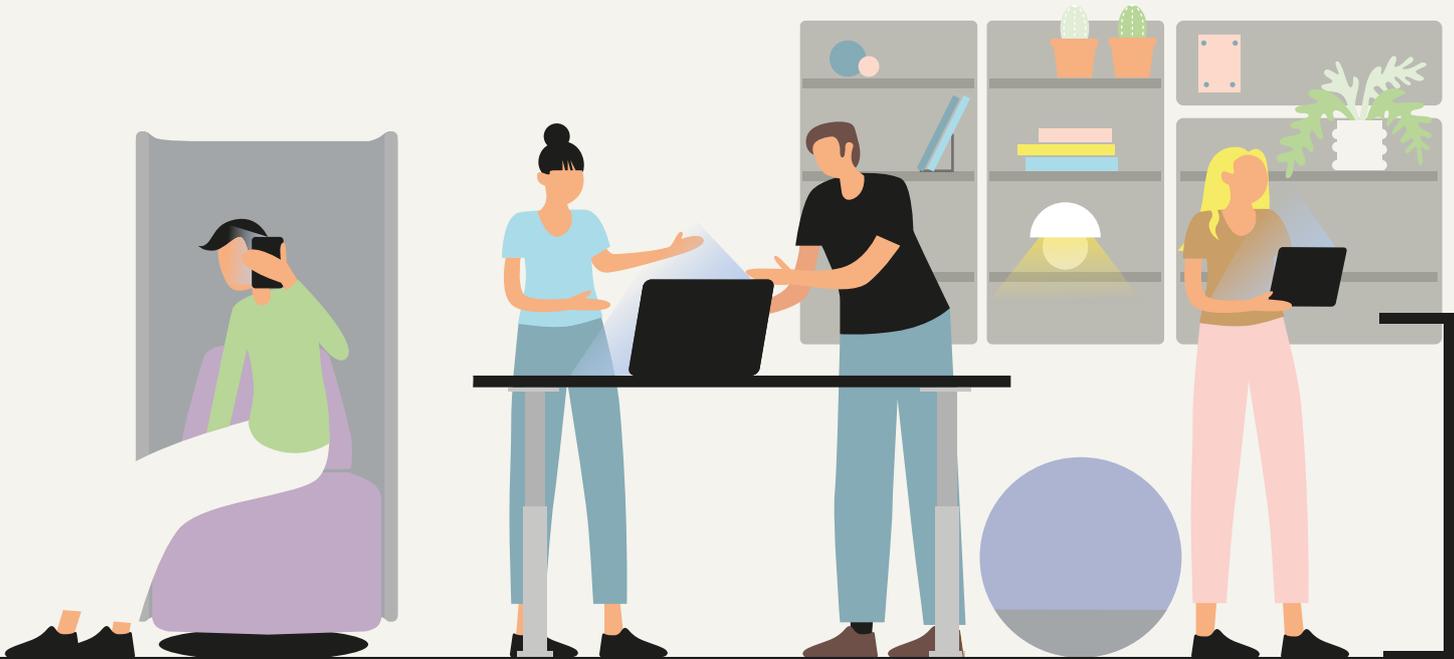


# REDEFINING THE WORKPLACE

THE FUTURE OF THE OFFICE AND  
HOW YOU CAN PREPARE



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# Make Room to Last

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Since our establishment in 1942, we at Kinnarps have been committed to finding and creating the perfect office, moving through work trends, the oil crisis, globalization, free trade areas, digital revolutions, cubicles, open-space offices, activity-based working, downsizes and upsizes. For almost 80 years, we've been Making Room for the ever-changing demands of business, shaping office environments that promote well-being and prosperity. We've worked sustainably and with circularity from the very beginning, always searching for the golden ratio between sustainable environments, people and economy.

Suddenly, we all find ourselves at the brink of a new era. During, and after, the COVID-19 pandemic. Working from home has meant setting many of our beliefs aside, highlighting differences in needs that we didn't know we had, and creating new opportunities for companies to create great places in which to work.

This white paper from Kinnarps: ***Redefining the workplace***, is an initiative dedicated to the future of offices. Finding a new balance between home and the office, ensuring a sustainable and long-lasting future that supports efficiency, both at work and at home.

We believe this is a necessary read for business leaders, office managers, HR professionals and anyone else involved in designing or redesigning the concept of the office.

We hope that you enjoy reading this. Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Kind regards

**Dan Molander**

Sales Director at Kinnarps Group

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# Background

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In writing this white paper, we didn't just want to look at facts and figures on working from home during the pandemic. This is of course interesting and important, and we know there are many facility managers, real estate agents and business owners scratching their heads right now as they try to work out how rents, financing and value will develop during the next period in time. We wanted to take a different perspective; just as important financially, but more linked to the ability of businesses and people to stay focused and to keep turning out great work, creatively and efficiently, in the long-run.

Apart from traditional desktop research, looking at reports from around the world, we have interviewed 25 European professionals in depth on their situations at home and at the office; trying to capture their changed emotions and routines, and drawing insights from what they believe will be the long-lasting future of a thriving workplace.

Different countries have had different levels of lockdown, which of course affects the way in which people perceive possibilities and restrictions. We've tried to look beyond the direct effect of national restrictions, instead focusing on a broader perspective of how changes to the concept of a workplace today, can and should affect decisions you make for your office space in the future.

## REMOTE WORKING IS HERE TO STAY, TO SOME EXTENT AT LEAST

Just as society and cultures change over time, so does the way we look at labour, ways of working and our offices. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many employees were compelled to work from home, regardless of whether they wanted to or were even prepared for it. It's been described as a global experiment in remote working – and the effects are starting to show.

Remote working has proven to be more beneficial in the short-term than either employers or employees could have imagined. Home seems to be a good place for work that requires focus and full concentration. Employees often report higher levels of efficiency when working remotely, both in individual focused tasks and in virtual meetings. Many report more efficient meetings that are much more likely to start on time and don't include any small talk before properly beginning. Some workers have also discovered new ways of meeting that they find especially valuable, such as teleconferences transformed into walking meetings outside, online yoga sessions and virtual coffee chats.

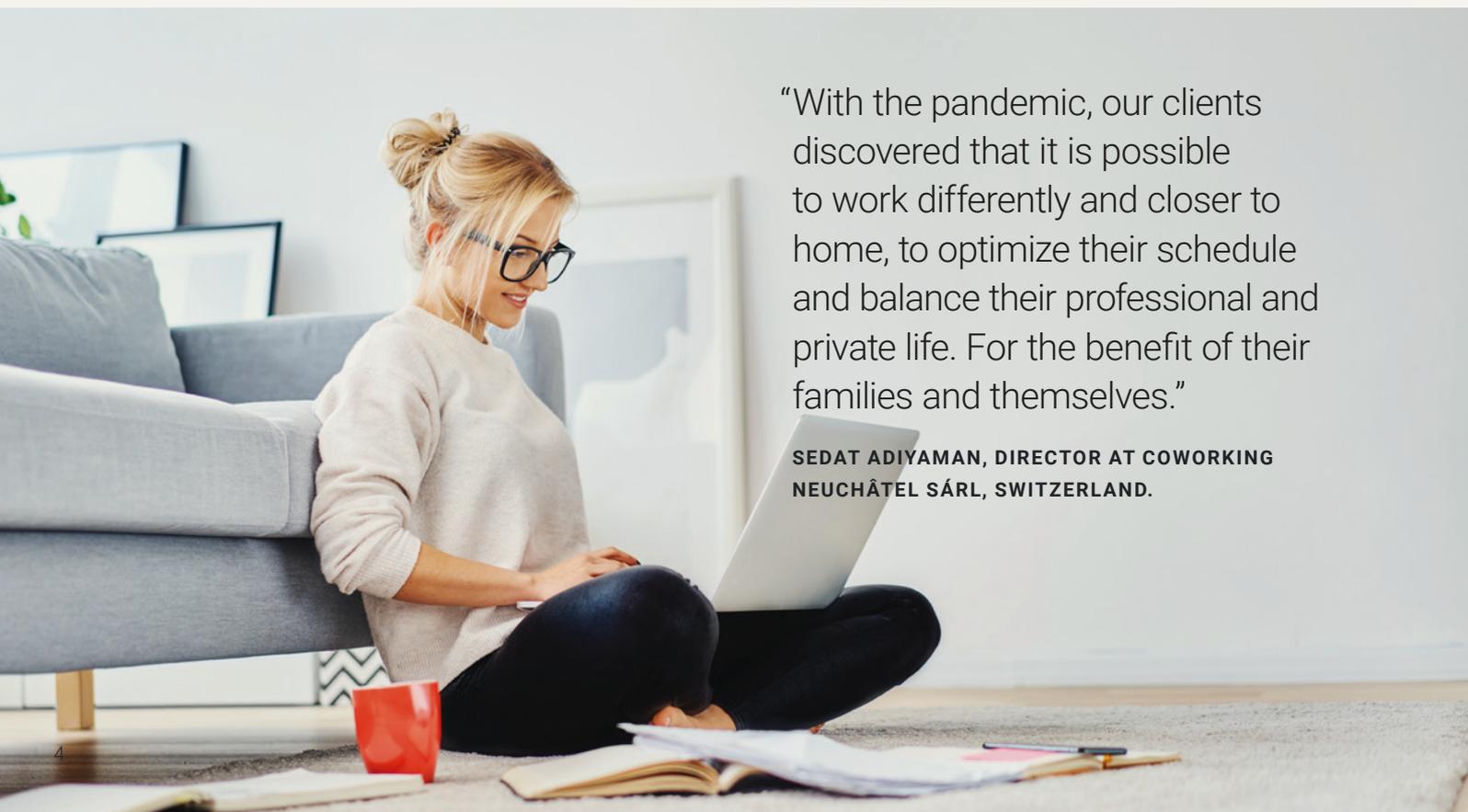
Working from home has also provided employees with more flexibility and for many, a better work-life balance. The time employees save not having to commute to work, combined with the opportunity to do small household chores during breaks, offers more time for both family and other interests. Having this flexibility is meaningful for many people.

Despite the direct short-term benefits of remote working, we can see indications in our interviews that we need to

proceed with caution when drawing conclusions from this. Although some employees have had a great experience working from home, this is not true for everyone. For some, it has been a period of great hardship, and many people experience real difficulties in being able to do a good job from home. For example, those attending to small children during lockdown, living in compact housing or with little opportunity for good ergonomics have had a less positive experience than others.

In addition, having your office at home can make it hard in some cases to ever stop working, perhaps because you suddenly experience that your employer, boss, major clients and so on have moved into your living room. It can be hard to set the boundaries between work and private life when everything happens in the same space. According to a European survey, 27% of those working from home during the pandemic reported working much longer office hours than normal, using their free time to keep up with the perceived expectations of their company.<sup>2</sup>

If employees are given the freedom to work any time and any place during the day, it might be beneficial to have a conversation about the expectations of collaboration. Are you allowed to send emails after 8pm? Are the recipients supposed to answer late at night? What are the rules and boundaries for remote working and collaboration?



“With the pandemic, our clients discovered that it is possible to work differently and closer to home, to optimize their schedule and balance their professional and private life. For the benefit of their families and themselves.”

**SEDAT ADIYAMAN, DIRECTOR AT COWORKING  
NEUCHÂTEL SÂRL, SWITZERLAND.**

# WHAT WE MISS FROM THE OFFICE

## THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE TO FACE INTERACTIONS

In our interviews with professionals all across Europe, as well as in our day-to-day conversations with clients and partners, it has become clear that the thing we miss the most from the office is each other. Without a place to meet and connect with colleagues, a lot of co-workers feel lost, lonely and uninspired. These are dangerous characteristics for a workplace, and something everyone should be aware of, not least because mental illness and diagnoses such as mental fatigue and depression have grown incrementally during the last decade. This has been especially evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, with even more Europeans reporting a drop in their psychological well-being.

## WHO-5 WELL-BEING INDEX

The WHO-5 Well-being Index measure mental well-being on a score from 0–100.

<b>64</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>EQLS 2016<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>APRIL 2020<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>JULY 2020<sup>2</sup></b>

1) Eurofound (2017a), *European Quality of Life Survey 2016: Quality of life, quality of public services, and quality of society*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

2) Eurofound (2020), *Living, working and COVID-19, COVID-19 series*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

Complex collaborative tasks such as creative meetings, brainstorming and the testing and development of new ideas is best done together in physical meetings. Here, the office has a huge role to play. In our interviews, this belief has been overwhelming, and a typical example of something that you don't notice or miss until it's not there.

There seems to be a consensus that some forms of collaboration can be done more efficiently in digital meetings, and many find that they have learned how to use the digital tools provided by their companies even better. Adding more digital meetings to the agenda in the future can help save on travel costs and also be beneficial for the environment, but there is still an important element in face-to-face meetings that cannot be ignored. The physical aspect of meeting and collaborating together in person adds something that no digital solution can provide. The key will be to find a balance between digital and physical meetings, and also to experiment with new and upcoming technology that can help add a physical aspect to digital meetings and make them more interactive.



“The type of information exchanged in face-to-face meetings is different, and better. Often, it's hard to have trusting and in-depth discussions in telephone conferences since you can't see the other person and assess their body language. But we should aim to find the right balance between the number of face-to-face meetings and telephone conferences.”

**ANNE STEINICKE, PROJECT MANAGER AT SENATE DEPARTMENT FOR FINANCE BERLIN, GERMANY.**

## CREATING A GOOD WORK CULTURE

The office area is not just the place for spontaneous meetings by the coffee machine: it's about forging the sense of togetherness and a sense of belonging into something greater. Ironically, it makes employees feel more at home by feeling more connected to the company, as well as the community they are part of.

A good work culture makes everyone feel seen and acknowledged, and this can be hard to do when everyone works remotely. It's easier to miss that employee who's having a hard time, not feeling good or needs some extra help. It's important to consider this when working remotely and to put measures in place to help everyone feel connected to each other.

## CATERING FOR NEW AND YOUNG TALENT

One of our most interesting findings is the question of what happens to new and young recruits when their bosses, mentors and more experienced co-workers aren't naturally around to answer their questions and offer advice. Attracting and retaining talent is one of the biggest challenges European companies have had in the 21st century. And although it's easy to consider when you think about it, we've found that many workplaces have overlooked the fact that junior employees and newly hired staff might actually have the biggest need to actually be in the office.

The office space is the best place for learning, asking those spontaneous questions, giving and receiving feedback, as well as testing out different things. It's also the best place to share company values and become a part of the culture. What happens when the most experienced people at the office aren't there to collaborate with new and young talent?

The new-found comfort of digital meetings and remote working as an efficient and functional solution may also affect recruitment processes in the future. Many interviews are now being done online, and this is something many companies are looking to keep in the future, at least for the first part of the recruitment process. It might also broaden the search area for future recruitments if the opportunity to work from home exists.

“Work community and work culture are the most important aspects of the office, which cannot be replicated at home.”

**LAURA PIHLAJA, HR SPECIALIST AT ADVEN, FINLAND.**

“I think it's very good that some have taken this opportunity to develop and mature. Trainees and recently recruited team members were at a disadvantage. They have nothing to draw from, who to model. And that's the trouble with the Home Office, because in these conditions, people in positions like this have a much harder start. We think it's just a bad thing for home office organisations in this context. Because these people don't have how or when to acquire the right experience. Of course, it depends on the industry, because there are companies where experience is gained with the number of tasks performed, but in many others it is a question of the quality of these tasks.”

**KONRAD KRUSIEWICZ, ARCHITECT & FOUNDER  
AT THE DESIGN GROUP WARSAW, POLAND.**



### **DON'T UNDERESTIMATE ERGONOMICS**

The office is not just a better place to build company culture and have creative brainstorming sessions and face-to-face meetings. Another important aspect that many employees working from home have missed is the ergonomic solutions provided at the office.

The office, unless you happen to have a specific home office, is almost always more ergonomically designed than a work setup in the home. People working from home might not notice any discomfort at the beginning, but working from the kitchen table or living room couch can have long-term effects on the body. Studies show that people working remotely for a longer period of time have consistently experienced pain in the neck, shoulder, elbow and back area. This can cause long-term pain, leading to higher sick leave rates and decreased well-being, with higher health costs for both the employee and the employer.

How can employers make sure their co-workers stay happy and healthy in the long run? If we're looking at a new era of remote working, perhaps employers need to think about the increased need for proper ergonomics at home? We can see that the legislation varies between countries, creating different conditions for employers to be able to assist their employees with an ergonomic working environment without the individuals being financially affected by, for example, benefit taxation. It's important that the legislation is quickly adapted to the current situation to ensure that employees who work from home can also have a good working environment.



“I think most companies will want to see as many of their employees as possible in the office because the physical encounter between people in a consciously designed environment is superior in terms of innovation power and building a corporate culture. But at the same time, it will be very difficult to completely remove the freedom that many felt with the opportunity to work from home. I believe and hope that we will see a little more flexibility in adapting where we work based on our needs.”

**JONAS FALK, ARCHITECT AND PARTNER  
AT STRATEGISK ARKITEKTUR, SWEDEN.**

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE OFFICE?

As many as 75% of workers in Europe say they would like to continue working from home – but very few would like to do so every day. In the people we interviewed, there appears to be a shared agreement that a 3 to 2 ratio is desirable: either three days at the office and two from home, or the other way around.

With an increased flexibility of where we choose to work comes new demands on the way we work and design our office spaces. Even before the pandemic there has been a lively academic discussion on how offices should be designed. High office rents, as well as an interchangeable work situation, has compelled decision makers in organisations to maximise their use of the office space.

So what does this mean for the future? If people are able to choose when they work from home, this could be when they need to focus on those work tasks that require a high level of concentration. But what about the people who can't focus at home? We will surely need more variation and different types of working environments in order to properly suit the future needs and demands of the office.

## FUTURE OFFICE TRENDS

### ACTIVITY-BASED WORKING

Activity-based working is often misunderstood and wrongly used. It is simply a way of working where you need a thoughtfully designed office environment to support the activities of the specific organisation. The employees then choose an environment based on the task. This way of working will be key for many companies that provide their employees with a more flexible working situation where they can choose where to work themselves. If your employees work remotely 2–3 days a week it will mean that the office, in general, will only have about 50% of the employees working there at any one time. Having your own personal desk will not be a cost-effective solution.

Also, considering that some of the employees might come to the office to collaborate and others to focus, you might need different environments based on those activities. What's fundamental however is that the various environments are chosen based on a thorough analysis involving all employees in the process, as well as to ensure that it's implemented fully into the organisation.



### **MORE SPACES TO MEET**

During our interviews, we've noted a longing for face-to-face interactions and meetings. The digital meetings are fine, but we miss the informal chit chats, the brainstorming sessions around the whiteboard and short catch-ups between co-workers. You can do good work from home, but many people are yearning to return to the office to collaborate with their colleagues in person. This will almost certainly affect the future need for meeting spaces in the office. If more people work remotely from time to time, there will be an increased demand for virtual meeting spaces, both for larger groups and for individual use. Supposing that more people also want to use the office for creative meetings, the need for project spaces and other kinds of meeting space where you can work creatively together will become necessary.

### **SECLUDED SPACES FOR FOCUSED WORK**

Not everyone has had a great experience working from home however, and often the experience is dependent on whether or not it's easy to concentrate. For those who cannot focus well or are unable to have a good ergonomic work setup at home, the office will need to provide quiet spaces where employees can concentrate on their individual tasks. Quiet space for concentration is something many offices felt a lack of even before the pandemic, and even though many people have found focus and efficiency at home, we can't rely on that and forget about the need for individual concentration in the future office too. Quiet space for concentrated work is often vital for the overall experience of the office environment, but it doesn't have to mean cubicles or private offices. By dividing the office into different zones with good screening and adding guidelines for use and behaviour, you can have concentration and focus even in open spaces.

### **MORE TECHNOLOGIC SOLUTIONS, BOTH PORTABLE AND FIXED**

Technology is an important factor for success when it comes to adding a more flexible way of working where employees can choose where they work, both inside and outside of the office. It's not just about providing the employees with laptops, smartphones and software to help them connect with each other, it's also important to look at the technical solutions in the office. There has to be a good ecosystem of technological solutions in the office that's easy to connect to, both when working individually and when collaborating. We want a seamless experience where everything is linked, like the smart devices we use at home. Presumably, more employees will work remotely from time to time and there needs to be systems in place, both in the office and portable for remote use, that make it easy to work together, access files and other important documents, and share your work with the rest of the organisation.

### **CO-WORKING OUTSIDE THE BIGGER CITIES**

Less time spent on commuting as well as a wish for a simpler life outside of the bigger cities are positive factors in favour of remote working. The concept of the office has become broader and both employees and employers are realising that they can work efficiently from other places, not just in the office. Working remotely does not only mean working from home; co-working spaces are increasing in popularity, even in smaller cities and in the suburbs. Some companies are also talking about decreasing their flagship offices in the central parts of bigger cities and instead adding smaller, satellite offices outside of the city, giving easier access to employees living in the suburbs.

### **DEVELOPING NEW STANDARDS FOR LEADERSHIP AND EMPLOYEESHIP**

Coming from an era of mostly spending our work time in the office and moving into a more dynamic and flexible way of working remotely also places new demands on leadership. Many C-level leaders have been fostered into the philosophy that work should be done in the office, and focus has been on time spent in the office rather than actual effectiveness, productivity and results. It should not matter how, when and where we get the job done. A more dynamic balance between work in the office or elsewhere requires 'old school' managers to adopt a new way of leadership, a leadership that can trust in getting results delivered from responsible employees no matter where the job is done. But a more dynamic and flexible way of working does not just put new demands on the management, it also puts new expectations on the employees. You have to develop a culture of ownership and responsibility in the whole organisation, not just among the leaders. We call this employeeship, and it is equally important to a more modern leadership if organisations are going to adapt new and more flexible ways of working. Whatever lies in the future, we can conclude that the office workers of the world have shown incredible resilience and flexibility during the pandemic. Now it's time for management, and the concept of the office, to return the favour!



“The hybrid way of working will be more common and affect both the physical premises at the workplace but also the home office. Technological development has increased radically, but so has everyday use, and the next step is to develop collaboration opportunities digitally.”

**FREDRIK NILSSON, HEAD OF GROUP REAL ESTATE INTERNATIONAL AT SEB, SWEDEN.**

“Huge changes are on their way. Leaders have to learn how to let go and trust their employees. Their attitude towards the home office will change. We are going in a “Working from anywhere” direction. The aim is to work more flexibly and maintain a healthy work-life balance.”

**CSONGOR RÉVÉSZ, FACILITY MANAGER NI, HUNGARY.**



## AN OFFICE THAT IS MADE TO LAST, IS AN OFFICE THAT CAN CHANGE FOREVER

In order to design an office that lasts over time, it has to be able to adapt to new challenges, shifting demands and different preferences. A prerequisite for this is carefully chosen colours and materials that contribute to a calm and uniform appearance. That way, it's possible to reconfigure and combine the furniture from different rooms in the office while keeping a homogeneous and consistent impression. A future-proof and long-lasting office interior solution needs to be flexible enough to keep changing with the organisation. These could be small changes that happen every day, but they can also be bigger shifts and transformations that occur with far less frequency, like the shift we find ourselves in right now.

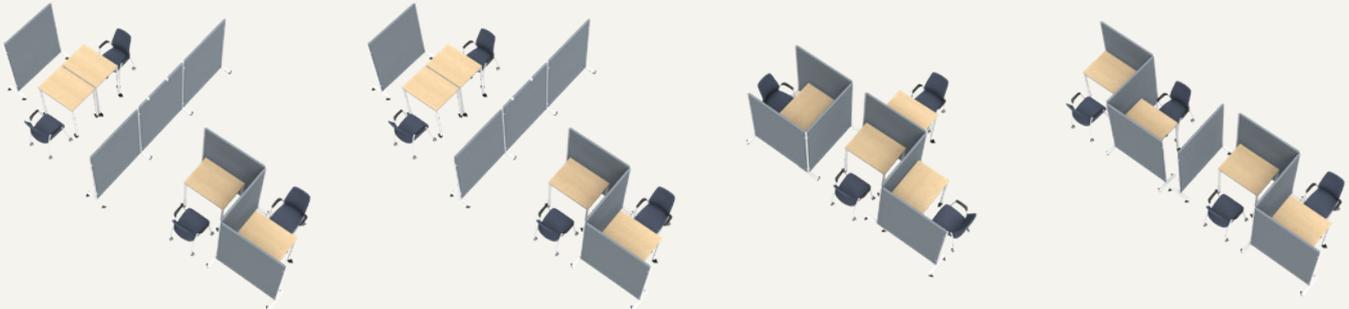
We know from meetings with our existing customers that many are considering the flexibility of their office space in the future. Flexibility can sometimes feel like a buzzword thrown around to make us see the importance of changing over time. We have to be flexible, but what does that really mean? When it comes to office design and furniture selection, we like to talk about three levels of flexibility that you need to consider when designing a long-lasting and future-proofed solution adapted to your organisation's needs.



### DAILY FLEXIBILITY

Some things you like to change from day to day, or even several times a day. It can be adding extra chairs or screens to a meeting space, or a place to sit while collaborating at your co-worker's desk. It can also be individual adjustment of the office chair and the variation of sitting and standing with a height-adjustable desk. Daily flexibility has to be easy, which

is why products with castors are perfect, as they're easy to move to where you need them at that moment. Multifunctional products like partition screens with notice boards are perfect when you need some extra writing space for the meeting and also provide excellent sound absorption.



### SHORT-TERM FLEXIBILITY

This pandemic has really put the short-term flexibility of our offices to the test. Companies all over the world have been forced to make changes to their office layout in order to be able to adhere to government guidelines and restrictions, which have also changed and evolved over time. We don't know how much of these changes will be present in the future, but many people have realised the importance of having an office solution that

can be adapted to different needs and situations – in this instance a pandemic, but next time it might be a quick growth spurt for the company or a cross-functional project. You can add short-term flexibility to your office by changing the number of seats and screens at a bench solution, as well as by transforming it between workstations and a meeting space, depending on your needs for the near future.



### LONG-TERM FLEXIBILITY

Flexibility can also be long-term: something that can help you adapt to changes happening every other year or even more infrequently. This kind of flexibility makes it possible to use the office furniture for a long time to come, a solution that is both economically and environmentally sustainable. You get long-term flexibility with products that can be reconfigured to fit new

spaces or new purposes. With a continuing modular system, you can add or retract parts to arrange your furniture in new constellations, making them adaptable to your ever-changing needs. A solution that fits you perfectly right now might not be what you need in two years' time, or after you move to new premises.



## HOW CAN YOU PREPARE?

The concept of the office has changed. Right now, you might feel caught in the middle between past ways of working we cannot return to and an unknown future. So how can you prepare your office for a new way of working?

Change requires time and reflection. First and foremost, you need to analyse what has worked and what has not worked in your specific organisation during the pandemic, as well as how you'd like to work in the future to best support the business and employees' well-being. Whatever direction you're heading in, it's crucial that you involve all your employees in the journey to prepare them for the new way of working. Their participation, insight and experience are important factors for a successful future. Then it all comes down to designing your office space to suit your future way of working and to promote health and prosperity, both for the organisation and the people.

### WORKPLACE ANALYSIS LEADS THE WAY

Over the years, we've helped many clients design value-creating changes in their physical environment. We do this through our workplace analysis, Next Office®, which helps create business-adapted and sustainable office solutions. The strength of our workplace analysis is that it's based on the unique organisation's vision and goals, and that it simplifies the involvement and inclusion of staff and other stakeholders. We've learned the importance of involving everyone early in the process in order to be able to establish needs, both today and in the future, while also identifying challenges and opportunities. Throughout the analysis process, we help our clients identify and understand their needs, and then compile a report that forms the basis for the interior design solution. We are convinced that advice on changes in interior design solutions and working methods needs to be based on data, not guesswork.



## **FIVE SUCCESS FACTORS**

1

### **SET A VISION AND GOALS**

To create consensus, management needs to set a vision and goals for the business. Vision and goals should then form the basis for the entire process.

2

### **INVOLVE STAFF**

A crucial factor in the success of your change journey is to include, involve and prepare all employees from the outset. When you take advantage of different experiences and needs, the end result is always better.

3

### **DESIGN THE OFFICE ACCORDING TO ACTUAL ACTIVITIES**

To create a successful office, the interior needs to be designed according to mapped activities and working methods and put both the individual and the business in focus.

4

### **SET RULES AND GUIDELINES FOR THE OFFICE**

To make the best use of the office and create a good work culture, you need to set clear guidelines for how to use and behave at the workplace, as well as guidelines for remote work. The rules for the office must be dynamic and adapted to changing conditions.

5

### **FOLLOW UP**

It's important to follow up on how the new office works and how the new environments function and are actually used. Follow-ups must be carried out regularly to ensure the office is adapted to changing needs and new employees.

Would you like to know more about how interior solutions can help your company prosper?

**[kinnarps.com](http://kinnarps.com)**

