

## **New Work after Corona - now more than ever!**

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The concept of "New Work" is less than four decades old, initiated by Frithjof Bergmann, who founded the first center for "New Work" in Flint, Michigan, USA in 1984. Since that time, many concepts have developed around New Work - from the use of digital tools to the "colorful" design of the physical work environment. In practice, these concepts have been tried out for some time - with great success! When Google builds a slide into the office building, Adidas lets its employees work on beanbags or the employees of TeamBank in Nuremberg hold meetings in a "jungle", these are just a few of many successful examples of modern New Work concepts. As the scientific community and also our own research projects have shown, this generally leads to numerous advantages, such as higher employee satisfaction, lower fluctuation, greater attractiveness as an employer, more innovations, but also higher productivity per unit area and cost savings due to less space requirements. However, possible problem areas must not be ignored - not all employees feel comfortable in the new working environments. And yet the advantages of the concept seem to clearly outweigh the disadvantages for all those involved.

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced almost all companies to send up to 100% of their employees home, in order to work remotely. At the same time, media increasingly called for more focus on the "really important things" in a crisis, instead of wasting time with the "colourful design of office space". Is the New Work concept at an end again? We firmly believe that it is not! These statements show once again that the New Work concept is not fully understood by the majority of people. After all, it is by no means just about the colourful design of offices - behind New Work lies a much greater change in the world of work than many people are aware of. And Covid-19 has already and will continue to accelerate this change towards a new form of work.

### **Corona as an innovation accelerator**

Through Covid-19, many were forced to try out a new form of working at home that at least comes close to the New Work concept in terms of self-determined jobs and working hours. The experiences of the last few months make it clear that office space and thus costs can be saved by a greater use of remote work arrangements. It also shows that, contrary to expectations, employees that work from home are not less productive than in the office - in fact, many even report higher time efficiency, as work can be done in a much more concentrated manner and without distraction. Of course, this only applies if the own children do not have to be looked after at home during work or other activities cause (permanent) distractions. Also, workplaces at home often do not comply with company ergonomic regulations - this is where companies still have to work on. Nevertheless, Corona has forced many people to try out a new working environment and concept, which can prove beneficial to everyone, even when the need for remote work regulation no longer exists.

But what about creative work, e.g. on new products or services, which might not be so easy to do via digital communication channels? This is probably where the greatest limitations of the remote work solution lie, because there is no longer any spontaneous interaction, as colleagues cannot be met by chance. In addition, there are no casual conversations in which you could spontaneously get involved if you had something to contribute. These small value

contributions are difficult to organize through remote work. Especially the creativity in teams lives from spontaneous, informal (and also accidental) encounters and therefore cannot unfold in sufficient form at 100% remote work. The company and the office are the "market place for innovations". It is often loud and colourful - sometimes even a bit chaotic - there. But this is how new ideas are born! Nevertheless, there are first digital tools, such as online-based whiteboard solutions, with which teams can sketch out ideas together as in a physical meeting room. Nevertheless, often nothing works without appropriate interpersonal relationships.

### **In search of the superior synthesis**

In the end, however, both office work and remote work are needed in order to be able to carry out the various activities accordingly - and this again corresponds completely with the "New Work" philosophy. Each form of work has its own peculiarities and offers the best possible conditions for innovative and/or efficient and effective completion of the task. We have to understand that there is a variety of activities in working life that should be supported by a variety of different working environments and working conditions. Covid-19 has just made it clear that people, teams and whole organizations can create many different working environments to suit the different activities in the workplace.

All in all, Covid-19 has broken with the traditional way of thinking that a permanent workplace is indispensable. Employees are forced to try out both forms of work and can thus gain experience more quickly with the advantages and disadvantages of both forms of work. In the following, the aim is to create a superior synthesis of both forms of work, as envisaged by the "New Work" concept. Corona thus proves to be an accelerator in the New Work learning curve.