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The future of work is digital

June 2020



Our future work life?

What will our work lives be like after Corona? Find out what employees think about their work lives. And what that means for your leadership. We hope you'll get some new and useful insights. We are:

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Focus on the flexible and digital work life after Covid-19

As a manager, how can you lead post corona? Can and will you seize the opportunity to change how you work and become a new *thought leader*?

We have investigated employees' views on work life post Corona, and especially what they expect of their work life going forward. Our research shows that employees want a 'new normal'. They're looking for a change in the setup of their work lives. At the same time, they've become more digitally confident, so things that used to be impossible are now suddenly quite possible. This insight can be used to gain a leading edge and proactive perspective on how company can come up with new solutions to the needs and expectations of their people.

The big question is; are you ready to embrace this new reality in your company? What expectations do your employees have of their work in a post-Corona world? How can you put yourself at the forefront of this 'new normal' that will also become a reality for your workplace? Your job will remain the same; you have to create the best possible financial results and ensure that your employees have the best possible opportunities to succeed in their roles. But you'll need to rethink your work practices and adjust them to the expectations and needs of your employees.

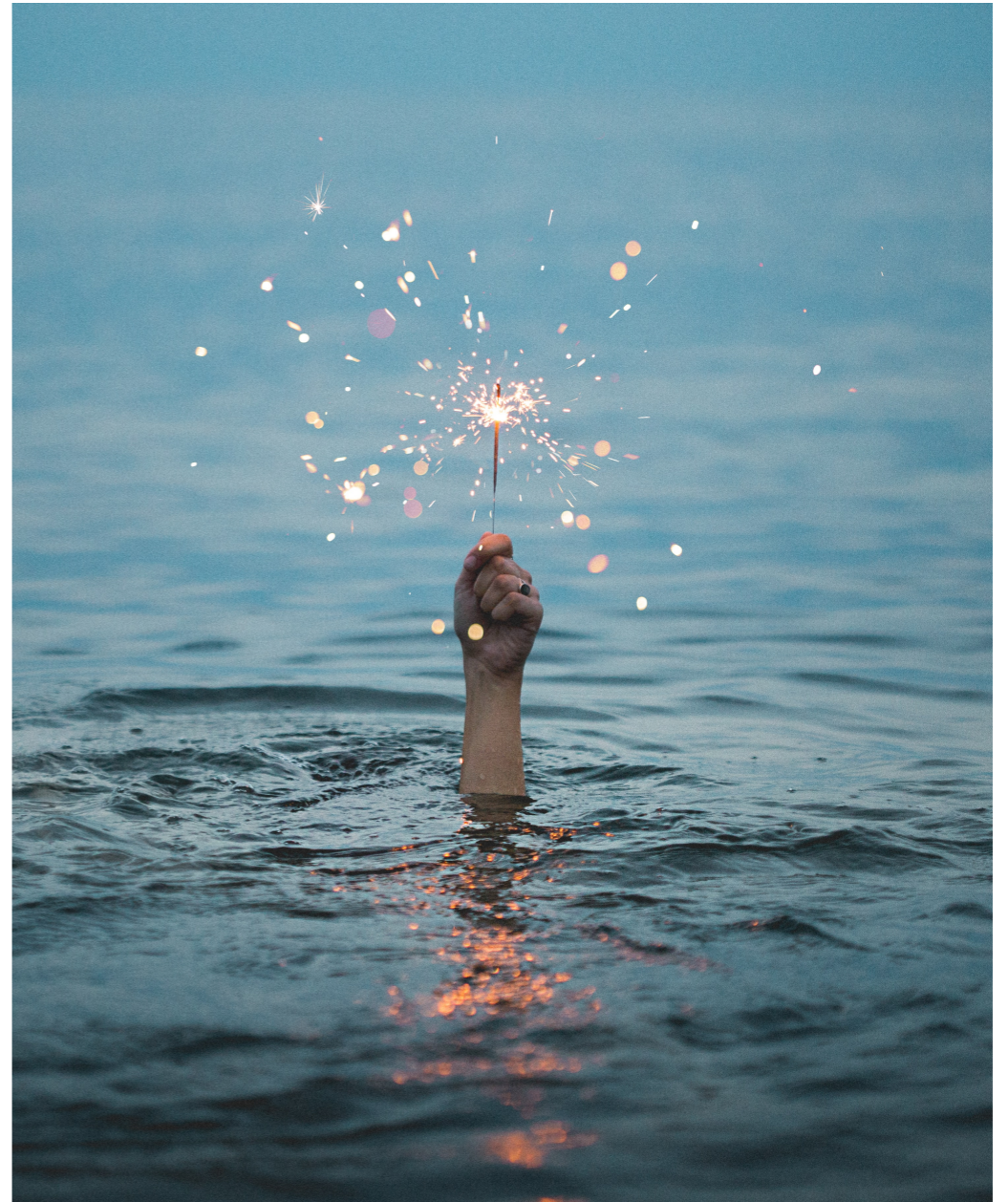
In this e-book, we'll present you with the results of our survey of the current attitude toward work life among the Danes. We'll offer our perspective on what this might mean for you as a manager. This will help you take the lead and the responsibility for your business. You can take a proactive decision about how to run your business in new ways, and how to find new, more flexible and individually tailored solutions along with your team.

Seize this opportunity to make changes

Your leadership style during Corona reveals your culture. It's time to rethink your ways of working.

As a manager you should take this opportunity to create positive changes for your organization and your people. Show confidence in your employees, listen to them and experiment with your way of working. An opportunity to make such radical changes in your work practices rarely presents itself. Your ability to lead and take responsibility for creating business results will be at the core. It will lead to greater on-the-job satisfaction which is a determining factor in recruitment of new talents, and it supports a renewed relationship with your customers.

This is why you need to look into how you can rethink your work practices, your organization of the workplace and what behaviors you reward. One example is that it will no longer be cool to show up with a minor flu and a ton of tissues. Or to travel around the world to meet people that you might just as easily meet online.



In the same way, it will no longer be cool to insist that your team show up at the office every day, just because you're afraid, they will not do any work at home. Think about what those things say about the boss, the employees or the culture that prevails in your workplace?

Just so we're aligned: Our focus here is on knowledge workers. Some of our points will also be useful when it comes to jobs that require some level of physical presence at certain times. We make huge generalizations. Maybe it doesn't exactly fit with you and your work situation.

But one thing is for sure: Things that weren't possible in the past, are possible now. Let's make the best of that. So use this as a guide to taking a fresh look at your company and your culture, habits, beliefs and facilities.





What do your employees say?

We've landed in a 'new normal'. And employees have learned how best to deliver.

In one week, more than 200 people in Denmark have responded to our survey to tell us what 'new normal' looks like to them. The crazy thing is that people agree. The comments show a significant pattern when employees express how Covid-19 has changes their work lives. The vast majority use the same words and descriptions when they explain what they've learned, and how they wish to work going forward.

We're talking about a new discourse about the future of work and employees pretty much agree on that discourse. It all started with Covid-19 that triggered a whole bunch of new habits, expectations, demands, attitudes and wishes for how they want to set up their work lives. Today it's no longer about Covid-19. Over time it's become the 'new normal' – a new ordinary, and therefore, permanent need. Because employees have gained a greater insight into how they can best deliver on the job.

Significant changes

One of our conclusions is, that no one misses their commute. And that almost everyone believes that altering their working conditions has gone surprisingly well.

We'll give you all the results in print in just a minute. First, we want to share some of the most obvious trends. Almost everyone has experienced significant changes. 97% say they've experienced a change or radical change of their work life as a result of Covid-19. There is widespread agreement when 8 out of 10 feel it's a good thing to be able to work from home without interruptions and without wasting time on transportation. 9 out of 10 feel the advantage of digital meetings is the opportunity to be highly effective because everything that's not really necessary has been cut away. In the future they'd like to work more digitally and from home. Although they don't want to lose physical proximity to others all together. So there's still a need for a physical workplace. But perhaps not every day. And maybe it takes a different shape or form. The discourse is very clear. Next, we'll give you our view of what this means for you as a leader. And what issues will be essential to discuss.



New *thought* leaders

New thought leaders will develop the business and will lead with real flexibility.

As a manager you have probably already been faced with new wishes and demands. Otherwise, you will be, when you all return to the office. Many talk about what they've learned and how they would like to work in the future. It's on people's minds and employees are aware that they are not alone in wishing for change. They share their approach with many others and have gained a louder voice in that way.

Managers who are capable of quickly developing a business while at the same time finding new solutions, will be the future thought leaders and will be better able to attract and retain employees. A company can create a competitive factor when it comes to recruitment and retention if it provides a credible option to work flexibly, digitally and on the employees' own terms. The new thought leaders are characterized by proactively taking a stand and finding solutions rather than setting up barriers to employees' flexibility.



Take a proactive approach on five levels

How do you take ownership of the change process? And how can you be a modern, financially responsible manager of a company where most employees want a flexible and digital work life?

What solutions, compromises and new ways of working do you need to create? What does it mean for businesses that most employees have experience with meetings on Zoom, Teams or Skype, and no longer want to go to the office every day? The discussion you should have with your top management team and your employees includes five equally important topics:

1. Flexibility

Many managers will have to realize that their key employees want to work less while delivering the same. The challenge will be to reconcile this with the legal and regulatory employment terms that we have today. They should not be allowed to block this progress. Many employees want to keep their freedom when they return to the office. This will require employees who take responsibility, work independently and continuously deliver high productivity. Not all employees will be able to do that, but don't let that stop the others from doing it. The base line must be trust as well as clear expectations and goals. You don't have to settle on a permanent solution right away. Instead you can set up multiple scenarios that you'll test over a period of time. While you're doing this, your flexibility will make it easier to recruit new people who don't live near your office. For example; pick one setup as an experiment for a while.

When employees return to the workplace after working from home, it's getting more complex, as you will have binary meetings – some employees will meet in person, while others attend digitally. Pay extra attention to the digital attendees, to get their say during the meetings. You might also want to use digital tools like sli.do and other digital tools to create a united platform during the session. Communication also changes when people work from home. As a leader you might want to have more one-to-one meetings, where you can check in with every employee, rather than just large Teams meetings, where people might not want to express concerns or doubts.

2. Home offices

A practical question that needs to be discussed is about what equipment the company will make available to the employees at their home offices. Is there a need for webcams and microphones? Chairs and green screens? What about people who don't have room for a home office, but would like the flexibility? Do they need a third alternative that is not home or the office? What if we made "home office fringe benefits" similar to how we might offer free snacks and coffee? When it comes to offering attractive benefits, we will see great ingenuity in the coming years.



3. Technology

Then there's the technology that the company makes available for internal chats, webinars, online meetings – or whatever your business requires. You're not likely to find one system that can handle all your needs. Try, instead, to create a portfolio of systems that span a wide range of needs and that allow your employees to roam around rather than be limited. Again, trust is the key word. Rethink how you can ensure IT security, especially when people work from home. Appeal to people's common sense rather than impose rigid rules. There are plenty of cloud solutions that enable remote access to your systems, making an office irrelevant. Many people need some level of social interaction, also when working *remotely*. Create your own informal fora via Teams, Slack or similar platforms. Or use social media for what they were intended for; namely to be social with each other and the world around you.

4. Interior design of the office

Alright, so there'll still be people in your office. But what if people are there less frequently, does everyone need a permanent work space? Or might there instead be a need for more quiet zones and phone booths? Revisit your plan and your budget for interior design and work stations if not all employees show up every day. Do you need less space, or can you create innovative environments, play areas, creativity boards or training rooms that employees might benefit from? Make it more fun to be in the office. Maybe the design should be less static and easier to renew more often? Don't underestimate the value of good coffee, delicious lunches and social events.

5. Work culture – physical and digital

The fifth level is your working culture itself. This is the hardest part for many. It's not visible and you can't fix it by buying new equipment. For example, ask your employees to each describe three things that they especially like about working in your company, or three things they don't want to do without. Based on this you can define some characteristics of your culture.

Create a clear framework of what expectations you have of each other, when you can't see each other. Make sure to align these expectations with your executive board, because that will rub off on the rest of the organization.

For example, is it ok if you don't log on until 10am, if you work late in return? Must all emails be answered on the day they are received? Is it frivolous to enter quiet time in your calendar if you need to concentrate on an important task? Is it okay to leave a Zoom meeting if the topic is not relevant for you? Is it ok to take a yoga class in the middle of the day? Start from the perspective that each person should have the best possible setup for performing their work most effectively. Some need many water cooler meetings and status reports, while others don't. They, on the other hand, may need more alone time or variation. What types of employees do you have today? Do they fit with the company's culture? Consider what your future talent pool will look like.

As a leader, inspire employees to create good working habits from home. Help them create structure and working methods, encourage them to take regular breaks during the day, and take a lead on email habits by being the manager who doesn't send emails after 5 pm and during weekends.



10 things for you to consider as a leader

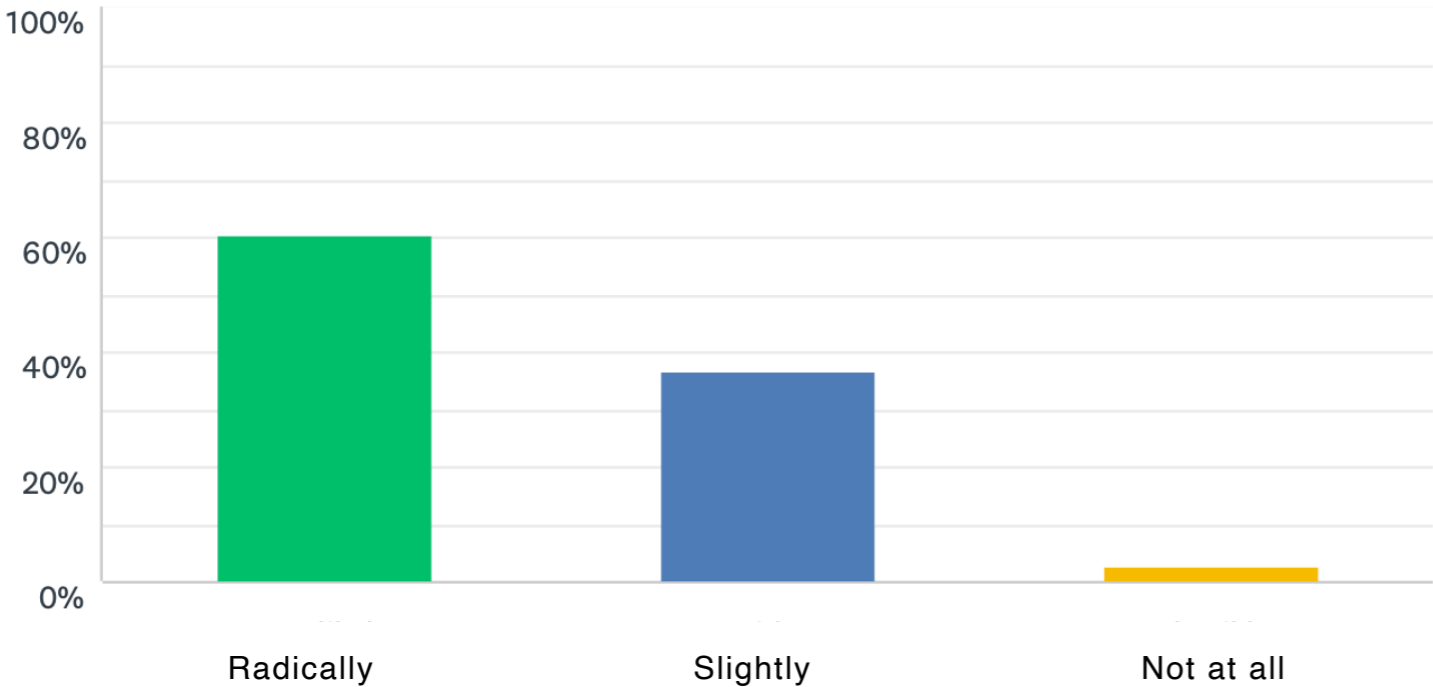
Here's a list of questions that will help you shed some light on work life from different perspectives.

1. From your perspective, what is the greatest challenge facing your company in the 'new normal' work life?
2. How can you both take responsibility and drive the business forward while at the same time enabling greater flexibility for each employee?
3. If you're worried that remote work will be to the detriment of the company, then articulate what your concern is really about – reduced efficiency, loss of knowledge sharing and ideas, or something else entirely? Specify your concern and do something about it, instead of introducing unnecessary obstacles to employee freedom and job satisfaction.
4. How can you create the necessary balance between a calm working environment for the individual and collaboration, both at the office and remotely?
5. How can you shift your focus from "I see you, therefore you're working" to "as long as you achieve your goals, I don't mind where you are or when or how much you work"?
6. What culture do you reward in your workplace? What incentive structures does your company have? Are they up-to-date?
7. Do you have the right technologies in place to ensure a productive workflow for those who work remotely? Can colleagues collaborate as well as conduct digital customer meetings? What do they need, in terms of equipment, IT and frameworks?
8. How do you socialize, also digitally?
9. How can you leverage your working culture as a factor in recruitment? What makes you stand out?
10. What has surprised you the most? And what have you learned about yourself as a manager, about your team and your working culture? Use this as a starting point for creating positive changes.

Survey results

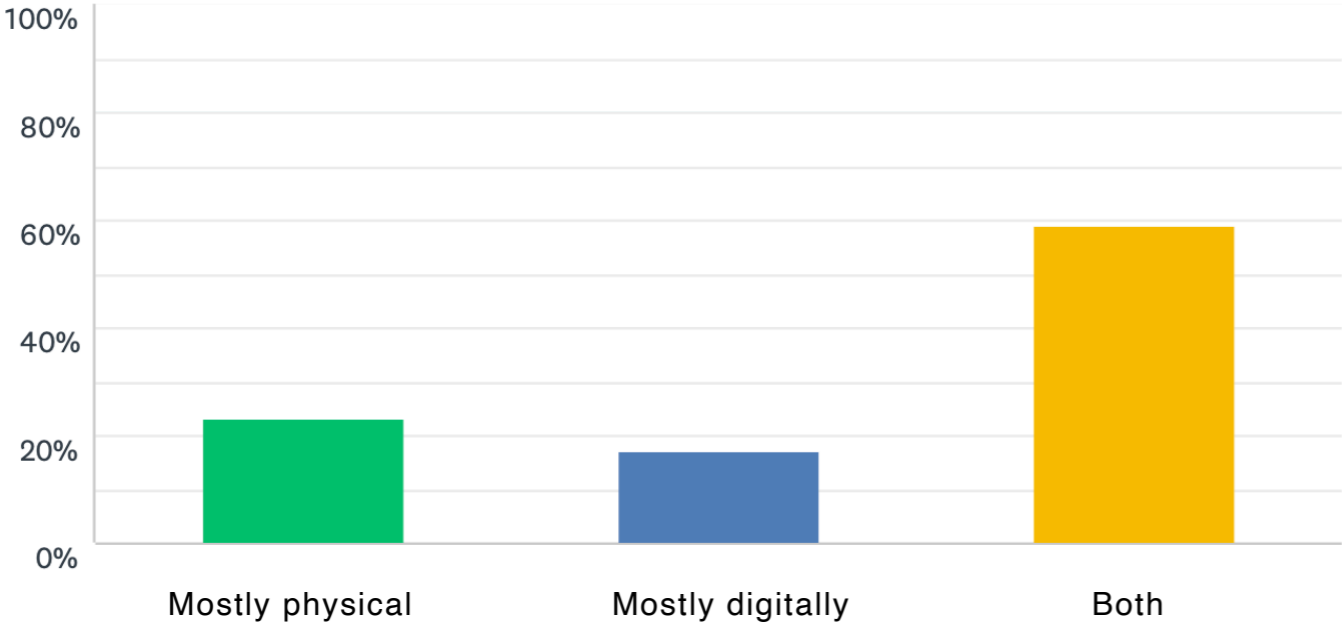
These are the results of our online survey. We've received over 200 responses. Participants had the option to comment in two open text fields, which almost 200 did. Read a selection of the many responses on pages 18-19.

1. To what degree have your workdays changed due to Corona?



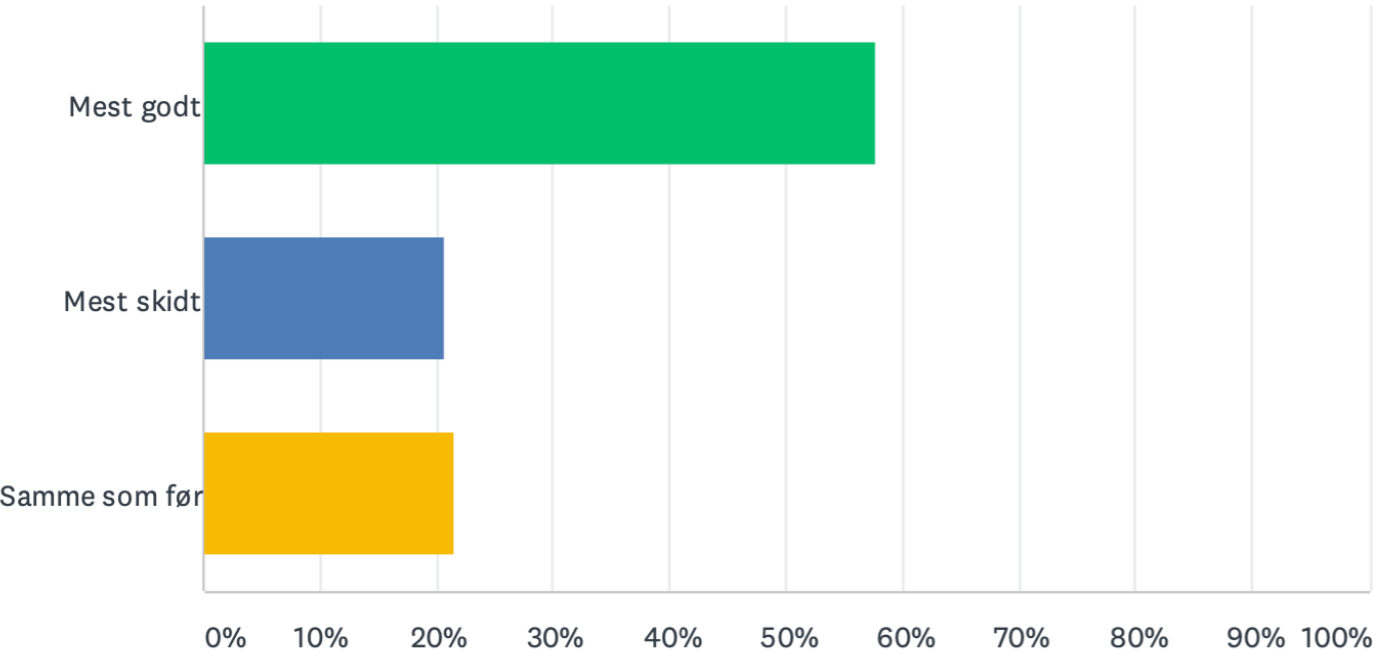
Radically 60.56% 129
Slightly 36.62% 78
Not at all 2.82% 6
TOTAL 213

2. What will your work life be like after Corona?



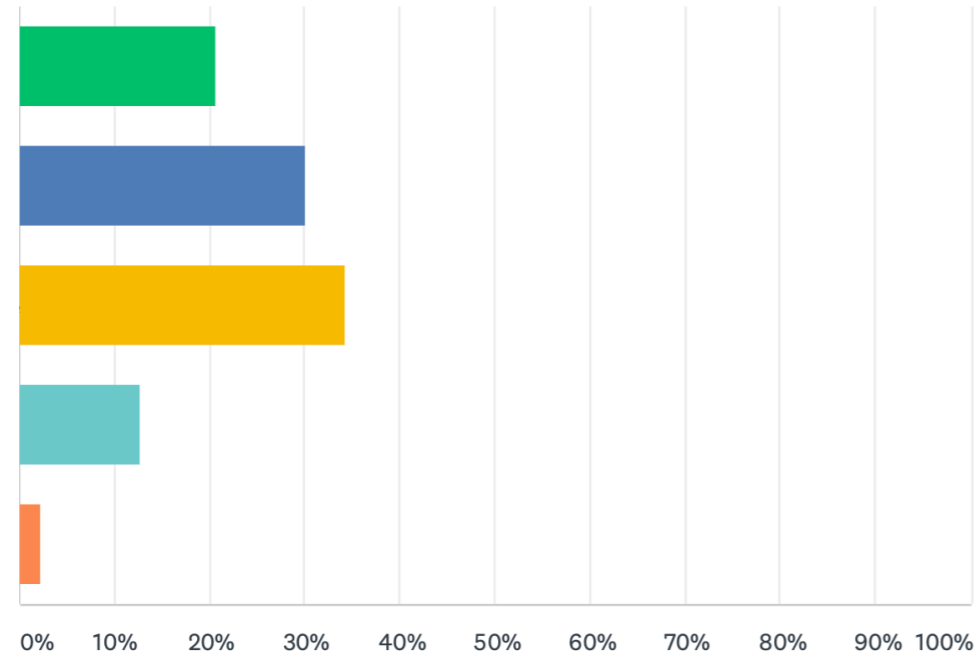
Mostly physical presence 23.47% 50
Mostly digitally 17.37% 37
Both (50/50) 59.15% 126
TOTAL 213

3. Is work life after Corona...?



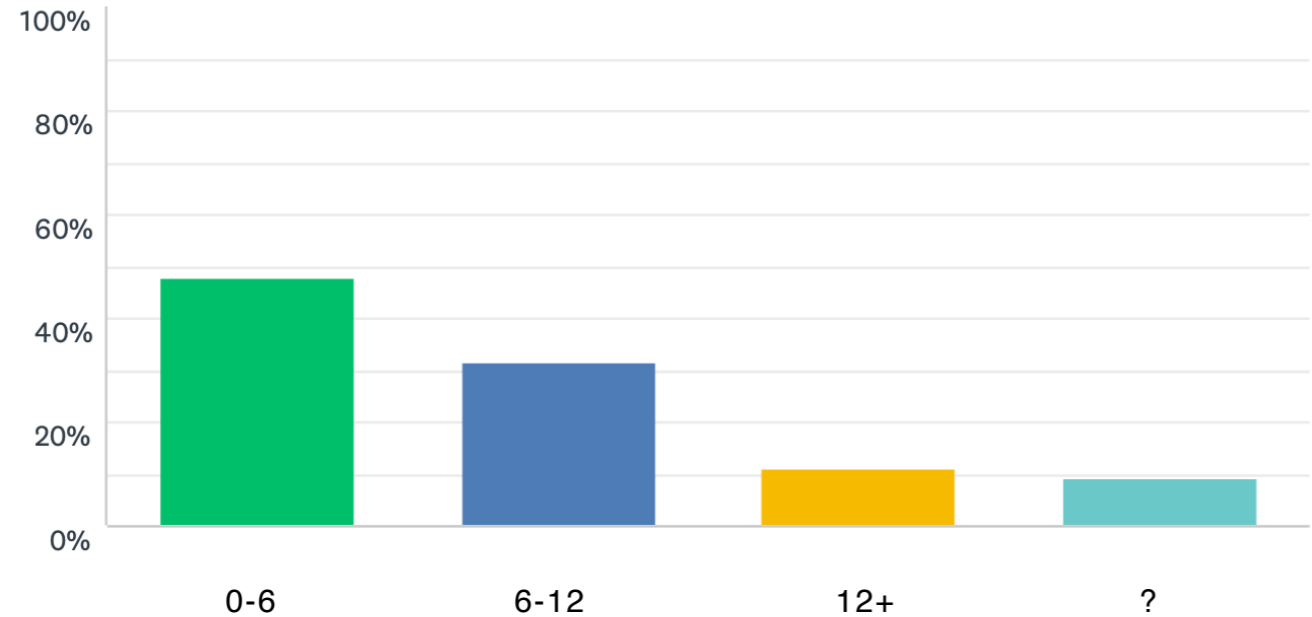
Mostly good 57.75% 123
Mostly bad 20.66% 44
Same as before 21.60% 46
TOTAL 213

4. Has your workplace been (financially negatively) impacted by Corona?



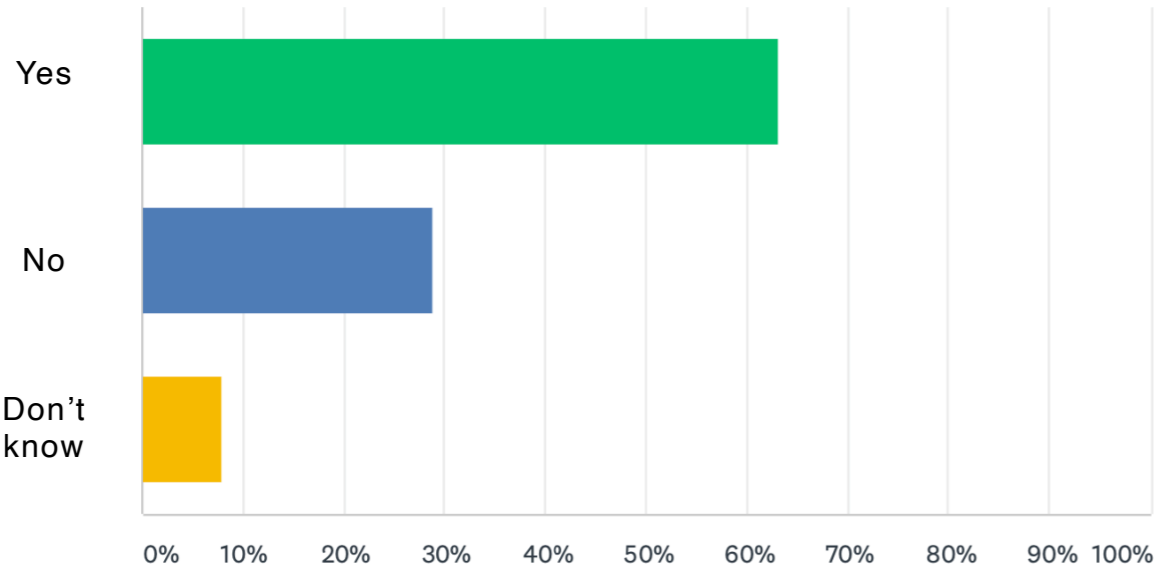
Yes, very much 20.66% 44
Yes, a little 30.05% 64
Barely 34.27% 73
No, on the contrary 12.68% 27
Don't know 2.35% 5
TOTAL 213

5. How long do you expect restrictions to be imposed as a consequence of Corona?



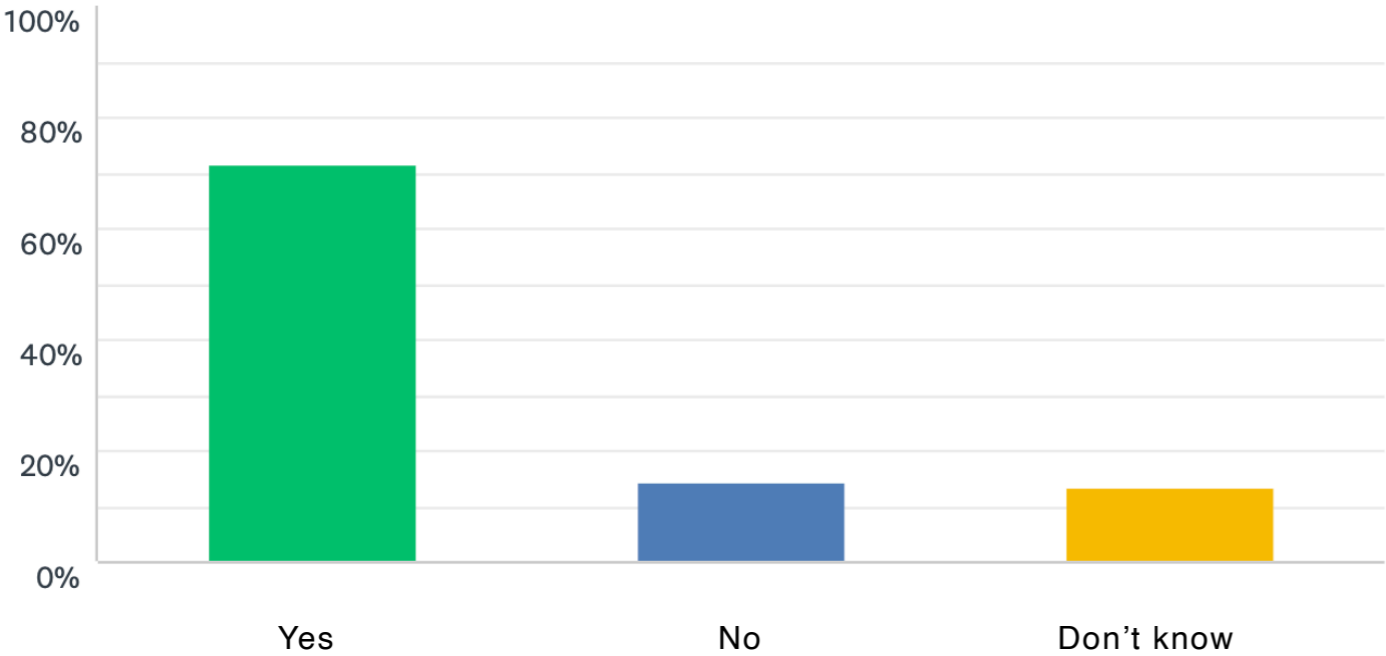
0-6 mths. 47.89% 102
6-12 mths. 31.46% 67
12+ mths. 11.27% 24
Don't know 9.39% 20
TOTAL 213

6. Do you prefer to work from home more?



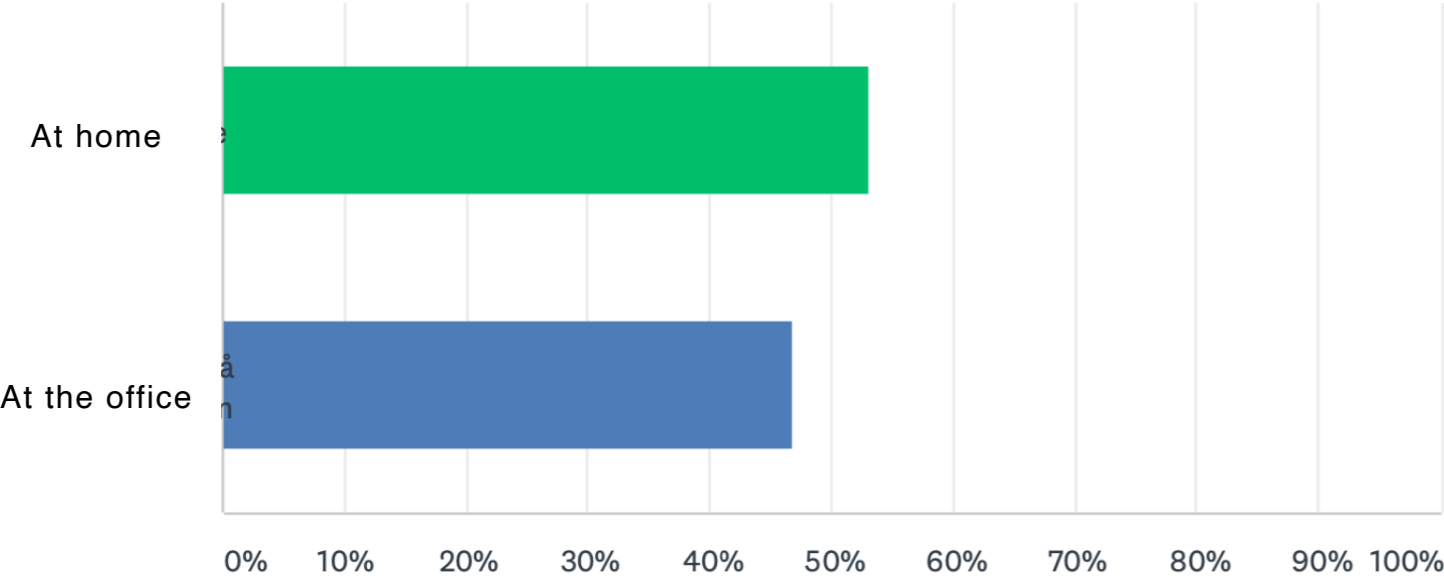
Yes 63.21% 134
No 28.77% 61
Don't know 8.02% 17
TOTAL 212

7. Will it be possible at your workplace to work from home more after Corona?



Yes 71.83% 153
No 14.55% 31
Don't know 13.62% 29
TOTAL 213

8. When are you most productive?



At home 53.05% 113
At the office 46.95% 100
TOTAL 213

9. Question: Lessons from working online?

“I’ve learned that I can do more online, than I thought I could.”

"It's a big dilemma; our productivity has gone up, sick leave has dropped, people are more flexible and collaboration across departments is improved. But we miss each other and for me personally, the daily unplanned input I get at the office means much more than I had thought."

"It's clear that the digital space definitely has some benefits, and there are opportunities that we can become better at utilizing. However, I feel that social relationships are still strongest in the physical space."

“There is a lot of flexibility that you can take better advantage of when you work from home. Knowledge work doesn’t necessarily take place most effectively between 8am and 4pm.”

“That it’s more productive and allows for international participation in meetings without the travel costs. We’ve also learned to use Teams and Zoom throughout the organization and next week we will conduct our first virtual co-creation workshop.”

“You don’t get interrupted in the same way during the day. Meetings are usually shorter and more to the point, so there is less time wasted.”

“That the digital tools can replace a long list of physical elements. Meetings are often more efficient when digital. There’s less work wasted because you work more effectively at home. It’s both good and bad, because sometimes you forget to take breaks. On the other hand, you can stop working earlier in the day, for example if you’ve had lunch at your desk.”

10. Question: Benefits to meeting in person?

“Socially and psychologically it means a lot to be together with colleagues. I believe a combination of remote workdays and office days is the best.”

“A lot of misunderstandings are avoided when you talk with each other instead of emailing. And it’s cozier, too.”

“It’s difficult to start new projects (e.g. with brainstorming sessions) without meeting in person. That part would be hard for me to do without.”

“It’s essential to my job satisfaction that I can see and talk with my colleagues. It’s also more effective in terms of settling minor questions more quickly.”



Reading list and photos

We recommend the following books and articles, if you want to know more:

It doesn't have to be crazy at work (book)

4 dage arbejdsuge (book in Danish)

Hvordan ser arbejdslivet ud efter corona? (article in Danish)

Fra kriseerfaringer til permanent forandring (article in Danish)

Why work doesn't happen at work (video)

Translation:

Anette M. Pierce - Find Anette on LinkedIn

Photos:

Patrick Robert Doyle, Febiyan, Volodymyr Hryshchenko,

Kristopher Roller, Thought Catalog, Nathan Dumlao, David

Pennington

