

Velliv

Re-boarding

- and our new work reality

"I am really looking forward to it, and I am tingling with excitement thinking about how we will soon be able to live our normal lives together again.

But yesterday, when I was sitting on my couch – where I have been sitting quite a lot by now – various other feelings also passed through my body. The one feeling that I felt the strongest, I would call reopening anxiety. I suddenly got very nervous."

Claus



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- and our new work reality

After a year of lockdown restrictions, remote working and a lack of in-office contact with our colleagues, time has now come to go back to work.

The lockdown has brought good things like reflection, reduced stress and comfort whereas the reopening may bring anxiety and mental distress to some. So how do we prepare ourselves for new ways of working and interacting in group settings again after such a long period of alone time?

Experience and studies show that employees want the flexibility to work from home and that offering a hybrid work model is a key factor to companies in attracting and retaining employees. To many, the increased flexibility, saving time and money for commuting and greater work control are seen as positive factors.

When employees – and especially new employees – want to work in office a couple of days each week, it is for the social interaction, for the possibility to promote and strengthen collaboration across teams and departments and being aligned to the company's values, work culture and career opportunities.

Reopening anxiety is a new term

The anxiety, worries or uneasiness about the reopening, and about returning to the world as we knew it is called "reopening anxiety". It is not a diagnosis, but a term used for expectation pressure, the pressure of failure or breaking the habits of lockdown.

¹ Six Key Advantages and Disadvantages of Working from Home in Europe during COVID-19, DTU Management, May 2020

What hybrid work model to choose?

There is a variety of models to choose from when it comes to finding the best match for the company, ranging from "everyone showing up for work", two-three weekly mandatory working-from-home days to working anytime and anywhere. So, the question is whether there is a conventional way of ensuring the perfect office and home working balance?

One study showed that employees' need to physically attend work also depended on their duties and who else would be there. The different hybrid work models offer advantages and opportunities, see the table on the right for examples.

The best model depends on:

- senior management's approach
- how the hybrid work model is structured – optional/mandatory
- the nature of duties
- the stage of the project
- the level of belonging and trust in the relations and culture in the team and in the organisation
- how good managers are at practising distance management
- what the individual employees need in order to work from home or anywhere
- whether you are newly employed or have only recently joined a new team
- how the company can fulfil the requirements under occupational health legislation.

100% manager driven

Managers alone decide how often employees may work from home.

Hybrid-model

Could be a fixed number of days working from home.

Employee driven

Employees alone decide how often they want to work from home

Advantages

It is easy for managers to follow up on the employee performance as well as well-being on a daily basis because the manager decides the number of in-office days per week.

It may be easier to execute development tasks and create a team spirit where the number of in-office days per week has been clearly defined.

It may be easy for managers to plan and prioritise tasks together with the employee while taking into account the need for deep work and, for example, development meetings.

It may be easier for employees to plan their own working life with the advantages that comes along with that.

Loyal employees experiencing a high degree of responsiveness to their employment conditions, which may in turn have a positive impact on image and recruitment.

To some employees, autonomy – i.e. being able to control your own working day – has had a positive effect on their ability to maintain a high level of motivation and effectiveness.

Disadvantages

If the manager does not feel equipped for practising distance management, it may be difficult to offer the flexibility requested by the employees. Thus, focussing on helping managers who are or have been experiencing special difficulties in that connection is key.

A manager who shies away from conflict risks creating a feeling of injustice, which is something many employees may have a hard time dealing with. One way of reducing this problem could be to include an item on the agenda of each management group meeting to share the experience they have each gained from their practice, thereby establishing common ground. If there are any trade union representatives in the company, it may be useful to train them in the new way of working so that they can support the manager.

Employees who find it very important to work in office or have a poor remote working setting at home will see this as a problem. Individual considerations should therefore be discussed and a plan could be made which can be revised on a regular basis in order to ensure understanding for how working life can function.

It may be difficult for managers who take part in cross-organisational management meetings to work from home on pre-fixed days if they are not the same throughout the organisation. This should be discussed by the management groups in order to ensure coordination or a decision for these meetings to be mainly held on-line.

It takes clear leadership to ensure progress and development, which may be under pressure as a result of the employees never meeting face-to-face. It may be useful for the manager to be clear about what is expected in terms of in-office days.

It still takes time to reach all employees in 1:1 dialogues when they are working from home. The decisive factor in terms of ensuring well-being and preventing stress is close dialogue and the manager's ability to use his or her knowledge about the different team members and their needs to prioritise their own time.



"Yes, it makes a difference, being at the office more often, although these last few days have been quite hectic. It's as if I have to get used to "going to work" again, which is a bit funny as we have been working all the time. But it's just different to be going to the office. Not to mention that it's simply great to see your colleagues again and have a chat and some laughs during the day. It is also really nice to be able to have a chat about a bit of this and that and to get some instant sparring without having to call or set up a Teams meeting!"

Gitte

Special attention in the initial period

It may be quite a daunting experience to sit together with your colleagues again after staying at home for many months – perhaps even more than a year. It is important to appreciate that this is how some people feel. It may thus be a good idea to arrange for a soft and gentle transition. Depending on your guidelines or policies, the manager may for example agree with the employee that he or she will be at the office one or two days per week and then gradually increase the number of in-office days.

May require
**more time for
social interaction**
– meetups at the
coffee machine
take time.

There is a huge
difference in the way
colleagues perceive
and react to things, and
openness and curiosity
is thus necessary.

Some will be
**more sensitive to
sound** and will have to
get used to the many
sounds and voices
once again.

**Remember this
when re-boarding**

**It may take
some getting used
to** on the home front
– like, for example, if the
family has become dog
owners or if the children
have gotten used to be-
ing picked up earlier
than usual.

May result in
reduced efficiency
because of repeated
disruptions and
interruptions.

It should
be possible for the
employees to **hold on to**
their new good work
habits, like going for a
walk, taking breaks
and so on.

There may be
an increased need
for talking about our
**different reactions and
perceptions** in connection
with the new way of work-
ing in a way that will make
everyone feel that they
can make themselves
heard.

Hybrid-model in practice



It is advisable for employers to hold joint meetings, either face-to-face or on-line, with all employees, if they are all expected to take an active part in the meeting. **Employees attending from home will often feel excluded.**

It may also be necessary to find new ways of working with the hybrid work model, with some being at home while others are at the office. The hybrid work model may also be particularly relevant in relation to meetings.

It may be useful to:

- discuss expectations to each other's availability – fixed time and flexitime? And how you can work together to support flexibility and prevent that the work becomes "boundless"
- use "trial and error" – evaluate your meetings on a regular basis in order to find the best way, e.g. talking about optimal business meeting planning and the length of meetings
- be careful as a manager not to give preferential treatment to those who are at the office
- be systematic and regularly follow up on employee well-being – it is advisable to maintain 1:1 in quality and quantity in order to ensure that the expectations of both parties are aligned on a regular basis and to prevent stress
- implement methods to monitor employee well-being, e.g. through the use of pulse surveys or more frequent psycho-social workplace assessments (APVs).



"Being attuned to" your employees

The 1:1 conversation with your employee

Purpose

This tool is designed for HR managers to use for the 1:1 conversation with all employees, and especially with those working from home. It is about ensuring a successful task execution and the employee's well-being.

Questions

Use the questions that are relevant for the individual employee – and take the 1:1 conversations at the frequency needed.

Well-being

- How are you doing these days?
- How do I make sure to pick it up in time if your well-being starts to deteriorate?
- If you notice any signs of the employee not doing so well – share your observations with the employee: I have noticed that...

If the employee expresses concern/shows signs of reduced well-being:

- What is the source of the strain on you? (what duties, situations, cooperative relations, at home?)

And what is it all about?)

- What are you already doing yourself, and what can we do together that would be helpful in your current situation?
- What else would be helpful to you? And how can I contribute?

Task execution

- How is it going with your tasks?
- Is there anything you need to discuss with me in that connection?

Reconnecting with colleagues

- To what extent have you reconnected with your colleagues? (Especially relevant for employees returning from furlough)
- Are there any specific cooperative relations that need to be strengthened right now to improve task execution and well-being?

Rhythm, routines and restitution

- What rhythms and routines help you get through the working day in a good way?
- What do you do to make sure that you get short breaks/"a change of pace" during the day?

Checking in with your team

Purpose

Whether we are working from home or in the office, it affects our task execution, cooperation and well-being. This tool is designed for use in your team to discuss some of the issues which you find it particularly important to find joint answers for.

Questions

- How do we make sure to coordinate our tasks with each other on an ongoing and sufficient basis?
- Is there a temporary need for other meeting fora to support the task execution? If so, which?
- How do we best communicate in relation to what – via email, telephone, "Teams", text messages, face-to-face, etc.?
- How do we make sure to remember appreciating each other?
- What have we missed while being de-connected from our colleagues during the pandemic? And how do we reconnect?
- What, in our experience, can we do for each other to maintain or re-establish our well-being?
- When do we feel connected in our team, and how do we hold on to that?



Support and help from Velliv

We would like to help and support to ensure a good, productive and long working life for your employees. Please do not hesitate using us as a sparring partner:

The Velliv Hotline

The Velliv Hotline is a hotline which you and your employees can call for help with physical as well as mental challenges in working life. The hotline is anonymous and may be reached by phone at **+45 70 23 50 52**.

Velliv's Health Team

The team can help employees suffering from sustained pain or mental ill-health that has not been handled by health insurance/the public system or your own health options. For the Health Team, call **+45 70 33 37 07**.

For managers or HR

If you are a manager or HR, you are also free to contact the two services. We also offer sparring and coaching in connection with employees on sick leave or employees who are at risk of going on sick leave.

Our social advisers are also at your disposal. They can guide you in terms of how the employee can stay in the job with the existing support in the public system and help you in preparing a good return-to-work plan.

Our social advisers are available at **+45 70 33 37 07**. You are also free to use our newly developed distance management dilemma cards for management groups and teams, respectively. You will find them on Pensionsportalen under Health or by contacting your customer relations manager.



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