

**Draw the Line? How Boundary Creation Behaviors at The End of Work Relate
to Recovery and Next-Day Work Performance**

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BOUNDARY CREATION BEHAVIORS & RECOVERY

Technological advancements and the trend toward hybrid work constellations have increasingly blended the work and leisure domains. While this has many advantages such as allowing people to arrange their days more flexibly, it also means that many employees experience new challenges concerning drawing the line between work and private domains. To illustrate, whereas physically attending work is naturally associated with overcoming physical boundaries between work and private life (e.g., closing the office door and commuting home), these natural boundaries cease to exist when working remotely.

A review of 91 scales related to boundary management (i.e., the ways that individuals manage the distinctions between work and personal life) by Cobb et al. (2022) indicates that the vast majority of studies capture people's preferences, attitudes, or behaviors to separate or integrate the job-related and the leisure-related domain while being at home (e.g., "I stop in the middle of my home activities to address a work concern") or while being at work ("I prefer to not talk about my family issues with most people I work with"). From this extant research, we can learn much about whether people feel they can control boundaries ("I manage well with separating/integrating the roles"), how work is designed to facilitate boundary management ("I am free to work the hours that are best for my schedule"), or how ICT usage as an intrusion demand effects boundary management ("How often does your organization require you to answer phone calls and emails during off-hours?"). However, only one study based on qualitative interviews related to work-life management by McDowall and Lindsay (2014) reported that participants mention strategies to "set a clear boundary between work and home", thereby emphasizing that it is not just important to consider what happens while *being* in the work or home domain, but that is also important to consider what people do to *create* clear boundaries when they transition from work to home.

In this research, we formally define boundary creation behaviors as the enactment of strategies to actively draw a line between the end of one's working day and the beginning of

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one's free time. We integrate boundary theory with the stressor-detachment model to develop a conceptual framework that links boundary creation behaviors at the end of work with employees' recovery experiences at home and next-day work performance. Ashford and colleagues' boundary theory (2000) postulates that individuals create boundaries between various spheres such as work and private life, and some of these boundaries are impermeable and inflexible, whereas others are permeable and flexible. We argue that on days at which employees actively engage in boundary creation behaviors, they can draw firm lines between work and private life reducing the likelihood of work-home transitions (e.g., answering work-related emails after work). In line with Sonnentag and Fritz' stressor-detachment model (2015), we further hypothesize that work-home transitions are negatively linked to detachment (i.e., a sense of being mentally away from work). Detachment, in turn, reduces employees' exhaustion on the same-day (i.e., evening) and the next morning, which positively influences next-day work performance. We tested the proposed hypotheses in two studies.

First, we conducted a daily diary study with 91 employees for ten consecutive working days ($N_{\text{day-level}} = 640$). Boundary creation behaviors were assessed with a newly developed formative measure consisting of four items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .72$; sample item: "Today, I marked the beginning of my free time with a ritual, for instance by having a cup of tea"). A two-level path analysis showed that the fit of our research model was good (RMSEA = .030; CFI = .966; TLI = .945; SRMR_{within} = .039). Controlling for variable daily workload, we found a significant negative relationship of boundary creation behaviors and work-home transitions, which, in turn, negatively related to detachment. Moreover, detachment had a significant negative effect on evening exhaustion, which in turn was significantly positively related to next-morning exhaustion and subsequent work performance.

Second, we ran an intervention study with 237 full-time workers. Of these, 73 people were randomly assigned to the boundary creation condition (asking them to actively create a

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boundary between work and free time), 78 people were part of the active control group (asking people to write down three good things), and 86 people belonged to the passive control group. Results provided further support for our conceptual framework and showed that people who actively engaged in the boundary creation behaviors subsequently reported higher detachment levels, and lower same- and next-day exhaustion, as well as higher next-day work performance.