results by writing them down.



Phase 3: Evaluate yourself

In order to check whether you are actually moving in the desired direction, you have to compare the behavior shown with your target behavior. To do this, you have developed strategies for checking whether you have reached your goal.



Phase 4: Reward yourself

If you have achieved your goal, you should reward yourself. Positive reinforcement means that a certain desired behavior is followed by a pleasant consequence. It is important to choose an appropriate reinforcer to reward yourself for achieving your self-chosen goal. Also, remind yourself every now and then how you reward yourself – this has a motivating effect on many people. Rewards can be positive emotions, tangible and intangible rewards, or natural rewards. If possible, you should redeem your reward immediately after your success – this way the rewards have a particularly strong impact. Rewards can also be small things, like a cup of coffee or a short walk. Lastly, therefore, you thought about concrete rewards for your goal achievement.

The daily exercise for the coming week

Apply the self-regulation strategies daily to achieve your goal in order to change your work organization.

Observe your behavior, evaluate whether you have already achieved your goal, and reward yourself if you have. You may find this easier if you have previously done the three-minute breathing exercise.

Module 5

Looking after myself – everyday rest and recharge



The objectives of this module at a glance

After processing this module:

- You will know why recovery periods are important
- You will have found out what recovery means to you
- You will know possibilities for recovery in your free time and during breaks in your everyday life



A warm welcome to you!

Welcome! Thank you for joining us again today.

Last week you learned how to manage yourself to achieve your goals at work. However, you may sometimes find that you are so focused on a task that you forget to take a break. Or you may find yourself looking at your smartphone or tablet to check your email when you get up in the morning or before you go to bed at night.

This makes it harder to recharge your inner battery regularly and properly. If you don't recharge enough, it can lead to fatigue, irritability, and lack of concentration. In the long run, this can negatively affect your job satisfaction, work engagement, and health. It is therefore important to get enough rest. That is why today we are going to talk about recovery. We will talk about the importance of recovery for well-being, health, and performance, and what that can mean for you. Then we will look at how you can recover in your free time and during breaks from work. Consider the time you spend working through this module as time for yourself.

As we did last week, we invite you to do your three-minute breathing exercise now to start this module calm and focused.

We wish you much fun and success with your fifth module.

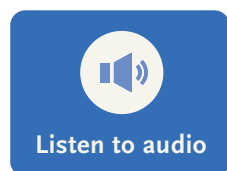
The three-minute breathing exercise

You can start your three-minute breathing exercise here now.



1. Assume an upright, comfortable posture. Ask yourself, "What is my experience in this moment... thoughts... feelings... bodily sensations?" Acknowledge your experience, even if it is unwanted.
2. Focus your attention on your breath, each time you inhale and exhale. If your mind wanders, bring it back.
3. Expand your awareness to your entire body.
4. Finish the exercise and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.

Adapted from Michel et al., 2014; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.

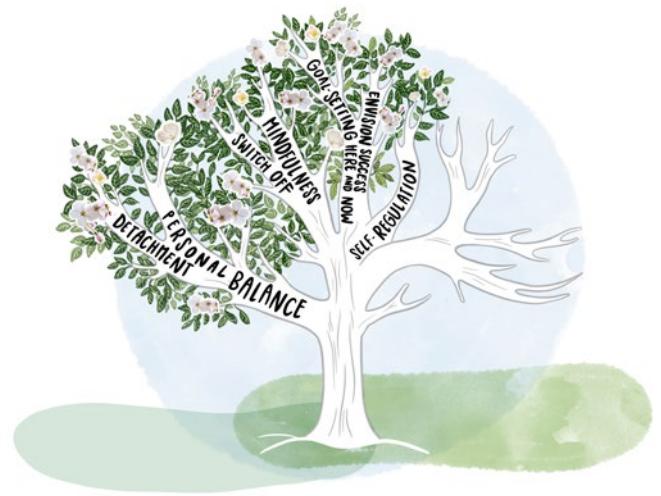




Review

Let's look back at the last module. In the previous module you:

- Expanded your competence of self-regulation and can thus better self-organize and work in a more focused way
- Learned strategies to formulate and achieve your goals in everyday work life



Your favorites

To begin, we would ask you to reflect on how the implementation of self-regulation strategies has worked in your daily life.

Reminder – the self-regulation strategies from the last module were:

- Targeting strategies
- Strategies for self-observation and evaluation
- Self-reward strategies

Which strategy helped you the most? Which strategies did you find difficult? Did you achieve your goal for changing your work organization?

Consider changing this aspect or other aspects of your work organization.

Which strategies and exercises are your favorites?

You can mark the corresponding exercises in your [exercise overview](#).

We encourage you to continue consciously using the strategies and exercises that have been working well so far – your strategies and exercises for setting boundaries, for switching off as well as for self-organization. In this way, you will quickly notice how useful these strategies are in your everyday life.

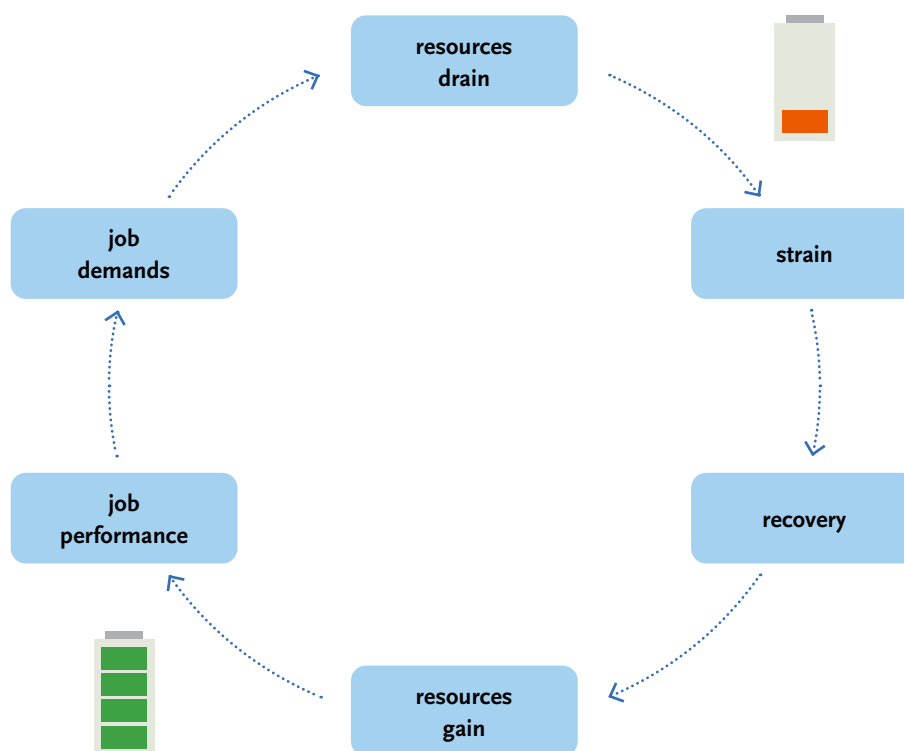
The importance of recovery

Why is rest important?

At work, we are constantly exposed to a wide variety of demands and stresses. These include time pressure, a high intensity of work, and the expectations of others. This costs us energy – physically, but also mentally. For example, our attention wanes over the course of the day.

Recovery phases restore the energy used up by your work. To do this, it is necessary to avoid working and thinking about work as much as possible during leisure time. Once our inner battery is recharged by a recovery phase, we feel good and are able to perform again.

It is important to maintain this balance of tension and relaxation. Otherwise, our behavior, feelings, and mood are likely to be negatively affected. In the short term, we initially become tired, irritable, and unfocused. In the long term, this can lead to persistent states of exhaustion, job dissatisfaction, and effects on health. In addition, our performance also suffers if we do not recover sufficiently.



Studies show that people working at home work more than people who do not work from home. According to a representative survey by the German Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, people working at home work longer hours on average, work overtime more often and report shorter rest periods more often than people who do not work from home (BAuA, 2020). Many people feel they have to prove they are working enough when working from home. This can lead to self-exploitation, for example, when they continue to work on their tasks even if it takes longer. Recovery ultimately suffers as a result.



When should I recover?

Perhaps the first thing you think of when you think of rest and regeneration is the weekend or your next vacation. In fact, vacations improve well-being and general satisfaction. Physical complaints also often decrease.

However, these vacation effects often do not last long. Perhaps you have experienced it yourself: you come back from vacation totally refreshed and, after just one or two weeks, your trip seems like an eternity ago.

A rule of thumb from occupational science research is that recovery should follow as soon as possible after the stress. The longer and more intense the workload, the longer the periods need to be to switch off from work.

So don't postpone your recovery until your next vacation. Your batteries should be recharged again and again in everyday life. You can achieve this by both recovering after work and taking breaks during work. This requires you to organize your working hours in a way that benefits your health.

Three things are particularly important for adequate recovery:

- Not working too many hours
- Enough time between the end of work on one day and the beginning of work on the next day
- Breaks during work



Effects of unrestricted working hours

We know from occupational science research that good working time management plays an important role in employee satisfaction, work-life balance, and health. When we work determines when we have time for other parts of our lives, such as family, friends, and hobbies, but also when and how long we can rest and sleep.

If you work overtime and extend your working hours, you have less time for private activities and recovery. At the same time, working longer hours means being exposed to the demands of the job for longer, meaning you actually need more time to recover than you would after a shorter workday.

Over the course of several long workdays, this can lead to a recovery deficit. As a result, attention and concentration can suffer, and the risk of errors and accidents at work or while commuting increases.

In the long term, insufficient rest can have a negative impact on health. Research shows that long working hours can lead to health complaints such as headaches, exhaustion, and sleep disorders, as well as increased stress and a higher risk of burnout and depression.

Yet it is not only long working hours that can lead to insufficient recovery between workdays. Many people find it difficult to fully and immediately mentally detach from their work at the end of the workday. If you are interrupted by work during your rest period – the free time between two workdays – for example, by emails or phone calls, or because you want to complete a few tasks in the evening, you will find yourself thinking about work again. And not everyone finds it easy to switch off again quickly and get a good night's sleep.

Working in the evenings and on weekends may not only lead to insufficient recovery between two workdays or two work weeks. These are also the times when most of our social life takes place. If you often work at these times, people in your personal life may not understand, which, in turn, may have a negative impact on the quality of your relationships – with your partner, with your children, but also with friends and acquaintances.

Extended working hours – through overtime, interruptions of leisure time, working in the evenings or on weekends – can therefore have negative social and health consequences. From an occupational science perspective, I recommend limiting working hours as much as possible in order to improve your satisfaction, work-life balance, and health.

More information: [Beermann et al., 2019](#)

In Germany, the Working Hours Act provides the legal framework for organizing employees' working hours. These core rules serve to preserve health. Take a closer look at these legal regulations, even if you are self-employed.

Statutory working and rest times (as of May 2023)

Working time

In principle, the working time on a working day may not exceed 8 hours. The **work may be extended up to 10 hours if there is compensation within 6 months**. The maximum working time of 48 hours per week may not be exceeded.

Breaks

If the working time exceeds 6 hours, a break of at least 30 minutes is mandatory; if the working time exceeds 9 hours, a break of 45 minutes is mandatory.

Resting time

After the end of the daily working time, an uninterrupted rest period of at least 11 hours applies in general, or of 10 hours in the case of hospitals, restaurants, and hotels, for example, **if there is compensation within 1 month**.

Tip: Keep an eye on your working hours!

Even without an electronic time recording system, if you are self-employed, for example, make a note of how long you work, whether you work in the office, at home, on the road or from another location. Keep track of how much you work, and make sure there is enough time between the end and the start of work.

How recovery after work can succeed

So recovery is important. That's why the following is about how you can best recover. You will probably already know a lot of this or do it intuitively. However, we want to invite you to become even more aware of your own leisure and recovery behavior. Then, at the end of the module, you can consider what you already know and do.

A common perception is that you can only recover if your energy reserves remain untouched. Many people think, "The best way for me to recover is to lie on the couch." But is that true? Work psychology research has shown that even active and strenuous activities can be restorative – as long as you don't occupy yourself with unpleasant topics and obligations during the time.

People are different, and that also applies to their recovery. Some people recover best when they engage in sports activities, others need to meet other people in order to recover, and still others need rest and time for themselves in order to recover.

It is not the activity itself that makes you feel refreshed, but how you personally feel during it.

Research has shown four basic experiences to be important to successful recovery:

Psychological detachment

You can switch off, that is, mentally detach yourself from work. You gain distance from your work.

You have already dealt with this in [Module 3](#). You have collected activities where you can personally switch off and have learned mindfulness exercises to detach yourself from thoughts of work.



Relaxation

You have a feeling of physical and mental relaxation. You become calmer and more relaxed. Biologically, it's about activating the parasympathetic nervous system – the part of the autonomic nervous system that ensures that we recover and regenerate during periods of rest.

You can achieve this by engaging in activities that require little effort and challenge, and bring about a sense of calm and relaxation. This can be, for example, reading, meditating, walking, listening to music, relaxation exercises, or watching TV.



Mastery

You take on a challenge that has nothing to do with your work. This may seem strange at first because you have to invest energy. However, at the same time, you are building up new energy reserves – for example, by learning new skills and abilities.

You can do this by engaging in activities that are challenging and provide learning opportunities – for example, playing sports, attending a language class, volunteering, or taking up a new hobby.



Control

You are free to decide on your recovery times and recreational activities within the framework of your available time. Of course, the amount of free time you can organize also depends on your private commitments. However, it is not the amount of free time that matters but how you organize it.

Choose what activities you pursue in your time off from work and organize it according to your personal preferences – in other words, think about what you like doing and where you get the most rest.





My recreational activities

Sometimes it's not easy to figure out how you recover best.

Collect all the activities you do in your leisure time. You can use the list of leisure activities you made in *Module 3* for inspiration.

Idea generator for leisure activities

- Go for a walk
- Exercise
- Cooking
- Read a book
- Listen to music
- Meet friends
- Meditate
- Watch a movie
- Relaxation exercises
- Take a language course
- Voluntary work
- Sing in a choir
- Yoga
- Decorate the home
- Attend a concert
- Take a bath
- Club sport
- Sitting in the garden
- Jogging in the forest
- Chatting to family
- Massage
- Play an instrument
- Visit a museum
- Watch a show
- Baking
- Mindfulness breathing exercises from Module 3

Now it's a matter of assigning these activities to the various recovery experiences. You may want to assign one activity to several recovery experiences – feel free to do so.

My leisure activities to detach psychologically

What activities allow me to switch off? What activities enable me to step back from work-related tasks? What activities enable me to gain some distance mentally from work? In what activities am I completely absorbed?

In the third module, you already noted what activities are good for switching off. If you like, you can use this list as inspiration (navigate to the corresponding exercise [here](#)).

My leisure activities to relax

What activities allow me to relax, unwind, where do I have time for leisure?

My leisure activities to master challenges

What activities enable me to experience challenge or a sense of accomplishment? What activities allow me to learn something new?

The leisure activities I want to pursue

What activities do I choose in a self-determined way? What activities do I carry out in a self-determined way?

Based on Hahn et al., 2011

Now take another look at your ideas about recreational activities.

Think about what you personally would like to do more often. Perhaps you have also come up with a new idea that you would like to try out. Take your time.

Maybe it will help you to make appointments with yourself for this.

To do this, open your schedule now (or open your digital calendar) and think about when you can engage in recreational activities during the next work week. Write this down in your calendar in a different color than the usual dates or use your private calendar if you also have a work calendar.

Recover during work

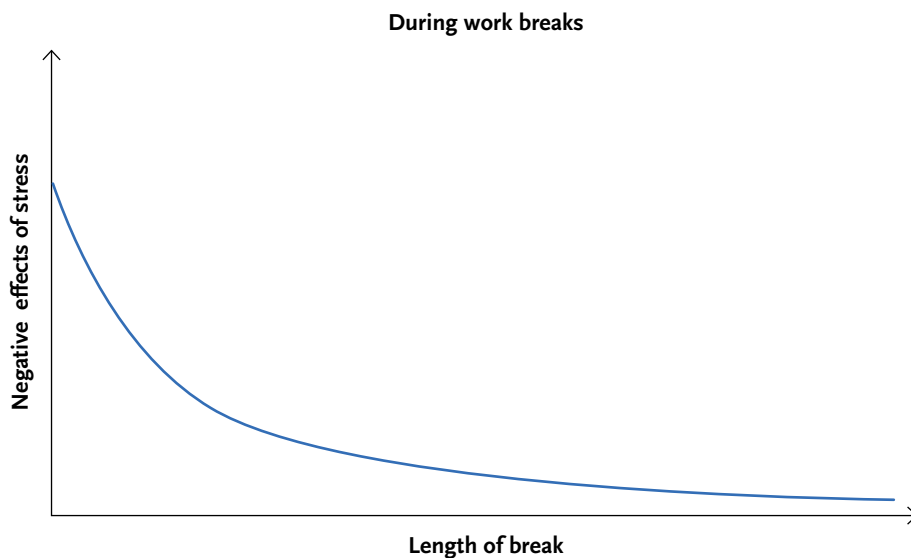
As already mentioned, it is important to recover during the working day by taking breaks. If you work independently of location and time, you are often responsible for planning and taking your own breaks. You may then sometimes wonder whether breaks are necessary at all and even contradict working effectively.

That's what many people seem to think. Every third German employee skips their lunch break, especially when time pressure is high. At the same time, almost 50% of employees in Germany frequently feel under time and performance pressure at work.

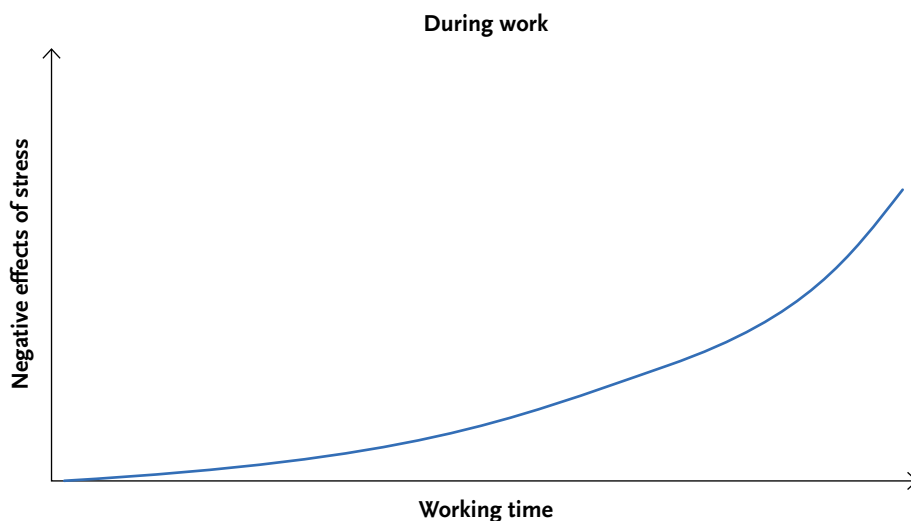
Why breaks are important

You feel the short-term stress effects of work demands even on one working day, leaving you tired, dull, or unfocused. These short-term effects can be counteracted with breaks.

The graph shows how the stress consequences increase over the course of the working time. First the curve grows slowly, then very quickly. It is therefore important to schedule a recovery phase before the curve rises steeply.



Even a short break has a highly positive effect (very steep drop of the curve within the first few minutes).



Breaks therefore also have a preventive function. If you take breaks in a timely manner, you can prevent critical fatigue states and ensure more consistent performance. People who regularly take short breaks of less than 10 minutes work more dedicatedly and efficiently than people who work through without a break (*Wendsche et al., 2016*). Regular breaks also make you feel more satisfied and are healthier in the long term.

One recommendation in work psychology is therefore: don't only take a break when you feel exhausted. Instead, take breaks before you can no longer concentrate so that you can continue to work productively afterwards.

The time you invest in breaks is not wasted.

Breaks can vary

The lunch break

There are longer breaks, for most people this is the lunch break. That's why occupational psychology recommends taking a lunch break and, if possible, leaving the workplace during that time.

The micro-break

Micro-breaks are shorter than 10 minutes. Although they are so short, they are enormously important. There are many ways of counteracting the demands of work for a brief moment. How often you should incorporate these breaks into your daily routine depends on your work demands.

Micro-break idea generator

- Look out the window
- Do stretching exercises
- Leave your desk
- Make a coffee while consciously noticing every hand movement
- Three-minute breathing exercise
- Take a short walk
- 54321 exercise
- Talk to other people



My break activities

In this exercise, you will find out which break arrangement is restful for you.

Please lean back and close your eyes.

Please try to focus on your breath and allow yourself to be completely present in this moment.

Breathe calmly in and out.

You probably take more breaks on some days and fewer on others. Think back to a day when you did a really good job of getting some rest during the workday.

How did you notice that you were rested? For example, some people report that when they are rested, they feel a sense of well-being, breathe more calmly, or notice a slower heart rate. Have you noticed changes in your body?

Sometimes you know exactly what you have done to achieve this feeling of recovery, and sometimes you only become aware of it as you go along. After all, you can take your breaks in very different ways – some people lean back and close their eyes, others move their bodies, still others talk to their colleagues. Think back to one of your restful breaks and ask yourself:

- How have you taken breaks in the past? What exactly did you do?
- How did you spend breaks that left you feeling fresher and more active?

Now imagine that you are taking such a break during a normal working day. You do all the things that are good for you. You might even be able to bring back that feeling of recovery, or an inkling of that feeling.

Notice when you have enjoyable and restful feelings, when pleasant bodily sensations occur, as these are signs that you are recovering. Sometimes even little things like consciously relaxing your shoulders, leaning back, or simply yawning can help you get new energy.

Enjoy the sensation for a moment longer and then slowly find your way back.



Listen to audio



Make a note of how you have made your breaks relaxing so far. You are also welcome to add ideas on how you would like to organize your breaks in the future.

Break activities that are good for me:



Sofia

“So far, I have often spent the breaks with other teachers in the teachers’ lounge, looking after students or preparing lessons. Yet I actually need more moments of quiet in my everyday life as well.

Break activities that are good for me:

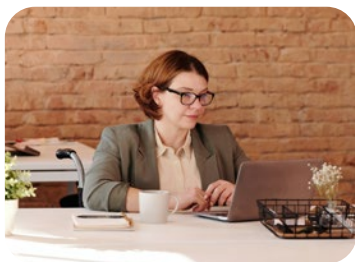
- Find a quiet place and do the three-minute breathing exercise with eyes closed
- Do the 54321 exercise for myself in the schoolyard”

Ahmet

“I realized that I spend a lot of time in front of screens. In the process, I don’t actually rest, and I’d like to change that now.

Break activities that are good for me:

- Look out of the window at a point in the distance
- Have a short chat with colleagues in the office
- Call my colleague who is working at home when I have a question anyway”



Hannah

“I realized that I like to be out in the fresh air.

Break activities that are good for me:

- Listen to the sounds on the balcony for a few seconds
- Move a few minutes in the fresh air”

Alexander

“I’ve realized that I want to move more during my breaks because I sit a lot. In addition, I can excellently catch a breath during trivial activities.

Break activities that are good for me:

- Get up and do a few stretching exercises
- Leave the study briefly
- Unload the dishwasher”



Consider your break activities again. You already know what breaks are good for you.

Next week, experiment with what makes you feel more refreshed during your breaks. You might want to repeat the break activities you just collected more often, or try a new idea. See how you feel about it. Then you can spend more breaks in the future the way that feels good to you.

You will now learn another exercise to make your breaks relaxing.

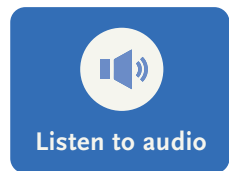


Savoring nature

We are often under stress in our professional lives. To leave everyday life behind for a moment, purposefully divert your concentration away from work activities during the exercise.

In this exercise, you will go to a place in nature in your imagination by listening to an audio file with nature sounds. While listening, you will be invited to imagine the natural environment and recharge your batteries there. You can try this right now by listening to the birdsong at the forest stream.

1. Please lean back and close your eyes.
2. Please try to focus on your breath and allow yourself to be completely present in this moment. Breathe calmly in and out.
3. First, imagine the environment you are listening to. What can you see, hear, feel, or smell? Where is your body located in the environment you are listening to?
4. Now try to imagine the situation very specifically. What can all your senses perceive?
 - What do you hear? What sounds?
 - What do you see? What colors and what things?
 - What do you smell or physically sense?
5. Now direct your attention to your body. How does it feel in this pleasant situation? Concentrate completely on your body and the perception of sounds.
Listen for approx. 3 minutes.
6. In your imagination, immerse yourself in the situation one more time. Imagine the environment in as much detail as possible and enjoy it.
Listen for approx. 2 minutes.
7. Now slowly return to the room. Bring your thoughts back to the here and now. Breathe deeply in and out. Move your fingers first, then your arms. Stretch and straighten and open your eyes. Do not immediately stand up, but sit for a moment until you have completely returned to the present.



Adapted from Steidle et al., 2017; Gierra & Klinkenberg, 2005.

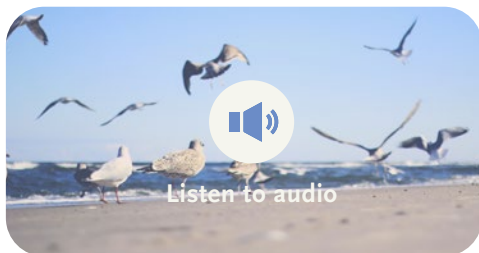
The daily exercise for the upcoming week

In the coming work week, make time for breaks every day and organize your lunch break or another break every day with the break exercise “Savoring nature”.

To do this, play the nature sound during your break. Of course, you can do the exercise more often, for example, in the evening at home or in the office after a stressful situation.

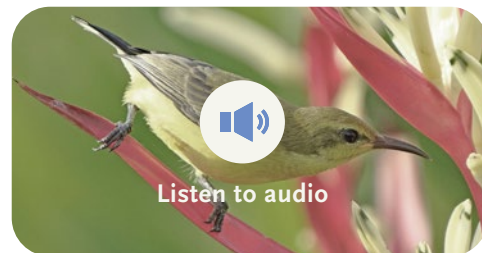
You can choose from five audio files with different situations and decide every day which soundscape you feel most comfortable in. You can listen to the nature sounds with or without instruction. You can do this exercise comfortably at your workspace or retreat to a quieter place or outdoors to listen to your nature sounds. You can close your eyes while doing this, keep them open and look at the image to the sound, or look at a quiet, natural environment, but one that does not offer any distractions.

Here you can listen to the audio files with the nature sound:



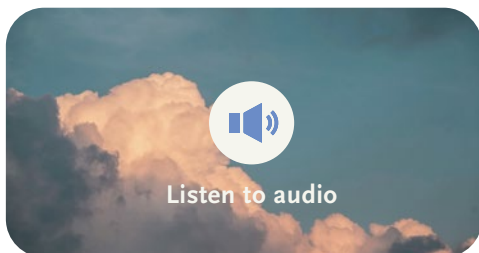
Seagulls by the sea

with instruction • without instruction



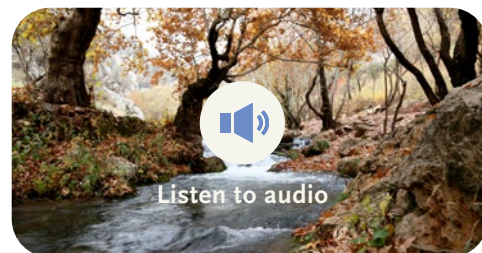
Birdsong

with instruction • without instruction



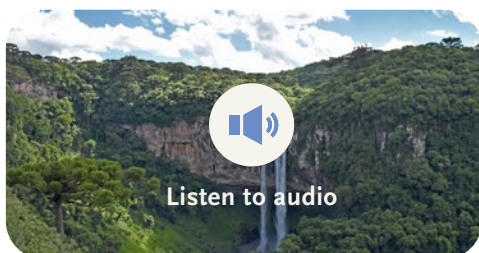
Summer thunderstorm

with instruction • without instruction



Birdsong at the forest stream

with instruction • without instruction



Rainforest

with instruction • without instruction



Application of the daily exercises in everyday life

Just like in the last weeks, you can now think about when exactly you want to do the nature experience exercise. In addition, you can think about what might prevent you from doing it and how you might react then, again. You already know the sequence of steps.

Schedule the time and place of breaks as it works well for you. Take breaks even if you don't feel exhausted. And take these breaks every day – not just on days when you work in a location- and time-flexible manner.



Phase 1: Set specific goals

Set a *SMART* goal

When in the following week do you plan to take a break each day to do the savoring nature exercise?

Reminder:

SMART goals

- S** pecific (concrete and precisely formulated)
- M** easurable (verifiable)
- A** ttractive (positively formulated)
- R** ealistic (challenging, but not too high).
- T** ime-bound (fixed in time)

Adapted from Doran, 1981

WOOP – present successes

What positive effects will occur if you manage to take daily breaks and do the savoring nature exercise?

Plan how to overcome obstacles

What might keep you from taking breaks and doing the savoring nature exercise?

How can you overcome this obstacle?

What is the corresponding if-then plan?



Reminder:

WOOP strategy

- W ish
- O utcome
- O bstacle
- P lan

Click here for the [WOOP strategy](#) explained in detail.

Adapted from Gollwitzer et al., 2018 | More info at woopmylife.org



Remember your goals

How will you remind yourself to take breaks and do the savoring nature exercise?

Phase 2 and 3: Monitor and evaluate yourself



How will you review that you have done this daily?

Phase 4: Reward yourself



How will you reward yourself for doing it every day?

Congratulations!

With the completion of the fifth module, the fifth branch of your FlexiTree has blossomed.



Congratulations!

You have successfully completed the fifth module of your FlexAbility training.

We wish you success in implementing the break exercise in your daily life. We are excited about the changes you will experience next week.



Review

Let's take a look back at today's module. Today you have:

- Learned why recovery periods are important
- Found out what recovery means to you
- Learned about possibilities for recovery in your free time and during breaks in your daily routine



Outlook

In the next module you will collect your sources of strength for organizing your work. In addition, we repeat all the training content and you will create an overview of your sources of strength.

Summary

The objectives of this module at a glance

In today's module, you learned why rest periods are important. You also found out what rest means to you, and learned about ways to organize rest in your leisure time and during breaks in your everyday life.

Why is rest important?

In recovery phases, the energy that has been drained by work is restored. When our inner battery is recharged by a recovery phase, we feel good and are able to perform again.

A rule of thumb from occupational science research is that recovery should follow stress promptly. The longer and more intense the workload, the longer the periods need to be to switch off from work.

Three things are especially important for adequate rest: not working too long, ensuring there is enough time between the end of work on one day and starting work the next, and breaks during work.

How I can succeed in recovery after work

Research has shown four basic experiences to be important to successful recovery:

Psychological detachment

You can switch off, that is, mentally distance yourself from work. You gain space from your work. You have already dealt with this in [Module 3](#) by collecting activities in which you can personally switch off and becoming acquainted with mindfulness exercises to detach yourself from thoughts of work.

Relaxation

You have a feeling of physical and mental relaxation. You become calmer and more relaxed. You can achieve this by engaging in activities that require little effort and challenge, and bring about a sense of calm and relaxation.

Mastery

You take on a challenge that has nothing to do with your work and thereby build up new reserves of energy – for example, by learning new skills and abilities.

Control

You decide your recovery times and recovery activities freely within the limits of your available time. You decide what you do, when, and how.

Recovering during work: why breaks are important

Breaks counteract short-term stress consequences of work demands (fatigue, lack of concentration). Even a short break has a highly positive effect. Timely breaks can also prevent critical fatigue and ensure more consistent performance.

You've collected restorative break activities. Next week, why not experiment with what makes you feel especially refreshed during your breaks?

Savoring nature

Today you have learned about the exercise “Savoring nature” to spend relaxing breaks. In order to better integrate it into your daily life, you have formulated *SMART goals*, as in the previous modules, imagined their positive consequences with the help of *WOOP*, and planned how you will overcome obstacles. You have also planned how you will observe, evaluate, and reward yourself for implementing the exercise.



The daily exercise for the upcoming week

In the coming work week, make time for breaks every day and organize your lunch break or another break every day with the break exercise “*Savoring Nature*”.

To do this, play the nature sound during your break. Of course, you can do the exercise more often, for example, in the evening at home or in the office after a stressful situation.

You can choose from five audio files with different situations and decide every day which soundscape you feel most comfortable in. You can listen to the nature sounds with or without instruction.

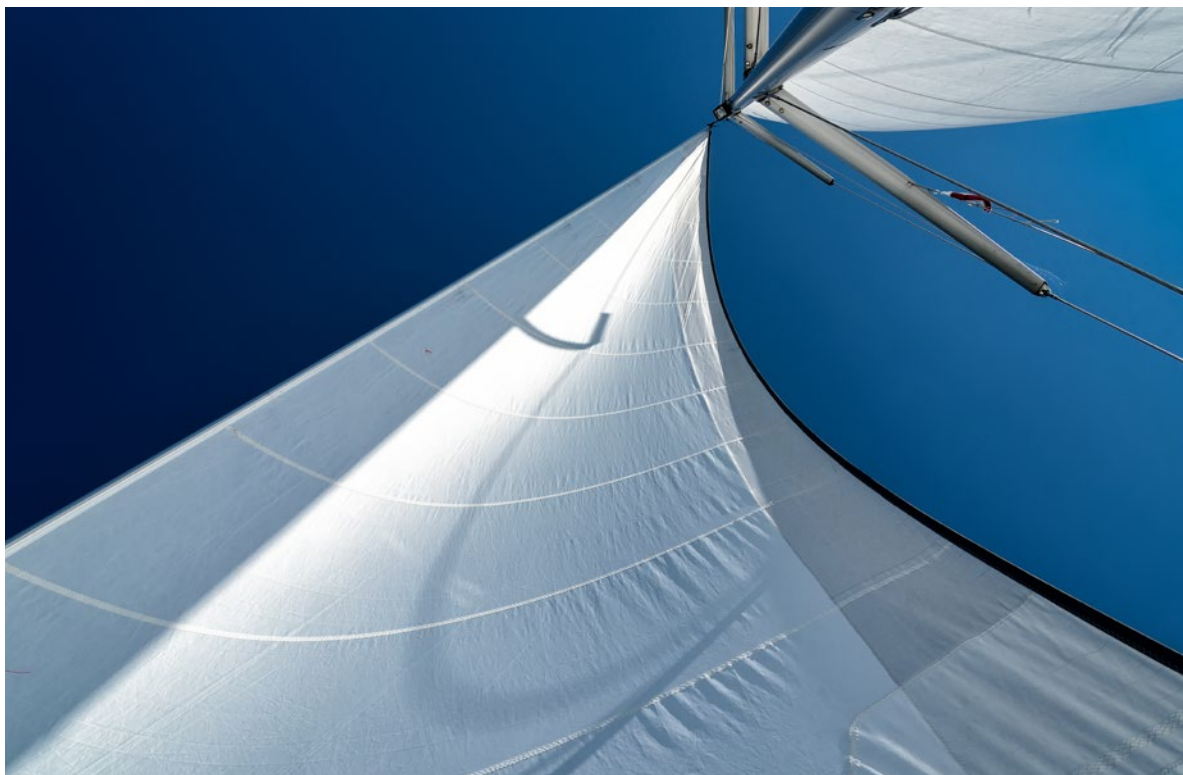
You can do this exercise in the comfort of your workspace or retreat to a quieter place to listen to your nature sounds or go outside in nature.

You can close your eyes while doing this, keep them open and look at the image to the sound, or look at a quiet, natural environment without distractions.

Module 6

My strategies, my sources of strength

A warm welcome to you!



The objectives of this module at a glance

After processing this module:

- You will have reviewed what you have learned in the FlexAbility training over the last few weeks
- You will know your sources of strength, which you can use to shape your location- and time-flexible work
- You will see at a glance which exercises of the FlexAbility training you liked best



Hello and welcome! Great to have you back!

Time has passed quickly. Today is the last time I'll be welcoming you to your FlexAbility training.

Over the last few weeks, we have dealt with many different topics, which we will look back on today. For example, how to set boundaries between work and home, how to mentally “switch off” from work, how to better manage yourself, how to organize your workday, and how to rest.

After this review, we turn to your sources of strength. In addition to the many strategies and exercises that you have mastered in this training, there are many other aspects of your life that give you strength. At the end of today's module, you will have an overview of your own resources, which you can use to better organize your flexible work in terms of time and location according to your own goals.

I would now like to invite you to do your three-minute breathing exercise in order to get away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life, to focus on the upcoming module, and then to start with today's training.

We wish you much fun and success with your sixth module.

The three-minute breathing exercise

You can start your three-minute breathing exercise here now.



1. Assume an upright, comfortable posture. Ask yourself, “What is my experience in this moment... thoughts... feelings... bodily sensations?” Acknowledge your experience, even if it is unwanted.
2. Focus your attention on your breath, each time you inhale and exhale. If your mind wanders, bring it back.
3. Expand your awareness to your entire body.
4. Finish the exercise and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.

Adapted from Michel et al., 201; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.



Listen to audio



Review

Let's look back at the last module. In the previous module you:

- Learned why recovery periods are important
- Found out what recovery means to you
- Learned about design options for recovery in your free time and micro-breaks in your daily life



Your favorites

At this point, we invite you to reflect on which recreational activities were particularly good for you and whether certain activities were easier for you to implement than others. How did integrating the savoring nature exercise into your everyday life work and what positive effects did you notice?

If there were difficulties with the implementation due to unforeseen obstacles, you can consider how to overcome similar situations in the future and make a new if-then plan for it.

Which strategies and exercises are your favorites?

Reminder – the exercises and strategies from the last module were:

- Recreational activities
- Restful breaks
- Break exercise “Savoring nature”

You can mark the corresponding exercises in your [exercise overview](#).

We encourage you to consciously apply the strategies for taking breaks even after you have completed the training. You can continue to use the “Savoring nature” exercise for this purpose. Of course, you can also organize your breaks differently. Furthermore, it is possible to also apply your strategies for disconnecting and shutting down, as well as for self-organization. Thus, all these strategies will gradually become a habit – you will benefit from them.

Review of the last modules

My strategies for dealing with location- and time-flexible work

In six modules, you have been dealing with how to organize your everyday life in such a way that you are healthy, satisfied, and can work effectively. You have learned some strategies for this in the last few weeks.

Time for a look back – we have once again summarized the contents of the modules for you. The individual exercises and strategies can also be found in detail in your exercise overview – clicking on the respective exercise or strategy will take you there.



Module 1: Working flexibly – being happy and healthy

In this module, you first learned about the structure and objectives of the training.

You formulated your resolutions for regular participation in the training, learning the first two strategies: first, formulate **SMART goals**; second, envision success and plan for dealing with obstacles (also called **WOOP strategy**).

You focused on your **own strategies** that you have already successfully applied to manage your flexible work designs and work-life balance.



Last, you learned about the **54321 exercise**, an exercise to deal with circling thoughts.

At that time, you formulated a wish for change by thinking about what you would like to achieve by participating in the training.



Take a moment to reflect: Where are you today? Have you come closer to your desire for change?

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

Module 2: Finding my personal balance

In this module, you learned how to set boundaries between work and private life in such a way that your areas of life are separated or connected according to your personal ideas. To do this, you first reflected on how strictly you currently separate your work and private life, and whether this corresponds to your desire to separate or integrate areas of your life.

You have learned why segmenting areas of life is important and got to know the positive consequences of being able to set boundaries between areas of life more clearly.

You also learned strategies for setting clearer boundaries between your work and personal life. You learned that you can set boundaries between your work and your personal life using *spatial*, *temporal*, *communicative*, *technical strategies* as well as *ritual boundaries*.

At that time, you set out to try two specific strategies in your daily life. In the weeks that followed, you may have tested other strategies as well.



Take a moment to reflect: How do you deal with the fluid transition between your work and personal life today? What changes do you notice in your everyday life?

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

Module 3: Switching off from work – setting boundaries

In this module, you found out how to switch off from work.

You learned what it means to switch off from work and why this is important. You also thought about how well you switch off personally. After that, you collected activities that enable you to switch off particularly well.

You also learned what it means to be mindful and how mindfulness can help you in everyday life to be more in the here and now. With the help of a *breathing exercise*, you tried out directly how to shift your attention to the here and now by concentrating on your own breath.

Afterwards, you learned what *mindful handling of thoughts and feelings* looks like, and you also tried this out in an exercise.

Since a mindful attitude facilitates the separation of work and private life, you subsequently learned a short *three-minute breathing exercise*. This can help you get off to a good start in the evening and mentally detach yourself from thoughts of work and the associated feelings.



Take a moment to reflect: How did a mindful attitude and focus on your breath help you disconnect from work at the beginning of your off-hours?

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

Module 4: Staying focused – working with concentration

In this module, you learned what methods are available to help you become more organized in and focused on your work. We discussed that there are many strategies for self-organization and that the ability to regulate yourself is an important skill that you can always and easily apply to formulate and achieve any goals in your life.

Using a specific resolution for your daily work organization as an example, we went through the **phases of self-regulation** step by step, and you applied the method to your goal the following week.

You already knew the first two phases – setting specific, **SMART goals** and then using the **WOOP strategy** to envision success and plan how to deal with obstacles. New additions, besides remembering goals, were the aspects of observing your own behavior and rewarding yourself for goals achieved.



Take a moment to consider: For which goals and in which situations can this approach be helpful for you?

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

Module 5: Looking after myself – everyday rest and recharge

In this module, you first learned why rest is important for health, but also for work performance. You also learned what constitutes successful rest. You dealt with recovery in leisure time but also looked at the need for recovery through breaks during work.

Then you found out that recovery means different things to different people and can be related to switching off, relaxation, perceived control, but also mastering new challenges.

You collected *activities* that help you recover in your free time. You divided them according to whether they help you switch off, relax, or master challenges.

You also identified how to take *restful breaks* so that you feel more refreshed afterwards. You noted down the break activities that are good for you.

As another way of consciously organizing breaks, you learned about the exercise *Savoring nature* and tried it out last week.



Take a moment to reflect: How have you been this past week? Were you able to keep the appointments you made with yourself?

If you like, you can now take out your schedule and plan your recovery activities for the next few days.

Have you experimented with organizing your breaks? Have you figured out what makes you feel refreshed? Or will you continue to try different things in your breaks?

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

With each module you learned and your FlexiTree grew. All the exercises and strategies gradually became visible as blossoms. Now your FlexiTree is fully grown.

Take a look at your FlexiTree – it symbolizes your development over the last weeks. The leaves and flowers symbolize all the strategies you now know.

We encourage you to continue using the strategies and exercises from this training because then new strategies will soon become habits. Then you can reap the rewards of your efforts – you'll feel your well-being and performance improve.



Your favorites

In past modules, you marked exercises and strategies in the exercise overview that worked best for you personally.

Perhaps your preferences have changed so we invite you to take the time now to mark strategies and exercises you want to take with you from the training as favorites in the [exercise overview](#).

Carry on practicing the strategies and exercises that are helpful to you so that you continue to benefit from participation in FlexAbility training over the long term.

So please consider: what can be discarded? And what do you want to take with you? Which aspects should continue to have an effect on your everyday life?

What are sources of strength?

We call sources of strength everything that helps you achieve what you set out to do. They enable you to deal with demands and strains. They give you energy and power, for example, to recharge your recovery battery. Your sources of strength also help you cope with challenging situations.

Sources of strength, also called resources, can be very different things. They can be personal qualities and skills, other people you value, but also activities or objects. Your personal strategies that you have learned in this training can also be sources of strength.

Different sources of strength

Personal sources of strength

... include all sources of strength that lie within you or that you wield.

- Your skills and strategies, your knowledge and experience
For example: organize yourself, separate yourself from work, switch off, relax, be mindful
- Your characteristics
For example: optimism, self-confidence, resilience (psychological resistance), conscientiousness, reliability, ambition, curiosity, patience, openness, determination
- Your interests
For example: playing sports, making music, singing, gardening, dancing, handicrafts, reading, going for a walk
- Other aspects or states that lie within you
For example: time, health, sense of pleasure, positive moods

Sources of strength in your environment

Professional sources of strength

... include all sources of strength in your professional environment.

- Your occupation
For example: development opportunities, autonomy (freedom of action), interesting activities, opportunities to set boundaries
- Your working environment
For example: reliable colleagues, pleasant communication in the team
- Your working conditions
For example: family-friendly company policy, job security, financial security, work equipment and premises

Social sources of strength

... include all sources of strength in your social environment.

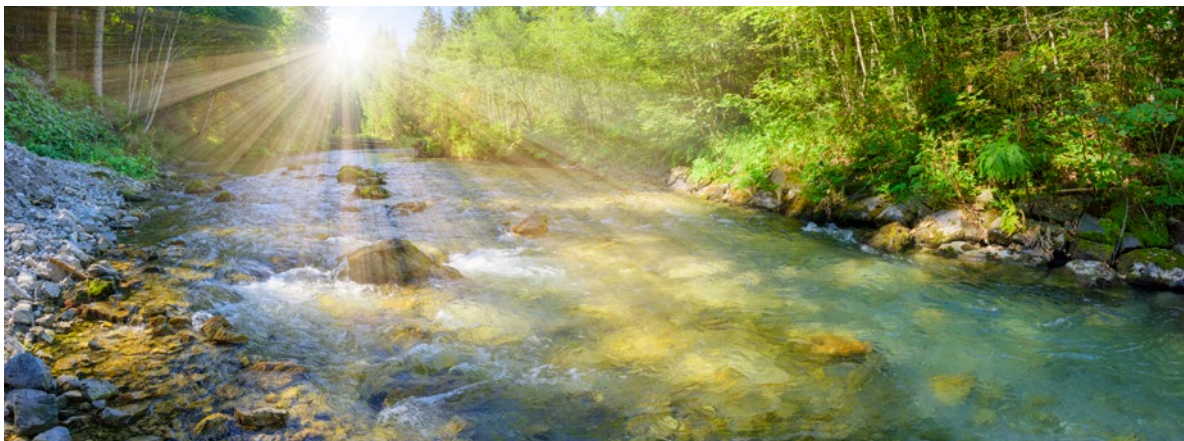
- Affection
- Love
- Respect
- Help and support from your family, friends, partner, colleagues and supervisors

Material sources of strength

... include all your material sources of strength and your living conditions.

- Employment
- Financial means
- A home
- Real estate
- Car

As you can see, there are many different sources of strength. The central thing is that we tap into the sources of strength that are right for us. That is what the following is about.



My sources of strength, my strengths

Here you can see your FlexiTree once again.

It symbolizes your personal development in this training. You have decided to change something in your daily work, in your habits. Your tree has continued to blossom with each module. The blossoming tree symbolizes all the possibilities you now know to meet the challenges of location- and time-flexible work, to work well and efficiently, and to stay healthy.

Some of these strategies have suited you well, some perhaps not so much. You have found your personal strategies in this training. In the future, these will give you the strength to master your daily work routine in such a way that you remain healthy, satisfied and effective. Your strategies are also sources of strength.

It is not always easy to know and name your own sources of strength. Now, at the end of the training, we would therefore like to collect all the things that, in addition to the strategies and exercises you have acquired in this training, help to ensure your location- and time-flexible work also promotes your health. What else makes up your FlexiTree? And how does that symbolize your sources of strength?

My personal sources of strength

The roots of a tree give it stability and support. Without roots, a tree cannot grow. Likewise, you have certain characteristics without which you could not have completed this training successfully.



Please think about what these characteristics are. What are your best qualities, your strengths, your talents? What do others appreciate about you? How would your best friend, partner, or family answer this question? What are you particularly good at? What are you often praised for – at work, in your family, in your hobby? What gives you pride in yourself? What do you like doing?

The roots of a tree are also fused into the earth, which provides them with minerals. What other aspects of your life give you strength? Are you healthy? When do you experience meaningfulness? What situations do you enjoy? Perhaps you can think of more short-lived sources of strength, such as a good mood?



All of these are your personal sources of strength. Imagine that they are the roots of the tree that give you support.

Write down your personal sources of strength in the corresponding field of the FlexiTree on page 136.

Sources of strength in my environment

Let's develop the image of the tree a little further. A tree can have strong roots and minerals from the earth but it also needs light and water to grow. Sun and rain nourish a tree, only then can it bear fruit. In addition, trees are particularly strong when they are in a group. In a forest, trees interact with each other and support each other.

It will be the same for you – only with the help of your environment will you be able to apply your own strengths and strategies, and achieve your goals. Sometimes we just don't see them. Yet these sources of strength are important to enable our personal growth, just as light, water and other trees are life-giving for the tree.

Social sources of strength

Please think about how your social environment gives you strength. Is it certain people? Your family, your friends, your relationship, your colleagues? How do they give you strength? These are your social sources of strength.



Note your social sources of strength in the appropriate box on the FlexiTree.

Professional sources of strength

Are there certain conditions in your work that enable you to grow personally? Do you perhaps draw strength from your professional activity (benefits of your job)? Or from the conditions under which you work (your work environment, your working conditions)?



Note your sources of professional strength in the appropriate box on the FlexiTree.

Material sources of strength

Do you also have material sources of strength?



Note your material sources of strength in the appropriate box on the FlexiTree.

You can now look at your personal FlexiTree, which symbolizes all your sources of strength. If you want, you can print it out and hang it up. Whenever you see the FlexiTree, you will remember what sources of strength lie within you and in your environment.



Now that you have collected your sources of strength, please consider how you can use and apply them. Which sources of strength do you want to expand? How could you achieve this?

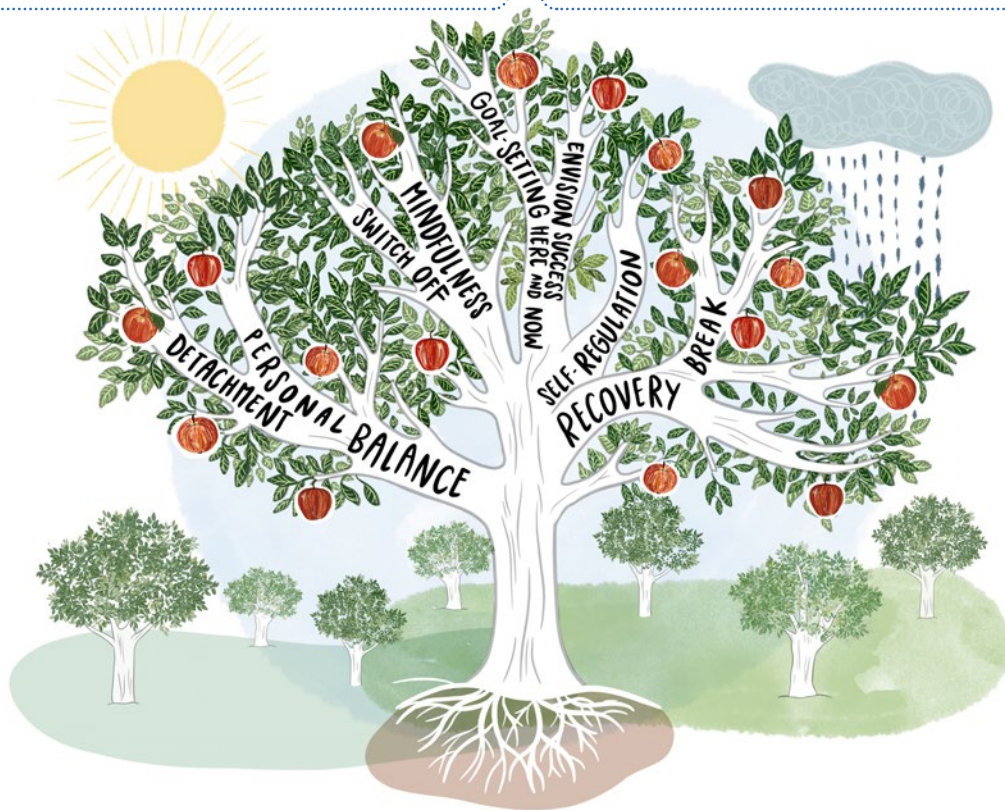
If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.



Find my sources of strength

My professional sources of strength

My material sources of strength



My social sources of strength

My personal sources of strength



Sofia

“A great personal source of strength for me is my passion for my profession. Teaching children and young people fills me with great joy. When I see how students develop, I know what I work so hard for. I also enjoy the financial security that comes with my job. Besides that, my partner is my biggest support in achieving my goals, but my friends are also a help to me, which is why I have asked them to remind me regularly to arrange meetings.”

Ahmet

“My biggest source of strength is the soccer club. Through training, I’ve gained self-confidence that I can apply in other situations. It’s also how I met most of my friends. I find it nice to be able to share my hobby with them. But I also have a good relationship with my colleagues and we always support each other when we have questions or problems. Being able to work from home allows me to do some tasks in a more concentrated and efficient way and is a great advantage of my job. I take it upon myself to distribute my tasks in such a way that I can complete difficult tasks from home.”

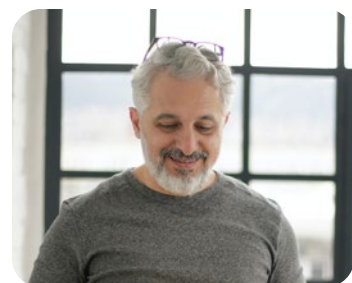


Hannah

“What gives me the most strength is spending time with my husband and children. I enjoy it when I can devote myself fully to my family. But the challenges and constantly changing tasks in my job also give me great pleasure and fulfill me. The opportunity to provide financial security for my family through my job fills me with pride. I have agreed with my family that we will play games together for at least one hour every week, without me doing anything for work in between.”

Alexander

“I’m very good at enjoying certain moments, for example a delicious dinner or a nice piece of music. I also manage to stay optimistic and keep a cool head even in difficult situations. This comes in handy in many professional situations. I am proud that I was able to give my children a successful start in life. I would like to create more moments for myself where I can pause and enjoy, for example by preparing my favorite dishes.”





Activate sources of strength

In challenging situations, for example, a conflict in the family or at work, or when we have to do things we don't like, sources of strength can help us to cope with the situation. It helps to vividly imagine how you have used a source of strength before.

What sources of strength do you need to cope with an upcoming challenging situation, for example, composure or a segmentation strategy? It can be a source of strength that you acquired in the FlexAbility training, or it can be a personal, social, professional, or material source of strength.

Now try to remember as precisely as possible a situation in which you drew on this source of strength before. Imagine this earlier situation as accurately as possible. Can you think of a positive image of it? How does it feel? Be mindful of all feelings and thoughts about it.

If you like, you can write down your thoughts here.

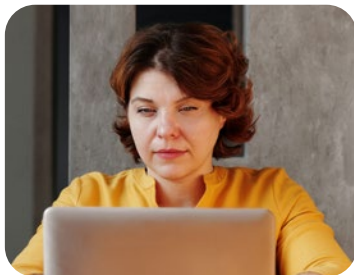


Sofia

“I stopped working an hour ago and my thoughts are still circling around work. I remember that in the past, in this situation, I benefited from talking to my friends on the phone. As soon as I heard my friend’s joyful voice, I calmed down. While I was telling her about my day and my problem with shutting down, I became more relaxed. Thoughts of work become less intense. My breathing slows down and I feel calmer now too.”

Ahmet

“While I’m working on a difficult task, I keep getting interrupted by my colleagues in the office. I’m less able to concentrate on the task at hand. In the past, I have put difficult tasks on the day I work from home. At home, I can concentrate better and am interrupted less. I feel productive and successful doing it. I will finish the task I started tomorrow when I work from home and devote time to other, less complicated tasks first.”



Hannah

“My work cell phone rings after work. I feel the stares of my family and notice the inner conflict between work and private life very strongly. I remember that in Module 2 I practiced avoiding these conflicts through clear communication. In the moments when I managed to set a clear boundary, I felt proud. Even now, I can feel that feeling. I pick up the phone and tell my co-worker that I will take care of her request the next day.”

Alexander

“While working on my long-term task, I despair in front of a large mountain of tasks. In such situations, my optimism has helped me in the past. When I reminded myself of how much I have already accomplished, I could look to the future with confidence. I feel the confidence and inspiration to successfully accomplish something again.”



The daily exercise for the coming week

Recall your sources of strength every day.

If a challenging situation is coming up in your everyday life, think about what sources of strength you need to cope with it. Then try to remember as precisely as possible a situation in which you drew on this source of strength in the past. Of course, you can continue to use your other sources of strength.

Just as in the last few weeks, you can use your self-regulation strategies to become aware of your sources of strength. For example, you can formulate an if-then plan (If I notice that my thoughts revolve around work in the evening, then I pause for a moment and remind myself what strategies I know to manage this situation). Or you can remind yourself of your sources of strength (for example, by placing a specific object on your desk that reminds you of a source of strength that helps you in stressful situations).

Congratulations!

Having completed the sixth module, you will now also see the environment of your personal FlexiTree, which symbolizes all your sources of strength.

Look at your tree again for a moment and be proud. You already had many skills when you started this training. Based on this, you have learned a great deal and built your strategies over the past few weeks. Now, if you continue to work on shaping your workday to meet your needs, you will soon reap the rewards of those efforts.

And don't forget in all this – there are also many sources of strength in your environment. It is worthwhile to reflect on them and become aware of them.



Review

Let's take a look back at today's module. Today you:

- Reviewed what you have learned in the FlexAbility training over the last few weeks
- Collected sources of strength that you can use to support your work that is flexible in terms of location and time
- Saw at a glance which exercises in the FlexAbility training you liked best



Congratulations! You have successfully completed the last module of your FlexAbility training.

Over the last few weeks, you have learned a great deal, tried out some practical strategies and exercises, and integrated something new into your daily life every week.

We encourage you to continue to consciously use the strategies and exercises you have learned. This way, they will become routine over time. Be patient with yourself – changing habits is a challenge. We are sure that you will succeed!

We wish you all the best for the future and much success in implementing your strategies and exercises in everyday life. Stay healthy and happy.



Summary

The objectives of this module at a glance

In today's module, you reviewed what you have learned in FlexAbility Training over the past six weeks and saw at a glance which exercises in FlexAbility Training you enjoyed the most. In addition, you now know what sources of strength you can use to support your work that is flexible in terms of location and time.

What are sources of strength?

Sources of strength are everything that helps you to achieve what you set out to do. Sources of strength, also called resources, can be very different things. They can be personal qualities and skills, other people you value, but also activities or objects. The personal strategies that you have learned in this training can also be sources of strength. You have collected your personal, social, professional, and material sources of strength.

You also reflected on how you use your sources of strength and which ones you would like to expand. In addition, you considered in which situations you have already used certain sources of strength and imagined a positive image of them.

The daily exercise for the coming week

Recall your sources of strength every day.

If a challenging situation is coming up in your everyday life, think about what sources of strength you need to cope with it. Then try to remember as precisely as possible a situation in which you drew on this source of strength in the past. Of course, you can continue to use your other sources of strength.



Exercise overview



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Here you can view all exercises at a glance, do them, or listen to the associated audios.

Tip

If you have followed a cross-reference, you can use the Alt + Left key combination (Windows) and Command + Left key (Mac) to return to the page you were last viewing.

Module 1



WOOP strategy

WOOP is an acronym, a short word composed of the first letters of the words Wish, Outcome, Obstacle, Plan. The goal of this strategy is to envision your success, to think about what obstacles there might be on the way to success, and to consider at an early stage how you would overcome such obstacles.

The strategy supports self-regulation to stick to long-term goals and realize them successfully. It is based on 20 years of scientific research. The method has been proven effective in many studies with people of all ages and in many areas of life.

WOOP always works the same way:

- W** First, name a goal that is important to you and achievable.
- O** Then determine for yourself what would be the best thing about achieving your goal and imagine it in your mind.
- O** Then, identify your biggest obstacle and mentally envision that obstacle.
- P** Last, set an if-then plan for how to overcome the obstacle.

Adapted from Gollwitzer et al., 2018 | More info at woopmylife.org



SMART goals

SMART goals are

- S** pecific (concrete and precisely formulated)
- M** easurable (verifiable)
- A** ttractive (positively formulated)
- R** ealistic (challenging, but not too high).
- T** ime-bound (fixed in time)

Adapted from Doran, 1981



Own strategies for dealing with location- and time-flexible work

Focus on strategies that are already in place

You bring a lot of your own experience and knowledge in dealing with the challenges of location- and time-flexible work. You are already applying strategies very successfully to shape your everyday working life. Many people are not aware of this. Therefore, we invite you to change your perspective now.

Consider this:

- What are you already doing to set clearer boundaries between areas of your life?
- What do you already do to take your mind off things after work?
- How do you organize your daily work routine?
- And how do you recover?

Feel free to take a few minutes to reflect and write down your successful strategies, techniques, activities, or behaviors.

Here you can navigate to your notes for this exercise.



The 54321 exercise

1. Name 5 things that you can see right now.
Example: I see the table, my feet, a pen, a cup, a window.
2. Name 4 things that you can feel right now.
Example: I feel the chair against my back, my feet on the floor, my hair against the back of my neck, a tingling sensation on my nose.
3. Name 3 things you can hear right now.
Example: I hear the whirring of the heater, the sound of traffic on the street, distant murmur of voices.
4. Name 2 things that you can smell right now.
Example: I smell the scent of paper, my perfume.
5. Name 1 thing that you can taste right now.
Example: I taste coffee.

Based on Dolan, 1991

Module 2



Spatial and physical strategies

- If there is a study at home: close the door
- If there is no study at home: set up a physical workspace (an area in a room where leisure time is not also spent), delineate the workspace, e.g. with a curtain or room divider
- Dress differently for work and for leisure (especially when working from home, clothes like those worn in the office can convey a certain feeling)
- Purposefully use items to separate/mix work and personal life (e.g. calendars, keys, photos)



Temporal strategies

- Set regular working hours
- Document working hours (keep a time account)
- Set up a schedule (with professional and private to-dos)
- Plan lunch breaks and short breaks in between (if it is still difficult to take breaks, e.g. arrange virtual coffee breaks with colleagues)
- Plan leisure time (e.g. every Friday, finish work on time to go to sports)
- Structure working time



Transition rituals

- Morning routines to consciously end free time (drinking coffee, reading the newspaper, changing clothes)
- Morning routines to consciously start work (set up workspace, turn on devices, read emails)
- Evening routines to consciously end work (planning for the next day, turning off equipment, rinsing coffee mugs)
- Evening routines to consciously begin free time (change clothes, change seats, reflect on or talk about the work day, plan free time, take a walk, listen to a podcast)



Behavioral and communicative strategies

- Define your own expectations
- Make agreements with family and friends, colleagues and supervisors about when you are available for whom, e.g. “I can only be reached at work for urgent private matters (e.g. call from the kindergarten). After work, I am only available for urgent professional issues (e.g. certain topics)”
- Communicate expectations regarding the separation of work and private life, e.g. tell colleagues that you are not available for work-related questions in the evenings and on weekends; do not talk about work-related topics with your partner over dinner
- Address boundary violations/transgressions, e.g. “I’m at work now and I’ll call you back later”
- If constant work-related accessibility is required: clarify expectations in the team, define times and communication channels
- Asking friends, family, colleagues, or supervisors for support in maintaining personal boundaries, e.g. asking others to pick up the phone
- Deal with personal matters only during breaks and free time (this includes household activities when working from home)



Technical strategies

- Use different devices for work and private life
- Set up different email accounts for personal and professional use
- Turn off push function for emails
- Set a time window for receiving email or stop checking professional email after a certain time
- Use do-not-disturb function or, if possible, switch off your business cell phone
- Use digital calendars to visualize accessibility and availability for yourself and others
- Determine and communicate times and communication channels for own accessibility (see also Communicative strategies).



Own strategies and routines

You may know other strategies or routines that facilitate the segmentation between work and private life. These may be specific implementation ideas for a particular segmentation strategy (for example, how you personally create a spatial separation), or they may be completely different strategies to those mentioned so far.

- Are you perhaps already using strategies or routines?
- What strategies and routines do others around you use?
- Do your friends, colleagues or co-workers have strategies and rituals that you find helpful?

Exercises such as the 54321 exercise can also be used as a routine.

What other strategies and routines can you think of?

Here you can navigate to your notes for this exercise.

Module 3



My activities to switch off

Some people can switch off particularly well and no longer think about their work when they are engaged in creative activities. Others completely distance themselves mentally from work when they are physically active. And still others distance themselves from work during completely different activities. What is it like for you?

What activities do you engage in during your free time?

Now consider how well you can switch off during these leisure activities using the following questions. For each activity, assign points from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very well).

- How well do you gain distance from your job demands in this activity?
- How well do you forget about your work during this activity?

You can now calculate the total for each activity. The activities with the highest score are the best ones for you to switch off.

Make a note of the activities where you can best switch off.

Here you can navigate to your notes for this exercise.

Based on Hahn et al., 2011

Mindfulness breathing exercise

1. Sit comfortably without leaning back. Place your feet flat on the floor, not crossing your legs. Make sure your back is straight. Let your shoulders hang down a little.
2. If you wish, close your eyes.
3. Be aware of where your body makes contact with the seat. Notice how this feels.
4. Become aware of what is going on inside of you. What thoughts are there? What feelings? What bodily sensations?
5. Now become aware of your breathing. Feel how your belly rises when you inhale and how it lowers when you exhale. You may wish to place your hand on your belly for a few breaths to feel how the breath flows in and out of your body. Notice the sensation of slight expansion as your belly rises with each inhalation and slight contraction as it falls with each exhalation. Follow these sensations as the breath flows into your body and as the breath leaves your body as you exhale. You may notice the little pause between the inhalation and the following exhalation, and between the exhalation and subsequent inhalation. Allow your body to breathe at its own rhythm. There is no need to change or control anything. Just observe from moment to moment. Keep your attention on your breathing, breath by breath.
6. Sooner rather than later you will notice that your attention wanders away from the breath, and thoughts and feelings appear. This is perfectly fine. Notice what is distracting you and bring your attention back to the movement of your belly. Do this again and again. Even if your mind wanders away from your breathing countless times, bring it back just as often without getting annoyed, without getting impatient. This is the normal process. Use your breath as an anchor with which you can bring yourself back to the here and now each time.
7. Finish the exercise by expanding your attention back to your whole body and the space in which you are sitting.
8. Open your eyes or let your eyes wander around the room and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.



Listen to audio

Adapted from Michel et al., 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.

Being mindful with thoughts and feelings

1. Sit comfortably without leaning back. Place your feet flat on the floor, not crossing your legs. Make sure your back is straight. Let your shoulders hang down a little.
2. If you wish, close your eyes.
3. Focus your attention on your breathing for a few breaths. Observe how the air flows into your belly, how it flows out again, and how it flows into your belly again. Try to keep your attention on the breath.
4. Now let go of your breath and observe thoughts and feelings coming and going, appearing and disappearing from your awareness. You can imagine that you are lying in a meadow and that your thoughts and feelings are like clouds that you are watching pass by in the sky. Do not hold on to your thoughts or feelings. Do not follow them. Just observe them as they come and go.
5. Now return your attention to your breathing and the movements of your belly.
6. Finish the exercise by expanding your attention back to your whole body and the space in which you are sitting.
7. Open your eyes or let your eyes wander around the room and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.



Listen to audio

According to Michel et al., 2014; Kabat-Zinn, 2006; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Siegel, 2010; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.

Three-minute breathing exercise

1. Assume an upright, comfortable posture. Ask yourself, "What is my experience in this moment... thoughts... feelings... bodily sensations?" Acknowledge your experience, even if it is unwanted.
2. Focus your attention on your breath, on each inhale and exhale. If your mind wanders, bring it back.
3. Expand your awareness to your entire body.
4. Finish the exercise and be ready and alert for whatever comes next.



Listen to audio

Adapted from Michel et al., 2014; Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002; Weiss, Harrer & Dietz, 2011.

Module 4



Goal-setting strategies

The first phase is about setting specific goals that you want to achieve. You can use strategies for **selection**, **optimization** as well as **compensation** for this. Using the *SMART method*, formulate a wish for change in your work organization and consider how to deal with possible obstacles (*WOOP strategy*). You can also consider other **strategies for self-regulation** to avoid temptation or to distract yourself from those. Finally, consider ways of reminding yourself of your goals. These can be cues or signals that continuously remind you of your own goals.

- What is your goal?
- How will you remember your goal?

Here you can navigate to your notes for this exercise.



Strategies for self-observation

To monitor your success, you must first observe yourself. You can observe a behavior in different ways. It can be your target behavior (the one you want to achieve) or the disruptive behavior (the one you want to avoid). You can describe it or just note how often or to what extent you display it (x times per day, x pages per day ...). However, it is important that you record it as immediately and accurately as possible. It is helpful to do this in writing. This can be done, for example, in a kind of diary, but also on simple tally sheets or apps. Think about a system that is as simple as possible and that you can easily integrate into your everyday life.

- How often and when do you exhibit the behavior?

In order to check whether you are actually moving in the desired direction, you have to compare the behavior shown with your target behavior. This is where the observations you made earlier come in handy.

- Have you reached your goal?
- What have you already succeeded in doing? What can you still work on in the future?



Self-reward strategies

If you reach your goal, you should reward yourself. It is important to choose a suitable reward. Remind yourself every now and then how you reward yourself – this has a motivating effect on many people. Rewards can be positive emotions, tangible and intangible rewards, or natural rewards. If possible, you should redeem your reward directly after your success – this way the rewards have a particularly strong impact. Rewards can also be small things.

- How do you reward yourself for success?

Module 5



Recreational activities

Sometimes it's not easy to figure out how you recover and recharge best.

Collect all the activities you do in your free time.

Now it's a matter of assigning these activities to the various recovery experiences. You may want to assign one activity to several recovery experiences – feel free to do so.

My free time activities to unwind

What activities allow me to switch off? What activities enable me to step back from work-related tasks? What activities enable me to gain some distance mentally from work? In what activities am I completely absorbed?

My leisure activities to relax

What activities allow me to relax, catch my breath, where do I have time for leisure?

My free time activities to master challenges

What activities enable me to experience challenge or a sense of accomplishment? What activities allow me to learn something new?

These are the leisure activities I want to pursue

What activities do I choose myself? Which activities do I carry out myself?

Here you can navigate to your notes for this exercise.

Based on Hahn et al., 2011

Restful breaks

Please lean back and close your eyes.

Please try to focus on your breath and allow yourself to be completely present in this moment.

Breathe calmly in and out.

You probably take more breaks on some days and fewer on others. Think back to a day when you did a really good job of getting some rest during the workday.

How did you notice that you were rested? For example, some people report that when they are rested, they feel a sense of well-being, breathe more calmly, or notice a slower heart rate. Have you noticed changes in your body?

Sometimes you know exactly what you have done to achieve this feeling of recovery, and sometimes you only become aware of it as you go along. After all, you can take your breaks in very different ways – some people lean back and close their eyes, others move their bodies, still others talk to their colleagues. Think back to one of your restful breaks and ask yourself:

- How have you taken breaks in the past?
- What exactly did you do?
- How did you spend breaks that left you feeling fresher and more active?

Now imagine that you are taking such a break during a normal working day. You do all the things that are good for you. You might even be able to bring back that feeling of recovery, or an inkling of that feeling.

Notice when you have enjoyable and restful feelings, when pleasant bodily sensations occur, as these are signs that you are recovering. Sometimes even little things like consciously relaxing your shoulders, leaning back, or simply yawning can help you get new energy.

Enjoy the sensation for a moment longer and then slowly find your way back.

Note down in bullet points what you have done so far to make your breaks relaxing and what break activities are good for you. You are also welcome to add ideas on how you would like to organize your breaks in the future.

Here you can navigate to your notes for this exercise.



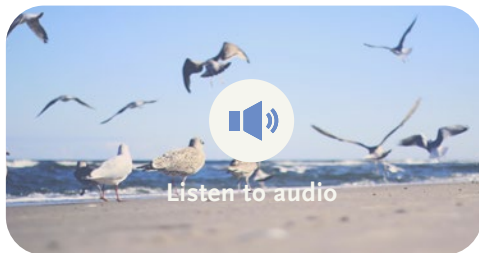
Listen to audio

Break exercise “Savoring nature”

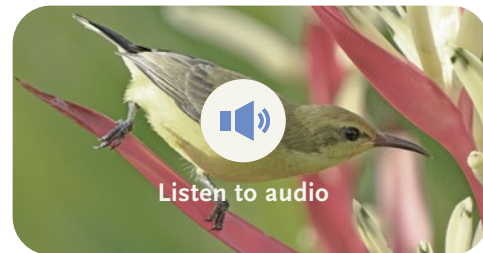
1. Please lean back and close your eyes.
2. Please try to focus on your breath and allow yourself to be completely present in this moment. Breathe calmly in and out.
3. First, imagine the environment you are listening to. What can you see, hear, feel, or smell? Where is your body located in the environment you are listening to?
4. Now try to imagine the situation very specifically. What can all your senses perceive? What do you hear? What sounds? What do you see? What colors and what things? What do you smell or physically sense?
5. Now direct your attention to your body. How does it feel in this pleasant situation? Concentrate completely on your body and the perception of sounds. *Listen for approx. 3 minutes.*
6. In your imagination, immerse yourself in the situation one more time. Imagine the environment in as much detail as possible and enjoy it. *Listen for approx. 2 minutes.*
7. Now slowly return to the room. Bring your thoughts back to the here and now. Breathe deeply in and out. Move your fingers first, then your arms. Stretch and straighten and open your eyes. Do not immediately stand up, but sit for a moment until you have completely returned to the present.

Adapted from *Steidle et al., 2017; Gierra & Klinkenberg, 2005.*

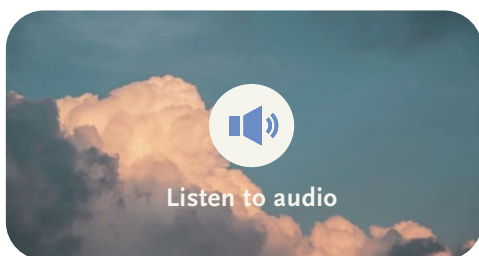
Here you can listen to the audio files with the nature sound:



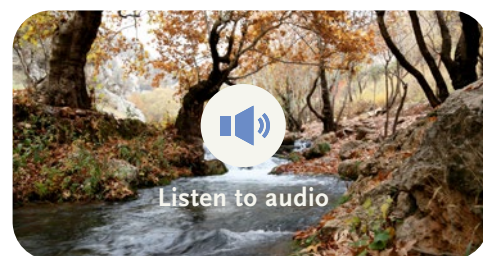
Seagulls by the sea
with instruction • without instruction



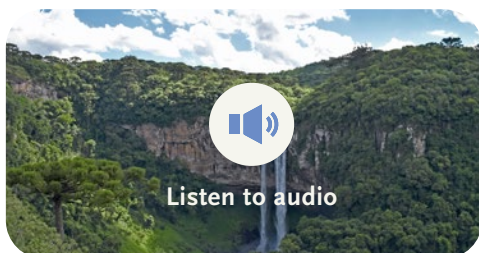
Birdsong
with instruction • without instruction



Summer thunderstorm
with instruction • without instruction



Birdsong at the forest stream
with instruction • without instruction



Rainforest
with instruction • without instruction

Module 6



Activate sources of strength

What sources of strength do you need to cope with an upcoming challenging situation, for example, composure or a segmentation strategy? It can be a source of strength that you acquired in the FlexAbility training, or it can be a personal, social, professional, or material source of strength.

Now try to remember as precisely as possible a situation in which you drew on this source of strength before. Imagine this earlier situation as precisely as possible. Can you think of a positive image of it? How does it feel? Be mindful of all your feelings and thoughts about it.

Here you can navigate to your notes for this exercise.

Conclusion

Recent research shows that the design of working conditions has a demonstrable impact on how flexible working hours and work locations affect recovery, work-life balance and well-being. Therefore, employers need to arrange working conditions appropriately and ensure occupational health and safety, even for location- and time-flexible work. In addition, individual self-regulation is an important skill in organizing location- and time-flexible work.

The self-learning training presented in this *baua: Guidance*, the FlexAbility training, designed for six weeks, can be worked on independently. This makes it possible to further develop personal strategies according to individual wishes and needs for the design of location- and time-flexible work, thereby strengthening self-regulation in the context of organizing work. In this way, professionals can shape their everyday working life in a self-determined and health-promoting way in relation to challenges such as blurring boundaries between work and private life, constant mental preoccupation with work, a lack of rest during breaks, or higher demands on self-organization.

The training was developed on the basis of scientific findings and evaluated in several studies with regard to its effectiveness and mechanisms of action. Compared to a control group, participants in the online training reported that they were better able to psychologically detach from work, derived greater satisfaction with their work-life balance, and generally experienced a deeper sense of well-being.

Users found the training very helpful, especially the specific and practical exercises and strategies, and the appreciative, encouraging tone. Participants particularly liked the diverse mix of information, videos, audios, exercises for writing, listening, or self-reflection, as well as the suggestions of the four fictional characters. The formulation of specific plans supported the participants step by step in coming closer to their goals in their professional and private lives.

This training presents exercises and strategies that are easy for professionals to incorporate into everyday life, thereby helping them get closer to their goals. In summary, the training is an effective measure for better self-management and health promotion in everyday working life with location- and time-flexible work.

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The FlexAbility self-learning training

How to organize your flexible work arrangements

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