

Press release

Zurich, 12 July 2018

The workplace of the future is flexible and connected – but managers are still failing to set a good example

Almost a quarter of office workers in Switzerland have to find their own workspace in their employer's offices first thing in the morning, and two-thirds work outside of the office at least part of the time. The increasing flexibility in Swiss offices is a reaction to changing working environments, which are becoming ever more knowledge-intensive, creative and connected. However, it is still the case that the working environment, available technologies, and above all the corporate culture frequently lag behind.

New technologies, increasing globalisation and the demands of young workers are rapidly driving change in the world of work and the ways in which we collaborate. As a result, there have been fundamental changes in entire sectors, occupations, fields of activity and the skills they require.

"When the world of work changes, the workplace also needs to change," Matthias Thalmann, Partner for Human Capital at Deloitte Switzerland, explains. "The majority of Swiss employees today are reliant on digital technologies and are primarily engaged in knowledge-intensive and creative activities that require a high degree of interaction. The office landscape of tomorrow must be geared towards flexibility, collaboration and communication to take these characteristics into account."

The professional services firm [Deloitte surveyed 1,000 office employees in Switzerland](#) who spend at least half of their working hours in front of a computer, and asked how these specific developments are currently reflected in their day-to-day working lives. Two thirds of those surveyed are no longer entirely bound to their employer's premises, with 40 per cent of those working from home or in another location, for instance a coworking space, at least one day a week.

The majority of workers still have their own desk

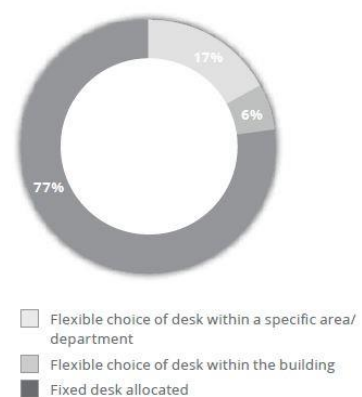
Although agile work concepts such as remote working and shared flexible office space ("hotdesking") are becoming more mainstream in companies in Switzerland, the majority of Swiss employees (77%) still have a permanent physical workplace of their own. Time management, on the other hand, has become much more flexible: 72 per cent have considerable freedom to organise their working hours in the office as it suits them, and only 9 per cent say they are obliged to adhere to rigid working hours.

Only one third of those employed in offices have to work on-site every day, meaning that the majority are able to work wherever they prefer on a regular basis. There is, however, significant variability in the extent of such flexibility: 28 per cent do so less than one day a week, 12 per cent just one day a week and over a quarter (27%) work no more than one day a week in their employer's office.

Employees working outside the office more frequently and the introduction of hotdesking in offices means that the number of fixed desks can be reduced, freeing up space for collaborative work zones, as well as discussion and relaxation areas. Carefully planned and implemented measures has been shown to promote cross-divisional collaboration and increased employee satisfaction.

"Many Swiss companies fail to implement the necessary adjustments to workplace design and working models and, as a result, lose both money and employees", Matthias Thalmann is convinced. "If they want to continue to ensure that their employees remain productive, creative and motivated, they need to provide an innovative and inspiring working environment, regardless of where those employees work. Intelligent, strategic concepts are needed to reconcile the challenging demands of young employees for greater flexibility and the older workforce's desire for security and familiarity."

Desk flexibility
How would you describe your desk situation?



Lack of the necessary technology

There is considerable scope for improvement in terms of the hardware that companies provide for their staff. Just under half of employees (47%) are equipped with a laptop by their employer that would enable them to work remotely, while 11 per cent are only provided with a smartphone or tablet. 42 per cent of those surveyed have not been given any digital devices that would allow them to work from outside the office or access company data. Just over half (53%) use chat functions or instant messaging, 39% rely on modern IT systems to access document management and 36% are able to use video conferencing. However, almost a third of companies do not use any modern collaboration solutions at all.

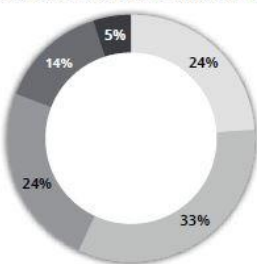
A shift in culture and less regulation

When implementing new working methods and technologies, clear communication and proper support are critical for success. Many Swiss companies appear not to have tackled this issue yet, as another [Deloitte survey](#) of HR managers has already shown. Our latest study confirms this: Only 39 per cent state that their company has guidelines on flexible working. The study reveals that there are significant differences depending on the size of the company, with the figure rising to 55 per cent for those employed in companies with more than 250 employees, and lowering to 24 per cent for those working in companies with fewer than 50 employees.

Surprisingly, while over half (56%) of managers are in favour of flexible working hours, only a third of respondents' managers supported flexible working locations such as home offices or coworking spaces. Against the backdrop of an open, modern corporate culture, it is important that managers not only support flexible working, but also act as role models through their own actions. A full 38 per cent, however, stated that their managers did not provide a good example of flexible working in any form.

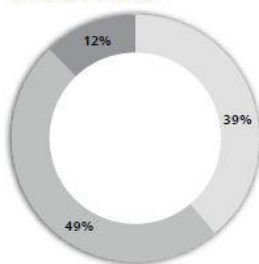
Organisational culture and structure

Are your managers in the company good role models for flexible working?



Legend for 'Are your managers in the company good role models for flexible working?':
Yes (lightest grey)
Yes, fairly good (light grey)
Not very good (medium grey)
Not at all (dark grey)
Don't know (darkest grey)

Does your company have guidelines on flexible working?



Legend for 'Does your company have guidelines on flexible working?':
Yes (lightest grey)
No (medium grey)
Don't know (darkest grey)

"Regardless of how well-developed the spatial concept, the workplace concept and the technology are, they can only be fully effective if the corporate culture is actively adapted and the attitudes of employees and managers change in line with them," says Luc Zobrist, an economist at Deloitte Switzerland and co-author of the study. "Companies that focus only on reducing costs and ignore employee satisfaction will not succeed in sustainably transforming the workplace."

Another factor that cannot be ignored is the legal framework in Switzerland. In addition to flexible workplaces and forms of work, modern technology and a trust-based corporate culture, the lawmakers also need to play their part: "Our labour laws date back to the industrial age and will need to be adapted accordingly for the digital age," Zobrist explains.

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- ➔ You can find out more about the study [«Workplace transformation in the digital age: Challenges and success factors»](#) and more on the topic of ["Future of Work"](#) on our website.
- ➔ You can also listen to our [Deloitte Future Talk Podcast](#) (German) with Martin Hirni, Head of Real Estate at Zürcher Kantonalbank, on the topic of workplace transformation.

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About «Workplace transformation in the digital age»

The study «Workplace transformation in the digital age: Challenges and success factors» examines trends and changes in the Swiss work environment and their effects on the workplace of the future.

The findings of this study are based on a representative survey of 1,000 office workers in Switzerland conducted by Research Now.

The survey was limited to white-collar workers – those working in office, commercial, service and similar occupations – who spend at least half of their working hours at a desk using a PC or laptop. Across the economy, this group makes up around 40% of all Swiss employees.⁶ The aim was to reflect the Swiss office landscape and to exclude occupations requiring little, if any, office space (such as a construction worker, cashier or childcare worker) and for which the described workplace ecosystem is of little importance.

In addition, face-to-face interviews were conducted with experts and executives from the following companies: ABB, Basler Insurance, Credit Suisse, Swiss Post, Johnson & Johnson, Nestlé, Philip Morris International, Swisscom, Swiss Re, Zürcher Kantonalbank and Zürich Versicherungs-Gesellschaft AG.

The study [«Workplace transformation in the digital age: Challenges and success factors»](#) is available online.

Deloitte Switzerland

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