

Velliv

"Unmute"

– reflections on the new flexible working life



"The process of adopting new behaviours in the workplace still takes place at a human pace."

– Dr. Michael Parke of the London Business School

"Unmute"

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There are many surveys¹ on the new flexible working life with more time working from home. Most of these surveys show that an increase in the number of people working from home is positive because it promotes flexibility and freedom, people experience fewer distractions, greater efficiency and are more in control of their own working day.

But not everybody is doing well in the situation. A Danish survey² has shown that 40% did not increase their productivity. This may be due to the feeling that the boundaries between working hours and leisure time are blurred so that you feel you are never 100% at work – or 100% off work. As a result, we end up working too much – or we take too few breaks and get very little exercise because we no longer travel to and from meetings, for instance.

And then there is the important human reaction to feeling overlooked, forgotten or insecure when you no longer get together or meet by chance at the coffee machine³. The impact of this may be more worries, more stress and loss of motivation and the feeling that your work isn't meaningful.

Finally, distance management is simply a challenge, calling for a new way of managing. When it is successful, it is because there are good and strong relationships

between manager and employees and between colleagues. Also, a culture of trust is vital for good virtual meetings and efficient working from home.

To avoid the undesirable effects of the changed working conditions, it may be a good idea for management teams to:

- have a chat about the need for governance when employees work from home. What do employees need? How can employees get a feeling that their nearest manager is visible? How are employees best involved?
- focus on cohesion and community, making room for discussion about the feeling of solidarity among employees and colleagues. How may a feeling of cohesion and community be revitalised? How may colleagues "rediscover" the chat by the coffee machine when working from home?

With the many new ways of collaborating it may be important for a superior to carefully align expectations with regard to duties, collaboration and, not least, the well-being of employees.

¹ THE FUTURE OF WORK AND DIGITAL WELLBEING, The Economist and The Impact of COVID-19 on Employee Engagement, Peakon 2020

² DTU Management, May 2020

³ Corona – NFA 2020

Strengthen your distance management?

1. Ensure alignment of expectations for almost any task! Fixed and flexible hours, response times, performance requirements, self-management – the list is long. If you are in doubt, don't be – discuss expectations with your employees, and do so systematically and frequently.
2. Shorten the distance. The channel of communication you choose must bring you closer together. Find the best way of communicating with different employees and keep track of the communication by having a weekly overview.
3. Formalise the informal. Plan social phone calls, joint coffee breaks, "good morning" or "thank you for today" chat times. It is not a waste of time or inefficient.
4. Determine clear structures for channels of communication. What platforms (for instance MS Teams, Zoom, Slack, Messenger, email, text messages or telephone) do you use and when. Define a mutual agreement on rules for this so that you build cohesion.
5. Consider virtual meetings a form of team building. Do not spend the time on "review of", "since last time" and "round the table". Create – together – a script for getting as much interaction as possible and strengthening the work community and the relationships.

Example of a communications overview with your team⁴:

	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Date										
Who	Where	Status	Where	Status	Where	Status	Where	Status	Where	Status
Amanda	Telephone	✓	MS Teams meeting	✓			1:1		Teams meeting	
Poul	Skype	✓			Coffee machine		Møde		Teams meeting	
George	Coffee machine		Telephone	✓			Skype		Teams meeting	
Louise	Meeting	✓	Walk'n'talk		Mail	✓			Telephone	

⁴ Inspired by Tænk tanken Bæredygtigt Arbejdsliv, 2019



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Virtual well-being?

Several senior managers tell that they have taken many walks with their employees to ensure that they have an understanding of their employees' well-being.

Because from the time of evolution we are programmed to function in social groups, the special brain cells – mirror neurons – are used subconsciously when we are in meetings where we often try to become part of a group by mimicking the behaviour of the other participants.

When the meeting is moved outside, and we walk shoulder to shoulder, many find that they have better and deeper conversations. It may be because the brain must not constantly try to make an effort to adjust to the other person, and the visual impressions we get from trees and the sky have a soothing effect. In this way, mental capacity is released, and therefore you often get more and better creative ideas, and not least quiet time for thinking because a break in the conversational flow may feel less awkward if you move about together rather than sitting across each other.

Many feel that they can get a good understanding of employees' well-being by asking them how they feel. If you do this virtually in a large group, it would be only human to try to evade the issue if you don't feel that good as it may be difficult to predict how the meeting will turn out.

If you as manager wish to address the issue of not feeling well at work or signs of beginning stressed, you may instead look out for signs in the behaviour of the individual employees. These may include:

- Changes in response, for instance shorter emails without a name
- Speaks considerably less – both in meetings and on a one-on-one basis
- Is more short-tempered
- Lack of energy "I'm not really able to commit to anything more"
- Demotivation, for instance, reluctance to take on new duties at work
- Too many concerns about everything both private or workrelated

So instead of asking the direct question "How are you" – it may be more productive to make enquiries into specific behaviours, such as "I have noticed that you no longer meet deadlines". In this way, it may be easier to steer the conversation towards any issue that may be on the employee's mind and drains him or her of energy. You may also find inspiration in the materials that Velliv has prepared in "The stress prevention concept".



Community under pressure



As a manager you carry a heavy responsibility for your employee's well-being. So keep finding new ways to up their spirits.

"I miss being in the good company of my colleagues, informal get-togethers and spontaneous laughs" is often heard in the corridors and at virtual meetings. Humans are social beings, and we need each other to build and maintain the corporate culture. The flexible working life make it even more important to find methods to create a feeling of belonging. "Virtual" work may reinforce the silo between colleagues because you do not seek out as many "unplanned conversations" with colleagues whom you used to meet by the coffee machine or at lunch.

Maybe you are feeling flat because you have already tried a virtual Friday bar, a Kahoot game about the team's favourite dishes, "guess who lives here" or on-line bingo?

However, it is of vital importance that you as a manager contribute to keeping up the momentum because you carry a heavy responsibility for your employees' well-being. So continue to find new ways of keeping up their spirits.

You may ensure structure by:

- **Introducing day-to-day routines that make it easier to achieve a work-life balance. For instance check-ins in the morning.**
- **Inviting others for a one-on-one online walk where you walk together apart.**
- **Supporting 10 minutes' office exercise once a week.**



Half-day workshop in nature

You could also use the new team building in nature initiative that Velliv has developed in consultation with ViNatur. As a Velliv customer, you get a 30% discount off an event.

With this half-day workshop, you will be given the opportunity to do something extraordinary to strengthen the cohesion and feeling of belonging in the organisation. All activities are designed to comply with the current Corona restrictions.

Benefits from the workshop:

- **Improved feeling of belonging**
- **Increased creativity and innovative thinking**
- **Better mental health**
- **Greater physical well-being**
- **More calm and energy**

Read more in the material "Workshop in nature".

Support and help from Velliv

We would like to provide help and support so that you can ensure your employees a good, productive and long working life. Feel free to use:

Velliv's Well-being Hotline

Your employees will be given help to meet any physical or mental challenges facing them in their working life. The hotline is anonymous and the number is **+45 70 23 50 52**.

Health Team

This is for employees who experience ongoing pain or mental dissatisfaction that is not dealt with under a health insurance/public health measures or perhaps under your own schemes. The number to call is **+45 70 33 37 07**.

As a manager and HR person you are also welcome to contact the two services.

In addition, we offer feedback and coaching, for instance in relation to employees that are off sick or employees that risk going on sick leave. We provide you with guidance as how the employee can stay in his or her job under the current support options available in the public system and help you draw up a good "return-to-work" plan. Please also feel free to call our social advisers at telephone number **+45 70 33 37 03**.



**Velliv, Pension &
Livsforsikring A/S**

Lautrupvang 10
2750 Ballerup

Telephone: +45 70 33 99 99
kontakt@velliv.dk
CVR-nr. 24260577

www.velliv.dk

Velliv

