

Sharing reflections on work-life balance



When we were deciding between moving to France or Singapore last year, the stereotype of a good work-life balance in France was one point in favour of moving here. Of course, when I arrived and my husband started working in an office, we realised that plenty of French workers feel overwhelmed by work too. It would be nice if there was a magic formula for meeting both our personal and professional goals at the same time, but maybe work-life balance looks different for each of us. To get some insight into this, I asked a few colleagues different questions about their own work-life balance.

Mialitiana Rakotobe from Human Resources reflects that 'it's very important for me to cut everything about work-related issues at home to avoid elevating stress. Once I am done for the day, I take my mind off work'. This separation of work and home can help us to rest, re-set and bring energy to work the next day.

Without a physical separation between work and home, making space for our personal lives can be more challenging. For **Gounalan Pavade** in our Science Department, one of the most important things for managing work-life balance while working from home is to 'follow a routine schedule dedicated to office hours and personal life'. He tries to 'avoid mixing up both' work and personal life and to keep good time management by sticking to his planned schedule which he adjusts according to essential needs.

Gillian Mylrea is currently working from Sydney, Australia. The time difference between Sydney and Paris has led her to spend evenings, sometimes until very late, on Zoom calls with colleagues. She has also moved 'homes' often since arriving in Australia. She notes that it 'has been hard to establish the same daily routine I used to have pre-COVID when my work routine was set hours at OIE HQ'. For Gillian, one of the biggest challenges is being able to recall what she did when, and this applies to both work and leisure activities. She describes time as feeling strange, explaining that 'time seems to warp like I am in the Rocky Horror Picture Show. You know ['let's do the time warp again'](#)'. To manage in this often-changing situation, she says: 'what has been important for me is to plan what hours

I will work each day and to document what I actually did so that I have an accurate record... This is not something I ever imagined doing as I usually prefer more spontaneity. Perhaps that will develop with time as I adapt to this new situation.'

Mara Elma Gonzalez Ortiz has found that working from home can also offer advantages for work-life balance. In the time that she previously spent travelling from her home to the OIE each morning, she enjoys passing more time over breakfast with her family. Twice a week they clean the house together before starting the workday. I think this is very clever – often housework falls on one person in the household, and it can be even more frustrating when you are working from home. Mara's family also don't interrupt each other during the workday. I think this demonstrates how work-life balance can be supported by our families, and how our experiences of working from home are influenced by our different households.

When I first asked Mara to share her ideas about work-life balance, she thought perhaps she wasn't the right person to talk to, because she often finishes work late in the evening. But she also realised there are ways that she and her family have managed well during this transition. When Mara described her weekly routine to me, I could see many ways that she looks after the wellbeing of herself and her family. For example, she respects mealtimes with her family and she practices yoga to help prevent pain that can result from passing hours seated in front of a screen. I've participated in the online yoga sessions that Mara hosts regularly, and they helped me to prioritise exercise, even when I felt lazy or busy. When Mara feels overwhelmed or tired, she does a 3-10 minute meditation, which is 'fantastic for resetting you in the middle of the afternoon'. One more tip from Mara: 'Take a good shower before going to bed. Put a good distance between the end of the work and the time you go to bed, even if you are tired'. This is something I can learn from this week. I stayed up late to do my taxes and, let me tell you, tax can literally become a nightmare.

Mia's perspective on work-life balance echoes Mara's. Mia says,

'I really think that everyone needs to take the time to put things that truly matter first'.

This includes taking some time off to unwind and enjoying simple things like 'gardening, cooking, talking to a loved one, reading a book, going for a jog or simply putting on a good playlist'.

I received one more response to my emails asking questions about work-life balance – a polite email thanking me and saying, 'unfortunately in this moment I cannot contribute'. This too, is a useful contribution. It's my view that we can each contribute to work-life balance by looking at our own routines and workloads and communicating what works best for us. But work-life balance for each of us is also something we build together as an organisation. By respecting the wellbeing of all staff, and our diverse experiences and approaches, we also strengthen our work.

A big thank you to Mia, Gounalan, Gillian and Mara for generously sharing your reflections.

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