

Tomorrow's Workplace: More like home?

Stuttgart, Germany, May 13, 2020 – As workers lucky enough to work from home slip into the comfort of their couches to keep the deadly pandemic at bay, it is important to bear in mind that a variant of home-working has always been there at every point of the modern-day workplace evolution. From ancient craftspeople to hunters and small farmers, each generally had their workshops and hunting grounds in close proximity of their homes. It wasn't until the onset of the industrial revolution in the 18th century which in some ways laid the foundations for working in a single designated building. And it was only in the last century that we saw the birth of the office-cubicle, personal computers, internet and wireless telecommunications followed by an onslaught of social media and network platforms in the new millennium. The adjoining paraphernalia not only enabled remote working but transported the contemporary work model to a whole new territory.

So, essentially, we are moving back to where we started from. **Salla Lardot, Head of User Experience at Drees & Sommer Netherlands, commented:** *"The origins of flex working are in the United States, where employees could use time more efficiently and enjoy the benefits of both worlds; the buzz in the office and the quiet environment at home.*

"Around 2012, tech giant Yahoo called their remote workers back to the offices because face-to-face interaction fosters a more collaborative and innovative culture. Fast-forward to the present day, it is both employers and employees have started to share the sentiment in their current state of 'forced isolation'. While many wholeheartedly embrace the benefits of working from home, others are missing the sense of community, serendipitous encounters and teamwork. In the past weeks, everyone has been missing the freedom of choice and the possibility to work in their preferred environment." Salla argues that when we make a return to normality, there is a good chance that the workforce would be split into two opposite groups.

She adds: "One group would want to continue enjoying the advantages of remote working while the other, having missed the social aspect would like to go back to the office, full-time. This will have a substantial impact on the future workplace design. A workplace needs to provide for both the quiet individualised workplace and the 'home feel' but also the social, collaborative and innovative environment. Workplace concepts that are responsive to changing trends and meet the needs of employees are more successful."

At the turn of the century, our modern workplace had to shake things up to adapt to the demands of globalisation, digitisation, personalisation and the 'war for talent'. Drees & Sommer has been alive to these changes in the real estate sector. It has delivered successful projects by conducting user requirements analysis and drawing up space allocation plans based on new demands of companies. In **Switzerland**, Drees & Sommer was commissioned to shift the headquarters of **Vorwerk International & Co. KmG** in Wollerau and prepare a new building that meets the renewed requirements of the company and facilitate growth. The fulcrum of the concept was on functionality and the human appeal. The outdoor area included the company's garden and roof terraces that were also redesigned. The result is a state-of-the-art, flexible office concept that complies with the company's corporate design and modern furnishings.

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This human appeal would be a major factor in determining future workplace models. Millennials and even younger employees joining the workforce today already demand user-centric and agile structures. Once this crisis is over, each individual will come out of it with their own diverse experiences. How will employers cope with the new dynamics? While a perfect solution may not be in the offing, building owners would need a finger on the pulse of occupiers and offer a range of choices.

Giulio Castegini, Head of Design at Drees & Sommer, says: *“Remote working will need to be considered while developing workplace concepts. Users will not work from the same location every day. With a new space, an attractive location, new design and new furniture, it is by no means enough to introduce new working environments that satisfy employees. This is why B and C locations are also becoming interesting for investors, as they offer attractive alternatives compared to overcrowded commercial property markets. This would also lead to more desk sharing which may ultimately result in lower stress on space in offices. Contracts with long terms (ten years and more) and expansion space in-stock may become extinct. Companies will rent less space for shorter periods.”*

In this Together

This will pave the way for more multi or mixed-used concepts and co-working places. The notion that under a single roof: freelancers, small businesses, start-ups and non-profits are working together creates a feeling of camaraderie, collaboration and breeds creativity. A modern co-working establishment offers greater freedom and networking opportunities alongside.

Experts at Drees & Sommer analyse buildings and create workable solutions by anticipating such working, living and co-creating environments. For the company, innovation begins at home. Its Innovation Hub in Stuttgart offers space for a wide range of uses on three levels: open-plan, interdisciplinary office, seminar areas, individual spaces, Executive Board offices, and spacious zones that are designed to promote communication during breaks. The former industrial bookbindery was preserved and transferred for the new mixed-use with some adaptations. Here, the leading European real estate consultancy shares the space with start-ups, working together to create disruptive business models.

Change Management

Analytical tools can help collate employee work practices, meeting situations, and the resources they require. Change Management can identify these evolving dynamic transitions in a company and create the groundwork for a customised space and function programme. This factors in the characteristics of the work environment that increase employees’ satisfaction and lead to higher work efficiency. Team leaders need to be prepared for the new virtual or physical office concept – where they will need to take their employees on a journey into the new workplace.

In 2019, **Dutch publishing company Sdu** moved to their new headquarters in **the Hague** to a building which previously housed the International Criminal Court. Drees & Sommer had to develop a workplace concept and interior design to stimulate a new way of working and collaborating. A coordinated workplace and meeting room, custom-made furniture, planting and styling of the spaces were designed to meet the ambition and needs of the new users of the building. The employers felt that the changed set-up led to a different way of working including

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flexible working and users were free to carry out activities according to their convenience and in a place of their liking.

Health is Wealth

“The current spurt in protective measures and the increasing health awareness of the population, a healthy environment is becoming more important in everyday working life as well. This also includes using health-promoting materials in building and interior design,” adds Giulio Castegini.

In the end, it all boils down to the user experience which encompasses all aspects of employees’ interaction with the company, its services and products. It is the art of forging technology, functionality, design, facility services and branding into an 'experience' that strengthens the 'vibe' in a company and contributes to its success. The ultimate goal is to strike the right balance between the demand of the employees and supply (opportunities) from the employers that will strengthen a team by creating a positive user experience in a future-oriented work environment.

For information see: [Work environments: Maintaining operation and restart](#)

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