



Changing the way we work

Communications

Professor Kanter

I think in the future, imagination and creativity are going to be essential. Because there are many routine aspects of the business that we're going to be turning over the machines - our ability to think and invent, and our ability to make relationships, are going to be the biggest assets, that people bring, not the mechanical parts of what they do.

Lars Kolind

It's just not sufficient any more to write memos, be it paper or electronic doesn't matter, there's never a breakthrough that has occurred by writing a memo, breakthroughs occur when two or more people get together, get inspired, have fun, think the unthinkable.

Torben Petersen

As part of the reorganisation we wanted to become paperless, I mean that was a very nice catchphrase, it's something that everybody can understand

Pia Koribek

I'm going to pick up er the mail to see -and shredding what we are going to keep and what we're not going to keep. This one I want to keep electronically so I'm going to scan it in the scanner over here ... So when I have done that I must send it to my own workstation to file it afterwards electronically. Now that I have scanned it I need to get rid of it, and I'll do that over here, through the shredder.

Torben Petersen

I think we very soon realised that we weren't going to be paperless and we're not, but even so I think we have achieved a lot. We want to be able in our office environment to move around and if you have half a ton of paper to move around you don't move.

Torben Petersen

Another reason for reducing paper was to encourage face-to-face interaction. The whole geared to this goal: the office features a large central staircase to encourage people to meet and interact.

Lars Kolind

Oticon is a face to face communication company because that's what hearing aids are all about, that's to improve communication.

Per Kokholm Sorensen

All the initiating all the projects happens within the teams -it could be over a cup of coffee in the coffee bars or lunch, actually a lot of new ideas come up at lunchtime, it seems.

Pernille Ronn

It's very difficult to keep a secret at Oticon because, if you're talking about it, you'll be talking about it while you're sitting at your desk or you're coming out of meetings still talking about it, so people hear about it and people always comment on the decisions made.

Commentary

But what if face-to-face interaction isn't possible? Although about half of Oticon's employees are based in Denmark, it's a global company with subsidiaries in 25 countries around the world.

Torben Petersen

We try to tie the international organisation together by means of information technology I mean we cannot er truly effect a face to face communication in our daily work with someone in Australia, but that is where the intranet and the electronic infra structure's going to help us.

Commentary

But despite the use of technology to facilitate remote communication, Oticon has no intention of following Digital down the remote working path.

Larskolind

I think in principle this company could operate with people working from then homes, but I think that the value we create is primarily created from physical face to face interaction between our staff, and so as a general principle this company will not move into telecommuting.

Prof Kanter

I think telecommuting is a tremendous employee benefit. It saves us all those traffic jams of getting into cities, but I think people are still going to need to convene face to face in groups.

Prof Charles Handy

The social bit is terribly important - you can't trust someone that you actually haven't laughed with. Wise organisations spend a lot of money bringing then people together.

John Holland

One of the things that you do miss on telephone conference is some of the body language, and some of the atmosphere of of being there.

Commentary

So what about video conferencing?

Bobby Redmond

Well good afternoon Janet and John, hi, my name is Bobby Redmond.

Robin Richardson

It's very good for getting to know people that you're working with and typically what would happen is people would use that for making ah introductions to one another and then they would revert to audio conferencing.

John Holland

I don't think you can actually build a relationship erm working remotely. I think it's something that builds by seeing the whites of peoples eyes in meeting rooms, in pubs, wherever you happen to be working but it it you do have to have the face to face contact.

Prof Kanter

A manager who's responsible for people who are not in the office every day, has to be really really good at relationships, has to care about the person, get to know the person a lot better, so that bond is strong even if you're not seeing each other day to day.

Cathy Mccaal

My particular way to handle this has been to make sure that I don't get cloistered in one office anywhere is uhm to just put myself out and about a bit and get to meet everybody. Ah the face to face contact is essential there is no way that I can achieve what I need to achieve if ah I try to do it remotely.

Commentary

So, it's important for managers to keep up social contact with their remote employees, but what about keeping tabs on the work side of things?

Alanevans

The smart manager doesn't meddle in the how people go about doing their job, the smart manager sets the target and the goal and what the output is on a mutual basis with the employee.

Marion Dancy

My view is that you have to trust people, when you manage people. You have to trust that they will do the job, or the project that they have been asked to lead or participate in. But, you do need to check in to make sure, that, they are making progress, towards the goal, make sure that they're getting the help that they need. It could be done by the occasional face-to-face meeting, it could be done by electronic mail or utilising the web forum concept.

Professor Kanter

So, we're not relying totally just on trust, we're also relying on a lot of very tangible things that managers can manage -getting the numbers, getting the measures, keeping things on track, helping people communicate with each other, those skills are really necessary.