

Home office: Finding a work-life balance

When signing up for the digital CIDyoung meeting May 13th, we asked participants the following questions:

1. What pitfalls of working at home are you experiencing?
2. Have you found any creative solution for your pitfalls?
3. Have you experienced any new or unexpected opportunities?

These questions were the basis for three rounds of table discussions in groups of approximately 4 to 5 people. Below you can find an overview of the most common difficulties with and solutions to working from home as mentioned by CIDyoung members.

Pitfalls

An often mentioned issue was that of making (and keeping) an orderly work schedule. Such a schedule ideally separates one's working life and personal life but coming up with such a schedule is not always easy. Because CIDyoung members work from home, there are bound to be interruptions from flat mates, one's children, or one's partner during planned work time. This leads to some members feeling the need to catch up on this "lost working time" during the evening, blurring the lines between working life and private life even further. As one member put it: "I keep working all the time."

Furthermore, some practical issues, like an unstable internet connection, having to work in an unergonomic position using just your laptop, or having to combine all the software programmes that are suddenly used now (e.g., Hangouts, Teams, Zoom, etc.), prevent efficient working from home. There is a need amongst some members for practical support from the universities to help with these problems. For example, not all universities provide the opportunity for researchers to pick up hardware (e.g., an additional computer monitor or a good office chair). There are also universities who do provide this possibility, but where CIDyoung members are not able to benefit from it as (a) they do not have the means to pick up these materials, or (b) where they have to hand in the material as soon as the crisis is over, and therefore do not see the benefit in arranging to pick up the hardware.

Other pitfalls that were mentioned are: (a) lack of exercise, (b) loneliness, and (c) declining motivation. It should be noted, however, that there are also members who experience little of these problems as they have a calm working environment at home or a partner who isn't home-bound for work.

Solutions

The discussions resolved mainly around solutions to the above pitfalls. Below you can find an overview of different solutions that we brought up. These are, however, very personal, and solutions preferred by one, might be counterproductive for others.

- Making a daily schedule.
- Take outdoor breaks / coffee Skype meetings.
- Order a laptop standard / monitor (maybe also provided through employer?)
- Really cleaning up your desk in the weekend such that you don't see any work related material on your desk. Hopefully this prevents you from working on the weekend.
- Doing yoga (via apps).
- Setting an alarm such that you are forced to take breaks every now and then.
- Hide your phone during work.
- Turn off notifications (as long as you don't see it, it isn't there) of e-mail and chat programmes.
- Jogging in the morning.
- Get up early, go to the forest and walk a little.
- Also work a little in the evening.
- Get a child!
- Lowering expectations of yourself (or at least what you want to get done). Be kind to yourself.