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Vignette: Ella's Day—Work Anywhere Anytime

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A glance at the personal assistant, which is displayed on the kitchen window right behind the coffee machine, indicates that another “colorful” day lies ahead of Ella; colorful means many different time pods. White stands for allotment, blue for deep work, red for project work, green for personal growth, orange for socializing, amber for personal priorities, and yellow for pooling time.

While enjoying the first coffee of the day, Ella quickly skims through the special attention list. 18 out of 20 events have automatically been resolved based on the programmed values and recent decisions. Only two need Ella's attention. The meeting with her practice circle lead takes place at the same time as the theater play of her godchild. She sends a quick voice message to the practice circle lead, asking whether it would be possible to have a brief exchange at 930 pm. Knowing that they are both “integrators,” who aim at mingling work and private life, she is convinced that this is the best of all the available options displayed. The second alert reminds her that her last sporting activity was more than 3 days ago. Based on the local weather forecast, the smart assistant suggests a light run through the park nearby together with Amy, one of her learning partners, who lives in the neighbourhood. Amy seems to be available at the same time and due for training too. The newly popped-up green amber field indicates that Amy's personal assistant has accepted the suggestion.

After a quick shower and breakfast, Ella takes her bicycle and heads for the local coworking space “Wunderraum.” During her 20-minute ride, she does the allotment (correspondence, documentation, etc.) via voice control. When she approaches the building, she is automatically checked in in the virtual community platform “G-Hub.” The software does not only show who is in the building today but also displays the current projects, interests, skills, and free timeslots of the community members.

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Ella has 30 minutes before the project work begins. She grabs a coffee and starts working at the workbench in the community zone. “You should meet Steven. He has just entered the space and has a similar profile to you,” suggests her smart assistant. Ella declines and continues doing her preparation for the day. Meeting new people is usually a nice distraction, but today she is very focused. Or let’s say she was focused until she sees a stranger entering the community zone, dressed in shimmering green colors, which is a nice contrast to her short red hair. “Forget it. You’re out of this project. Our values simply don’t match,” she yells in her phone before she slams it back in her bag without any further comments. “Oh hi,” she says, totally absorbed in thoughts toward Ella, “I didn’t mean to disturb you. Are you new?”. After a few words of introduction, Ella starts immediately talking about her projects and areas of interest, although she has never met Rose, the lady in green, before. Without the discreet reminder of her smart assistant, that her project work is due in 3 minutes, she would have forgotten the reason why she came to the Wunderraum this morning. “Why don’t you join us—we need exactly someone like to cope with the current challenges.”

Three hours later, the group leaves the project room called “Wunderlabor” and heads for a joint lunch in the city farm garden, for which they had recently worked for on its new distribution strategy, on a volunteer basis. The writing on the wall and smart table is automatically converted to a protocol that is added to the shared notebook of the team members. The tasks are in parallel integrated into the personal diary of each project member—not as a to do, but as an appointment in the agenda in consultation with the personal biorhythm and place preferences. A quick video done at the end of the workshop summarizes the main output—not only to record the key findings but also to update those members who could not participate in the session. Rose spontaneously decides to join the community on their journey. Of course, it was an intuitive decision, but her learning score—a quick individual reflection guided by the smart assistant—went through the roof. Not only because the topic was new for her, but mainly based on the diverse composition and open discussion culture of the project team.

The afternoon is blocked for deep work. It’s around 3 p.m. when Ella heads back to the Wunderraum. A few years ago, she would have felt bad about spending more than 2 hours for a community lunch, but this was mainly due to the outdated time tracking system that still existed in the old days. Since her main employer introduced a system called “Spark” that tracks energy, output, and learning, things changed drastically for the good of everyone—profits skyrocketed, the burnout rate went down, and the employee engagement score continually rose. She spends 2 h focused in the library of the Wunderraum—a place where all incoming messages and reminders are automatically muted. When she is through with her topics, she browses through “the pool” and checks the projects, where support is needed. She assigns one task to her that fits well with her skill set and interests. The introduction of the concept “pooling time” a few years ago helped her company enormously to gain velocity—it was a reaction to all the failed agility initiatives they tried before. Before she heads back home, she has a “Feedforward Session” with a new team member in a live meeting box. After the corona pandemic back in 2020, her

company stopped doing performance reviews and feedback sessions—realizing that digging in the past does not help to foster strengths and acquire new skills. And of course, this proceeding helps her employer to match future challenges with individual growth paths.

It's already past seven when Ella finally arrives home. During summertime, she works 120%—being a passionate ice hockey player, she prefers to have more time for sports in the winter season, where she usually works around 60%, also depending a bit on the nature of projects that are available in the marketplace. While relaxing with a lovely tea that she got as a present from the city farm, she captures her main learnings of the day in the personal growth journal.

Her employer introduced the “Job Crafting Model” back in 2021 as a consequence of the movement that started from the Feedforward Sessions. They agreed that they would keep a minimal form of the line organization and also main functions, based on the skill set and individual growth paths, but that everyone could choose projects in the company as well as voluntary assignments with externals in addition to their core responsibility. That was also why Ella, being a communication specialist, accepted the project at the city farm. She wants to build up sales and distribution skills in a real-life environment, accompanied by a team coach, who not only joins their project sessions but whom she can consult whenever she wants to review complex topics.

Before going to bed, Ella spends an hour writing on her second novel—a habit that she truly loves, as it helps her to not only relax but also deal with the rich experiences made with different people during the day. She started writing 3 years ago, when she realized that due to the introduction of “Spark,” she had suddenly much more energy in the evening to pursue her own personal projects. Maybe it was also because she started working at the Wunderraum during her autonomous time—back in the 20s called “home office days”—so suddenly her home was not associated with writing attritional emails and doing presentations any longer. Before she falls asleep, she glances at her smart assistant. How great, the next day is totally free of appointments as it is an “office” day. Of course, her company's community hub has nothing in common with the headquarters of the past, where people sat at individual desks and in windowless meeting rooms. However, unofficially they still affectionately refer to it as “the office.” Consequently, the smart assistant has already programmed the “in the community hub message” to notify people that she is not available for externals that day—“Wouldn't it be a pity not to spend the day with her team and have time for serendipitous moments?”

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