Five forms of limitless work

LIMITLESS WORK: WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND IT TO UTILISE IT IN THE BEST POSSIBLE WAY

More and more distance work has shown staff and managers that working from home is not only a fringe benefit. Distance work can be an effective way of solving specific tasks, but it can also be a risk factor in terms of losing touch with one another.

Increased flexibility places higher demands on our ability to set boundaries between working life and private life.

We often hear of the concept "limitless work ", but the term is used randomly to describe the work culture of specific groups, such as managers and highly educated staff who do not always distinguish between working life and private life.

However, limitless work affects almost all employees – and some more than others. Therefore, it makes sense to have a clear definition of how this kind of work can affect our work-life balance.

How do we define limitless working life?
Many elements can contribute to the feeling of working in more or less limitless ways. Some are easy to recognise, such as freedom to choose your own working hours and workplace, but others can be more subtle.
If life at work feels like pressure rather than giving a sense of freedom, it can be difficult to ascertain exactly where dissatisfaction comes from.

You will have a better discussion about the framework of work when colleagues and managers have a common understanding of the topic.

Below are therefore five definitions of limitless work to provide different perspectives of the concept and to help you find better solutions and verbalise challenges in working life.

1. Limitless in terms of working free of time and space

Temporal and spatial boundaries disappear when the job can be carried out at anytime and anywhere. This is often referred to as "independent of time and place", and it is probably the most tangible type of limitless work on the labour market. However, the degree of freedom varies, and therefore this type of limitless work requires frameworks and clear agreements between managers and staff. This form of work should also be discussed between colleagues, so there is an understanding that the time selected by one colleague does not necessarily correspond to the time selected by the other.

On the one hand, limitless work in terms of time and space increases the degree of freedom in everyday life, but on the other hand, all our time can potentially become working time if we are not aware of setting limits.

2. Limitless in terms of no or few organisational boundaries

Instead of working directly below a permanent manager who sets goals from day to day or from task to task, work has become more project-oriented for many people.

Here, the employee has a role in a project that is often organised across departments and where goals cannot necessarily be measured directly against the individual contribution.

Limitless in terms of no or few organisational boundaries place greater demands on employees' abilities to exercise self-management, because to some extent they themselves are responsible for defining when they have completed their tasks well enough, although without acquiring actual managerial competences. This may leave the individual with a feeling of inadequacy.

3. Limitless in terms of no or few political boundaries

Most workplaces have gone from having traditional conflicts of interest between managers and staff to all employees having a common interest in developing and operating an efficient organisation.

Today, most people work under conditions where expectations, divisions of responsibility, rules, organisation, affiliation and decision-making processes have become increasingly blurred.

This places greater demands on the ability of both staff and managers to fill out the framework of a freer working life such that it provides more well-being and not more stress.

On the positive side, no or few political boundaries means more freedom, flexibility and influence on own tasks. Staff may experience a greater sense of commitment to perform the organisation's tasks successfully.

On the other hand, no or few political boundaries may lead to increased pressure, because each employee must be able to set boundaries for his/her involvement in the work and respect his/her own capacity.

As there is no longer a "one-size-fits-all" model, conflicts of interest in collaboration are also more likely to be perceived as personal conflicts rather than professional conflicts, and this means that managers will not always find out about them until it is too late and/or managers will not address the conflicts systematically.

4. Limitless in terms of no or few cultural boundaries

Many traditions disappear in modern working life. Professional cultures disintegrate, work identity becomes somewhat individual, and personal values can be challenged by the values of the organisation.

Limitless work in terms of no or few cultural boundaries arise when a workplace wants to shape employees' values, their understanding of the outside world and their professional self-image. In such cases, the workplace is not content that employees make their expertise available. Human resources must also be brought into play and adjusted to the values of the workplace.

On the one hand, this means that employees can experience a strong corporate identity, be proud and strengthen the perception of their own identity in the values of the job when these coincide with the employees' personal values. This can promote creative and professional development.

On the other hand, it can become more difficult for the individual employee to set boundaries for his/her sense of responsibility and loyalty towards the organisation. This means that employees may find it difficult to maintain a distance to their workplace. In this way, boundaries at work can become more blurred, and challenge employees if their personal values do not tally with those of the workplace.

5. Limitless in terms of no or few subjective boundaries

Employees increasingly identify with their work, and experience that their personality is involved and brought into play at work. On the one hand, this means that personal development at work increases the well-being of employees.

On the other hand, if the conditions of the work do not involve adequate opportunities to realise this strong work identity, the individual employee will be affected much harder.