Compartmentalization

In the 120Reign™ Guide, compartmentalization means giving each area of life its own room, so what happens in one room doesn't flood the others.

BOTTOM LINE

Research on separating areas of life comes from two fields. In work research, mentally switching off from work during time off was linked to less exhaustion, better sleep and greater wellbeing in a meta-analysis of 91 samples with more than 38,000 employees, and programs that teach switching off were linked to a small to moderate increase in it across 30 studies. In self-concept research, keeping positive and negative parts of life in separate mental "compartments" was linked to higher self-esteem and lower depression when the positive areas felt more important, but to the opposite when the negative areas dominated. Constant after-hours work contact was linked to more work-life conflict, though also to some benefits. Overall, the research suggests separating areas of life is linked to recovery and wellbeing, with the caveat that it works best alongside, not instead of, facing what's hard.

WHAT THE RESEARCH SHOWS

Switching off from work is linked to recovery

A meta-analysis of 91 independent samples (38,124 employees) examined "detachment," the experience of mentally distancing yourself from work during time off (Wendsche & Lohmann-Haislah, 2017). Detachment was linked to less exhaustion and better wellbeing, and doing work-related activities during time off was linked to less detachment. Higher job demands made switching off harder, while support and control at work made it easier.

Switching off is a skill that can be strengthened

A meta-analysis of 30 studies testing 34 programs (3,725 participants) found that interventions designed to help people detach from work were linked to a small to moderate increase in detachment ($d = 0.36$; Karabinski et al., 2021). Longer programs with more practice showed larger effects than short ones, and effects were largest for people who started out more depleted.

Always-on contact blurs the line between rooms

A systematic review and meta-analysis of 37 studies found that work done through phones, email and other technology after hours was linked to more work-life conflict, but also to some feelings of enrichment, such as flexibility (Santos et al., 2023). The effect was mixed rather than purely harmful, which suggests choosing when a room is open matters more than never opening it.

Separate compartments in how you see yourself

Across three studies, psychologist Carolin Showers described compartmentalization as organizing positive and negative parts of yourself into separate categories (Showers, 1992). When people saw their positive areas as more important, compartmentalization was linked to higher self-esteem and lower depression. When negative areas felt more important, it was linked to lower self-esteem and more depression. Later work by Showers and colleagues found that compartmentalized self-views can also leave self-esteem more open to swings when a negative area is activated (Showers et al., 2015).

Having many roles is not automatically protective

A review and meta-analysis of the research on "self-complexity," the idea that having many distinct roles buffers stress, found only weak and inconsistent support (Rafaeli-Mor & Steinberg, 2002). Overall, more self-complexity was slightly linked to lower wellbeing, with large differences between studies. This suggests the benefit comes from how the rooms are managed, not simply from having many of them.

DISCLAIMER

This summary is for educational purposes only and is not medical or mental health advice. It describes published research on the principles behind the guide; the guide itself has not been tested in a clinical study. Talk with a qualified healthcare provider about your individual health needs.

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