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New Work - New Office

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design of an alternative working environment

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_Introduction

Last year, our daily work routine changed unexpectedly and drastically from one moment to the next. Suddenly we are sitting in a so-called "home office", which means: anywhere. Instead of sitting in our comfortable office chair, we now sit on a wooden chair in the kitchen, on an armchair next to the bed, sometimes we even lie in it, otherwise the floor has to suffice, maybe even the one in the park, and if the boss is already overdue for our lunch break again, we simply continue to work from the stove while the children are already pushing for help with the next math problem. Especially in dealing with the current situation of social distancing, the issue of the quality of one's own workplace is becoming more and more central.

Many people are expected to show a high degree of flexibility combined with personal responsibility. At the same time, this liveliness holds a lot of potential as a starting point for revolutionizing the world of work. The one-year "home office" intensive test phase has already yielded a number of advantages and disadvantages that can be used as a basis for rethinking and redesigning the way we work:
The current redefinition of home as a place of work makes it increasingly difficult to separate the private and the professional, while the importance of the workplace as a place of social contact is growing. At the same time, the "home office" opens up new possibilities for flexible work arrangements and simplifies the reconciliation of family and career.

But have we now slid headlong into an irrevocable change?
Or will presence in the office be possible again after the crisis? We have looked at the question of what a working environment might look like after a return to the office. Inspired by the current explosiveness around the topic of "new work", the following elaboration focuses on space as a medium to be designed. During our research, one question has become increasingly present to us: If we are to take work home, why can't we take home to work?

Economic and social developments have long called for a fundamental change in the world of work. The existing hierarchical and rigid forms of organization, in which the focus is more on capital than on people, make it difficult to implement needs-oriented changes. In the search for already existing experimental approaches, in which the human being as such is in the center of the work, we found mainly in the field of the educational system. The AGORA school in the Netherlands, for example, gets by completely without school subjects, frontal teaching, classes and even teachers and instead, with the support of so-called process facilitators, gives the students every freedom in designing their timetable and in the way they work. "Giraffenschulen" work according to the principle of non-violent communication, also do not evaluate children with grades and, in addition to meeting their needs, are concerned to give them independence and key communication skills along the way.

But stop a minute... If we are already starting to trust young children to take responsibility for their own actions, what's stopping us from doing the same with adult humans?

Based on our research in the field of non-violent communication and the ideas of the "New Work" movement, we have designed a concrete spatial concept that reflects the current developments towards more personal responsibility and needs orientation and translates them into a future utopia.
In the following, we will present this to you using the fictitious example of "Willing GmbH": The company, which focuses on software development, has an average of 30 to 40 employees. The founding team has consciously decided not to establish rigid hierarchies and to rely on the ability of its employees to organize themselves. Shared values play a central role in this. In the following short "tour" through the company's premises, the connection between ideal values and their spatial manifestation becomes clearly visible.

_Concept

Welcome to our working studio!

At the beginning I would like to introduce you to some of our guidelines, which we follow here for a harmonious living together.
The concept of our cooperation is based on the principle that we are all individual people with feelings and needs and that we are in a constant process of development as persons as well as a group. It is therefore out of the question for us to establish universal rules of conduct. We want to achieve that each of us feels empowered to take responsibility for actions and decisions without being under pressure.
In order to give room for development, there is a special meeting every month in which we all agree on a company guideline or revise it. I'll give you a brief overview of the current contents:
While the arrangement of our working hours is completely up to us and based on the principle of trust, there are some core times in which all colleagues should be present if possible. This, together with our joint lunches and the encounter meetings, strengthens the group feeling in the collegium. In addition, the development meetings and conflict meetings provide the space to further improve the climate of our life together.
You may have noticed that there is a lot of movement here and that there are no fixed workstations. Another central aspect of our collaboration here is the encounter and for this we want to create a working environment that is as dynamic as possible, where we do not remain in unhealthy routines but always keep moving - physically as well as mentally. Changes of environment, both in terms of people and the places that surround one, promote creativity and loosen up the working day. That's why almost all of our rooms have fully equipped workstations that can be used by anyone at any time.

We see our working time as an opportunity and give ourselves the freedom to organize it in the way that suits us best. As a concept for this, we have agreed to divide our premises into areas, each of which is assigned to a human need. I would like to show you a few of them now.

Workstations

This is our central working studio. Since we don't have fixed workstations, you are free to choose where you want to work at any time. If you find a place where you would like to work that is not yet equipped, you can simply take one of our mobile work sets and make yourself comfortable there - even if that place is the park next door or your living room at home. If you feel comfortable there, we don't want to get in the way of you and your flexibility. Here at the entrance, every employee has a personal locker, which is also used as a mailbox. You see, each locker also has a mail slot. Here in this large room, you have height-adjustable desks for your work. By now we know how unhealthy it is to sit all day. Working while standing is good for posture, breathing and concentration. It is very important to us to support the mental and physical health of our employees; after all, healthy employees are also much more productive. We therefore also pay attention to good lighting, for example. The large window areas let plenty of light into the room during the day, and our intelligent lighting system ensures effective pleasant room lighting even in the dark. The partition walls, which are distributed around the room, serve on the one hand to loosen up the room, but on the other hand they are responsible for optimizing the acoustics, just like the soundproofing elements on the walls and ceiling. Here behind this large room divider is the creative area. This is what I'll show you next.

Creative Area

Next door, people mainly work individually at desks. This, on the other hand, is the ideal place for social exchange as well as creative meetings. The seating landscape here is completely modular and can be rearranged at any time or completely moved aside when space is needed. The whiteboards and pinboards can be used to quickly record any thoughts. There are also plenty of materials available here for creative workshops. In addition, our digital bulletin board is located here, on which everyone can participate. On the bulletin board, appointments are recorded, questions are asked that concern the college, and information is exchanged. Since the board can be accessed from anywhere via an app, this is especially helpful for employees who are not in the office at the time.   You may have noticed that our work studio can get pretty lively at times. Of course, there are several ways to escape this for some time. For conference calls, for example, there are booths like the one you see back there. They are well isolated, so you can fully concentrate on your conversation. But if you just need some peace and quiet to work, the door here leads to the quiet room.

Quiet Room

Whispering is the order of the day here. The workstations are shielded by low partition walls and there are several seating niches. This is where people work or read in a concentrated manner. We attach great importance to the personal training of our employees. Part of the working time is reserved for expanding one's own knowledge and skills. Colleagues can use this time to attend workshops or courses. Or they can use the literature available here. Today, we are experiencing the transition from an industrial to a knowledge society. Knowledge is a great personal resource and an enormous success factor for our company. It only makes sense for us to invest in it.   Of course, many colleagues also use it in a completely different way. After all, it's a proven fact that people can only work in a concentrated manner for something like four to six hours. These niches here can be closed and thus used for a short nap. It's refreshing, and then it's back to work.

Meeting Room

Over here, we move on to the meeting space. In the age of digitalization, a large part of work is no longer tied to a specific location. However, this increase in flexibility is accompanied by a simultaneous decrease in personal contact during working hours. A recent study by the Fraunhofer Institute on the subject of satisfaction in the "home office" shows that the lack of social and informal exchange in the "home office" is particularly negatively associated with employee satisfaction. We therefore strive to promote precisely this exchange. For us, the potential of a shared workplace clearly lies in the physical proximity to our colleagues. Encounter, contact, exchange, trust and connection are ever-present needs, and we would like to invite our employees to bring these to work and integrate them into their personal daily work routine.

While spontaneous conversations are therefore welcome in any area, in this area we want to offer the space for an exchange on personal and emotional topics. Random encounters can occur here, where the focus is clearly on listening and the mutual gift of empathy. This strengthens personal relationships among our employees, paves the way for new contacts, especially across departments, avoids tensions due to pent-up emotions and, all in all, increases general satisfaction, health and the working atmosphere. Regular training sessions are held here in which precisely this competence of meeting one's interlocutor with honest compassion can be practiced.

Movement Area

Here we are now in the movement area. Physical activity refreshes the mind and small movement breaks promote productivity and give room to creativity. In addition to regularly scheduled ten-minute mini-mobility rounds and thirty-minute intensive workouts, there are also opportunities here to engage in individual physical activity and take a moment to switch off.

It is now widely proven that frequent sitting leads to significant health risks, causes posture problems and pain, and at the same time limits concentration and performance. Therefore, as you have already seen in the central workspace, we try to reduce sitting as much as possible and in this area, we try to compensate for its negative consequences.

James A. Levine describes in his book "Get Up! Why your chair is killing you" that the average person would have to walk at least 2 1/2 hours more a day in order not to negatively affect his physical health. In the book "Sitzen ist das neue Rauchen" Dr. Kelly Starrett adds that after every hour of monotonous work, whether standing or sitting, a ten-minute mobilization period is important. To inform and motivate our employees to take responsibility for their physical health, information events and workshops are also offered regularly in this regard.

Dining Area

I already mentioned our lunches together. This is the place where they are created. In our open kitchen, a randomly mixed team of colleagues cooks a plentiful meal for the entire staff every day. An external cook provides support and coordination. Cooking and eating together strengthens the sense of community and cross-departmental exchange and, in addition, we can learn a lot about healthy nutrition and a healthy lifestyle here. Parents whose children attend our kindergarten can pick them up for cooking and eating and spend this time together with them.

Childcare

It is important to us that we bring people into the company with all their strengths and weaknesses and their whole personality. We want to foster an open corporate culture. For us, this also includes making it possible for parents to bring their child here. We are a young team and after many colleagues expressed the wish, we have organized childcare here. However, harmonious interaction between family life and work starts earlier. For example, we encourage men and women to share parental leave equally. In general, gender equality is important to us. In Germany, women earn on average 18% less than men. At our company, pay depends solely on qualifications and responsibility within the company. Decisions on salary are made by a committee of colleagues.

Roof Garden

Everyone knows how relaxing it is to get out and get some fresh air in between. Meanwhile, it has also been proven that gardening has a positive effect on health. All the senses are engaged, and the physical activity is an effective way to relieve stress. We are also always thrilled when we can use what we have harvested ourselves in the kitchen. Of course, no one is forced to participate in this small garden, but so far everyone has always gladly accepted the offer. Besides the possibility of a relaxing break in the open air, there are also places to work. Under the awning you are even well protected from the rain. In the summer we also organize barbecues here more often.
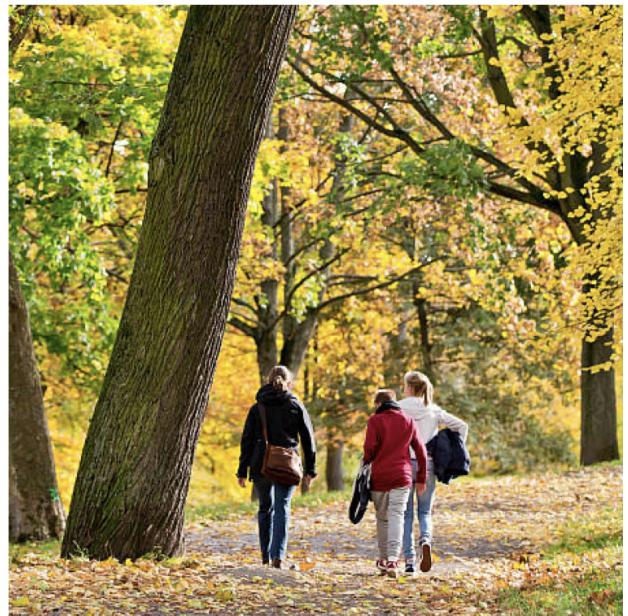
Forest and Meadow

In good weather, our meetings sometimes take place in the nearby park during a walk. A mobile work set can also be taken here. We want to take advantage of the many possibilities available to us today and not limit ourselves to one building when working.

_Perspective

We have now reached the end of the "tour" and leave our utopian "New Office" -
A spatial formulation of the lived "New Work" - culture.
And now it's up to you! The concept needs further elaboration and specification.
How exactly could the shown rooms look like? How the furniture and products in this
office of the future? What new processes need to be integrated into everyday work to
bring the concept to life?
The concrete implementation depends on so many different parameters. The size
and scope of the company's activities can only be mentioned here as an example.
But of course, not all people work in a company either. According to forecasts, the
number of freelancers and self-employed will increase more and more in the future.
How can they also find their place in this concept? Can the areas shown also be
transferred to a co-working space shared by several smaller companies? Where
would adjustments need to take place? Do ideas like open exchange and dropping
all professional masks work at all across companies? Would all companies then have
to be allies of a certain goal and representatives of similar values in some form or
another? And if freelancers work for a certain company and at the same time in a co-
working space, to which ideals are they committed?
Another possible approach concerns implementation in the context of the education
system. We mentioned at the beginning how teaching and learning are already being
rethought in some general education schools. But there is still a great need for action
here as well. The same problems that we observe in the world of work today -
pressure to perform, competitive thinking, psychological stress, lack of independence
- we also see today at many universities. In the existing system, intrinsic motivation to
learn and collaborate with others is suppressed until it dies. Everyone wants to be the
best everywhere, and only what is relevant to the exam is learned. Study, often
praised as the time of self-knowledge and world reflection - sometimes it degenerates
into a pure career step. Machine eats man.
So it is urgently time to consider the approaches now being taken in general
education schools and the world of work in the context of higher education.
How exactly can the rigid hierarchies at many universities be overcome? How can
student collaboration be supported? What spatial options should be available to
students in order to better combine private life and studies?
Especially currently during the Corona pandemic, students often move under the
radar. Their needs are ignored. But they also suffer from social isolation. Just as for
employees in relation to the office, it became clear to many students what a major
role the university plays as a place of mutual exchange. And this role could probably
be expanded in many places - both spatially and in the form of offers for joint
activities. It is up to you to shape this!

_Theoretical Background

As mentioned at the beginning, the Corona pandemic has opened many people's eyes to the upheavals that lie ahead for our way of working in the future. Home office, automation, machine learning - digitalization has an impact on every area of our lives, and this is becoming increasingly apparent when it comes to work. These evolutions offer a great deal of potential for personal development, but of course they also harbor risks. The debate on this topic is not new. The term "New Work", which is frequently used today, is already more than 40 years old. Currently, the topic is once again increasingly in the spotlight. In the run-up to this paper, we examined the background of the "New Work" movement as well as existing theoretical and practical approaches to implementing the theory. We found examples of this in the book "Reinventing Organizations" by Frédéric Laloux and in "Im Grunde gut" by Rutger Bregman. Explanations of the deeper background of economic interrelationships were provided by Fabian Scheidler in his book "Das Ende der Megamaschine". In the following, we will briefly discuss the findings of this reading, which have been incorporated into the development of our spatial concept.

What is meant by "New Work"?

The concept of "New Work" goes back to the philosopher Frithjof Bergmann. His theories were strongly influenced by the increasing automation of the automotive industry in the USA in the 1980s. In his eyes, the elimination of numerous jobs offered people the opportunity to think about what they really want to do for work and how they want to spend their time. It is the great question of purpose. Bergmann's theory questions the concept of wage labor. According to him, this has had its day. Wage labor focuses solely on the end product. Man is only a tool for its production. He submits himself to the work. "New Work" is intended to reverse this relationship. The human being is the center of attention and the work serves the only aim to support the human being in his development and to make him a more perfect, more alive being. "New Work" would thus be the liberation of work as we understand it today. "Having fun" at work, according to Bergmann, is far from enough in this regard. "Fun" is still a long way from fulfillment. But Bergmann also describes a problem with his theory. In order for people to work toward doing what they really really want to do, they would first have to know exactly what that is. And Bergmann doubts that they do. Nevertheless, countless concepts and models for a new world of work have gathered under the term "New Work" in recent years. The ideas sometimes vary greatly and go in completely different directions. What they all have in common, however, is the desire for a new sense of purpose in their own and their company's actions.

Currently, Bergmann's theory is again being discussed with increasing frequency. On the one hand, as already mentioned, this is due to ongoing digitization, which, similar to the situation in the 1970s and 1980s, will lead to the disappearance of many jobs

in the future. On the other hand, post-growth movements also play a major role in the discourse around the new world of work. The destructive power of economic activity geared solely to growth is becoming increasingly clear in view of dwindling resources and the growing number of signs of climate change. People's mental health is also suffering in the existing system due to constant competition and the economically motivated generation of ever new artificial needs. The "Megamaschine", as Fabian Scheidler calls the global functional fabric of economic structures, is reaching its limits in the 21st century. It is a system-immanent crisis of the economy and action is becoming increasingly urgent. More and more people are becoming aware of this. The desire for a meaningful form of cooperation, far from the goal of pure profit maximization, is growing. In his book "Reinventing Organizations," Frédéric Laloux explores the question of what such a form of collaboration might look like and how the transformation toward a new way of working might succeed. Laloux thus provides an approach to implementing the "New Work.

Evolutionary Organizations according to Laloux

Laloux argues that companies should not be seen as machines but as living organisms. These have an inner urge to self-organize and adapt independently to changes.

Self-Management

In the living system, there are no classical power hierarchies. Authority is organized in a decentralized manner. Self-organizing teams take on different tasks in the company, just as within the teams each employee takes on a specific role. Over time, natural hierarchies emerge based on experience, motivation and skills. Changes can be initiated on one's own initiative at any time and problems can therefore no longer simply be blamed on management. Decisions are made in the consultation process, in accordance with the colleagues directly affected, but ultimately on their own authority. The sense of responsibility to colleagues and to the goals and values of the company makes performance control mechanisms superfluous.

Wholeness

The goal is to accept the person with all his or her strengths and weaknesses and to discard the professional masks that normally prevail. This requires a safe environment in which problems can also be shared. Mutual consideration and understanding should take the place of competitiveness and self-promotion. An open feedback culture, non-violent communication and space for collegial reflection are decisive factors for the functioning of such an open corporate culture.

Evolutionary Purpose

As already mentioned, the question of the purpose of one's own and entrepreneurial actions is crucial for the concept of "New Work". Pure capital growth is no longer the goal. Instead, the focus is on adding value for society. Other organizations pursuing

the same goal are regarded as competitors rather than rivals. However, Laloux also understands the "evolutionary purpose" as a principle of corporate development. Instead of making forecasts that then have to be regularly corrected, he advises listening to the organization - the living organism - and helping it follow the path that emerges. Traditional companies look five years into the future and plan for the next year. In evolutionary organizations, instead, they look 20 years into the future and plan for the next day.

Decentralized/ Asynchronous Working

Such a fundamental reorganization of the corporate structure based on self-organization, flat hierarchies, trust and collegiality also provides the optimal framework for a different approach to working time as well as a redefinition of the "workplace". At the moment, decentralized working presents many companies with major challenges, because the usual mechanisms for monitoring performance somehow have to continue. However, where intrinsic motivation, a sense of responsibility and trust make such mechanisms obsolete, decentralized and/ or asynchronous working is much easier to realize. In the future, it will be the results of work that count more than control of working time - a change from a culture of presence to a culture of results. The desire for more flexibility in the organization of working time is so great because it is precisely here that it is decided how well private life and work can be combined. In addition to personal reasons, increasing globalization is also a factor that inevitably leads to new working time models. Digitization plays a decisive role here in the implementation, because if not all colleagues are in the office at the same time anymore, the importance of asynchronous information exchange increases.

As a result of the developments described above, the function of the office is changing. As shown in our concept, it is evolving from a pure workplace to a place of social exchange and creative collaboration. These aspects will probably remain in the future, because as social beings, people need contact with others. For many, the lack of social contact is the most significant negative effect of the "home office." Loneliness is already a widespread disease.

Criticism of "New Work"

As with every debate, there are also numerous critical voices in the context of "New Work". For many, the coordination of a decentralized and/ or asynchronous working team is a major point of criticism. Arrangements for meetings and the otherwise incidental exchange of information in the hallway have to be organized differently than usual.

One problem that many people in the "home office" are currently experiencing is the merging of private life and work. Constant availability, especially in combination with different working times, means that many people can no longer switch off properly. The spatial overlap between home and work presents them with the challenge of mentally separating themselves. Advocates of the "new work" movement use the counterargument that if work is actually regarded as meaningful and fulfilling, a fusion will not be perceived as unpleasant.

On the entrepreneurial side, despite some positive examples of successful organizations, there often remains the fear of productivity losses and therefore of not being able to continue to exist on the market.

In the current absence of an alternative economic system, an idea will ultimately only establish itself permanently if it also proves to be economical enough to sustain itself in the capitalist system.

Nevertheless, it is critical to note that most of the criticisms of "New Work" are voiced from a capitalist perspective. In Frithjof Bergmann's theory there is a clear criticism of capitalism. Those who disregard this fact and use "New Work" solely as a label to show themselves innovative and forward-looking, thereby distort the message and the impact of the idea. It is therefore one of the greatest challenges of the current "New Work" debate not to lose sight of the actual core of the whole thing in the course of the discourse. For many companies, "New Work" only offers a new way to domesticate and exploit their employees. The old thought patterns and operational structures are only slightly adapted to the current course and in the end, everything remains the same.

So we still need courageous pioneers to promote the idea of the new world of work!

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