



NO. 1 · JANUARY 2009

Alive

M A G A Z I N E

THEME

Work-Life
Balance
— global

**Tomorrow
I will come
later**

Professionals break
with the traditional
work rhythm



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





Free employee

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

by Markus Albers, Tyskland

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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