

The POST-COVID-19 workplace; empathetic & sustainable!

While Covid-19 is still raging, much has been spoken and written about what will change in our way of working after the pandemic. So, what have we learned from distance work? Some of the major global FM operators seem to agree that **working from home is here to stay, and in a post-Covid world, depending on the nature of the distance work, whether in your own home**, or in a local hub (the "third space" of work), it **can reduce office space by between 10-25%**. It also appears that we will travel less. Consequently, virtual meetings in their many formats will also become a permanent feature of our working lives. Most believe that the biggest post-Covid disruptor to the way we work would seem to be technology, with contactless technology, robots, artificial intelligence, etc.

However, perhaps the rise of new technologies may not be the greatest driver of change in the way organisations function in the future. **Perhaps this will come from changes in people's demands and expectations from work – the change in human dynamic!**

This should not be understood as an anti-tech approach, and that technology will not take up much space in our working lives in the future - because this will definitely still be the case. It is more likely that technology will probably expand completely on its own – irrespective of what we think about it. It will continue its inexorable advance with or without us... and as new technologies spread globally, they will probably not be regulated at the same rate. The frustration that has grown around this is that it should be us and not technology that controls and decides how our working lives will develop. **The sentiment is that there should be a return to common sense**, where the individual – without first consulting a digital tablet – can tell the difference between correct and incorrect, effective from ineffective, meaningful from meaningless, valuable from worthless, etc.

During Mærsk's malware attack in 2017, when the entire company was globally un-plugged, CEO Søren Skov communicated the following message to all employees: *"just do what is right for our customers and for our business!"* By doing this he reintroduced common sense and trusted that it could work. From this situation, Mærsk probably learned how fragile technology can make us when it is disconnected, especially in a large global organisation, but also how strong we can become by reintroducing common sense!

Purpose before profit! We can see a new trend developing. At SIGNAL, both before and during Covid-19, we have collected data from both existing and next-generation employees on what a good working life is, both locally and globally. A new moral compass for good work has begun to develop. Meaning before everything else! We want to know what good our daily work does in the world. We expect that meaning will be placed above profit and believe that the profit will probably come if the organisation does good things with what it has released into the world – especially in relation to sustainability.

A new perspective for a good "unplugged" working life. The "Always ON" culture many experienced before Covid-19 has given rise to reflection during the major lock downs. Many of us came from a culture where something productive was squeezed out of every available moment via smartphones and tablets, which constantly had our attention. Covid-19 gave us time to stop and think. Many people want a better work-life balance, where the office in future is a marketplace for cooperation, innovation, dialogue and development between colleagues at work, while the home office can, for example, give time and space for reflection and understanding, but on the individual's own terms. My work, my choice! And with the expectation that I have an employer and am part of a working community where we take care of each other and where my opinion counts too.

The Empathetic Organisation - and the age of the "innovation economy". Free spirits, project workers who are their own bosses and create their own brand, are growing – especially in the generation that is now entering the labour market. It is estimated that on average these people will have 30 jobs in

their working life. By 2025, around 75% of the global workforce will be Millennials (born between 1980 and 2000) - who will not be attracted to highly structured organisations, but rather to those organised around autonomous teams and project work. They see an attractive organisation as one with a high degree of trust and empathy and view those that lack these characteristics as something that jeopardises future innovation and kills common sense. The reintroduction of humanized workplace has begun. Everything we have intuitively learned is from basic human experience by living in an empathetic world – not by staring at a tablet 24/7.

Focus on what actually makes people productive. We have often talked about "work-life balance" and the increasing pressure to establish this. However, perhaps this has also meant that the word order has changed so that we now refer to a "live-work balance", which resonates with a new discussion about what actually makes people productive. This is about so much more than the physical workplace, about everything we associate with the workplace; fantastic on-boarding programmes that ensure that new colleagues quickly become part of a social and professional community, programmes for physical and mental health, healthy diet and advice about good health in balance, it is about sustainable design and bringing nature into our offices, about the company's CSR policy (corporate social responsibility) and overall opinion, and it is about flexibility – setting work free so that employees can choose where they work most productively – depending on the task, with whom to work, when to be available and finally in a balanced *live-work* perspective on their own terms.

The great thing about the investments that facilitate all of this, and which many top management may think is a step too far in terms of what they must commit to financially to ensure employee attraction, retention and productivity, is that in a sea of robust field studies it has already been documented that this focus delivers a significant return on investment compared to the original investment. We see a new human-centric approach to cost optimisation, where investing in what actually makes us productive results in a multiplied return to increased productivity, increased health, increased affiliation and much more – we deliver on both productivity and stay focused on costs.

Sustainability - a growing movement to make a contribution. Climate change has gradually been accepted as a reality that requires action. It has become socially unacceptable not to actively address climate change and consequently have an active sustainability policy. Employees choose organisations that try to do something for the climate, to combat poverty, encourage lifelong learning and the enlightening of organisations that do not relate to it. Every day, through their work, the next generation wants to have contributed to a more sustainable world. There is a growing awareness of a future in which "net zero energy" is the goal for investment strategies - most recently with Blackrock, which now requires a clear strategy for sustainability in all future investments. Deloitte has just conducted a global survey of 2,200 top executives, who mention sustainability rather than health and inequality as the most important challenge in the next 10 years. And this is NOW!

Curated experiences such as the 'staging' of the human empathetic organisation. Most organisations these days are aware that they have to offer their employees a little more than canteens, dry-cleaning and bicycle repair schemes. The abovementioned incentives designed to ensure that organisations deliver on attracting and retaining employees, as well as maintaining focus on productivity, are also about staging the many other incentives in terms of health, well-being, collegial community, on-boarding, lifelong learning, healthy diet and nutrition, sustainability and the organisation's overall ROLE. The discussion for service in a facility management world moves from Facility Management to "Experience & People Management", from "one size fits all" service deliveries, to "on demand, individual, customised service experiences"! In future, this will be the glue that binds the organisation's culture together, which every day, actually clarifies the organisation's role and ensures that a number of initiatives contribute to a

better working life in balance on a daily basis. Those service employees who deliver on this task have a "license to act". They should not merely tick a long to do list but do what makes sense in the given situation. This will elevate service to a new level and ensures both productivity and empathy!

If we succeed in this, there is no doubt in my mind that our working environments post-COVID-19 will be healthier, more sustainable, in a better live-work balance, more productive, empathetic and more enjoyable to be part of!

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