



The hybrid workplace offers new challenges for senior management

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By Kristine Seest

Many employees enjoy working from home, but it provides senior management with a new task of preserving the culture, ensuring the knowledge sharing and maintaining the internal collaboration.

Senior management has been given a new task. The framework for collaboration, relationships and results has changed with COVID-19. Many employees are no longer in the office every day, and a significant part of the remote work, that was introduced as a necessity, is here to stay. The changes have produced many positive results, but the new and flexible working conditions have also led to new considerations.

Managing a hybrid workplace was the theme at the recent meeting of the Network on Strategic Health and Wellbeing, facilitated by WTW. Here, Management Consultant Hanne V. Moltke from New Stories gave a presentation on the topics and focus areas that are important to consider for managers in hybrid workplaces.

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There is a big difference between physical distance, mental distance and relational distance

Hanne V. Moltke | Management Consultant

»Getting things done and succeeding with your tasks, provides wellbeing and job satisfaction. Therefore, it is great that employees in hybrid workplaces can do their jobs in the way they find best. But we are also at a point where we need to be aware of how the changes influence the company's overall needs. When we assess the effects of remote working, we must remember that there is a big difference between physical distance,

mental distance and relational distance,« says Hanne V. Moltke.

Quality and collaboration

She believes that the employees' flexible working conditions have created new challenges for senior management, which must now make sure that the flexible conditions do not have a negative impact on quality and the relations within the company.

»As an employee, you are essential for others to succeed. Therefore, the working environment and the conditions that provide the basis for relationships are very important. It should not simply be the individual employee's calendar that determines where and how to work. Flexibility can make perfect sense, but it should always be the task at hand that is the deciding factor in order to maintain quality, collaboration and innovation,« says Hanne V. Moltke.

She mentions meetings as one of the areas where management needs to decide on a policy, so that the organization knows which form of meeting to choose. According to her, not all meetings are suitable to be held virtually, because there are different needs in different teams in the organization. Therefore, it should be the task and aim that should decide the meeting form.

Flexibility and culture

Wellbeing Specialist Camilla Dahl Jensen from Novozymes is a member of the Network on Strategic Health and Wellbeing, and she believes that the lockdown proved that flexibility works.

»Working from home during the pandemic was a pressure test that the company and the employees passed with flying colours. The employees experienced great trust across the organization, and it was rewarded with high levels of job satisfaction and productivity,« says Camilla Dahl Jensen.

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It's about preserving the culture – for the benefit of the employees who are already here, but also for the new ones who are joining

Camilla Dahl Jensen | Wellbeing Specialist

She says that, along the way, Novozymes has been aware of and considered how working from home can potentially affect the company culture.

»Right now, we are focused on preserving the culture and maintaining the informal touchpoints. Something special happens when we are together in the office, and we have therefore, since the pandemic, introduced a new Flexibility Policy, where the focus is on Office First. As a workplace, we want to offer flexibility while aligning when people are expected to be present. It's about preserving the culture – for the benefit of the

employees who are already here, but also for the new ones who are joining,« says Camilla Dahl Jensen.

Innovation and reflection

HR Director Thomas Thorsøe from Kemp & Lauritzen is also part of the network, and he agrees that it is important to balance the flexibility.

»We create and develop when we are physically together, and the company needs a sense of community. Therefore, some structures need to be in place for that. But at the same time, employees must have a certain degree of self-determination and the opportunity to work from home, where it is more peaceful, and they have time to reflect. I believe this creates balance, peace of mind and happiness among employees,« says Thomas Thorsøe, who finds it crucial that there is mutual trust between managers and employees.

»I personally believe that we as management must trust our employees when they are working from home. We have to set them free to plan and manage their day themselves. You should be careful not to fill their calendars with back-to-back Microsoft Teams meetings and not to check their activity level. A sensible approach to working from home can create a good work-life balance and provide room for peace

and reflection. But there is a risk of destroying the wellbeing and the good balance if the employee ends up with a guilty conscience about not being in the office and therefore feels forced to fill up the home working days with Microsoft Teams meetings,« says Thomas Thorsøe.

Flexibility and community

Hanne V. Moltke also believes that it is necessary to create a framework for balanced flexibility with respect for the communal requirements.

»Relationships and emotional trust are more difficult to achieve if there are colleagues we only meet virtually. Virtual meetings can support the community, but it requires that the manager makes sure that everyone is involved and has their say. Managing virtual meetings requires a different set of skills than

physical meetings. And you can't have on the job training from home, and that is something that you also have to factor in when you create a balanced flexibility,« says Hanne V. Moltke.

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Working from home can create a good work-life balance and provide room for peace and reflection

Thomas Thorsøe | HR Director

Hanne V. Moltke, Camilla Dahl Jensen and Thomas Thorsøe all agree that onboarding new colleagues is an important issue when deciding on an organization's flexible working conditions.

Hanne V. Moltke says that the development of principles and framework for flexible working should not only be left up to the Human Resources department. And she encourages senior management of hybrid organizations to support

employee wellbeing, focus on the task at hand and preserve the cohesion of the organization. According to her, senior management can, for example, start by answering questions such as:

- Can our tasks be solved better in a more hybrid framework?
- How can we ensure a sense of belonging and a good working community when we increase flexibility?
- How can we ensure attentive and holistic management when more people are working from home?

WTW's Corporate Health & Wellbeing division offers specialized advice in matters related to health and wellbeing. In May 2022, the Network on Strategic Health and Wellbeing was established as a forum for WTW clients to spar with and inspire each other. The network has members from 25 companies and is made up of two groups – east and west of the Great Belt.

Hanne V. Moltke is a partner in the consulting firm New Stories. In 2022, she and the company's two other partners published the book 'Hybrid management – collaboration across time and place'.