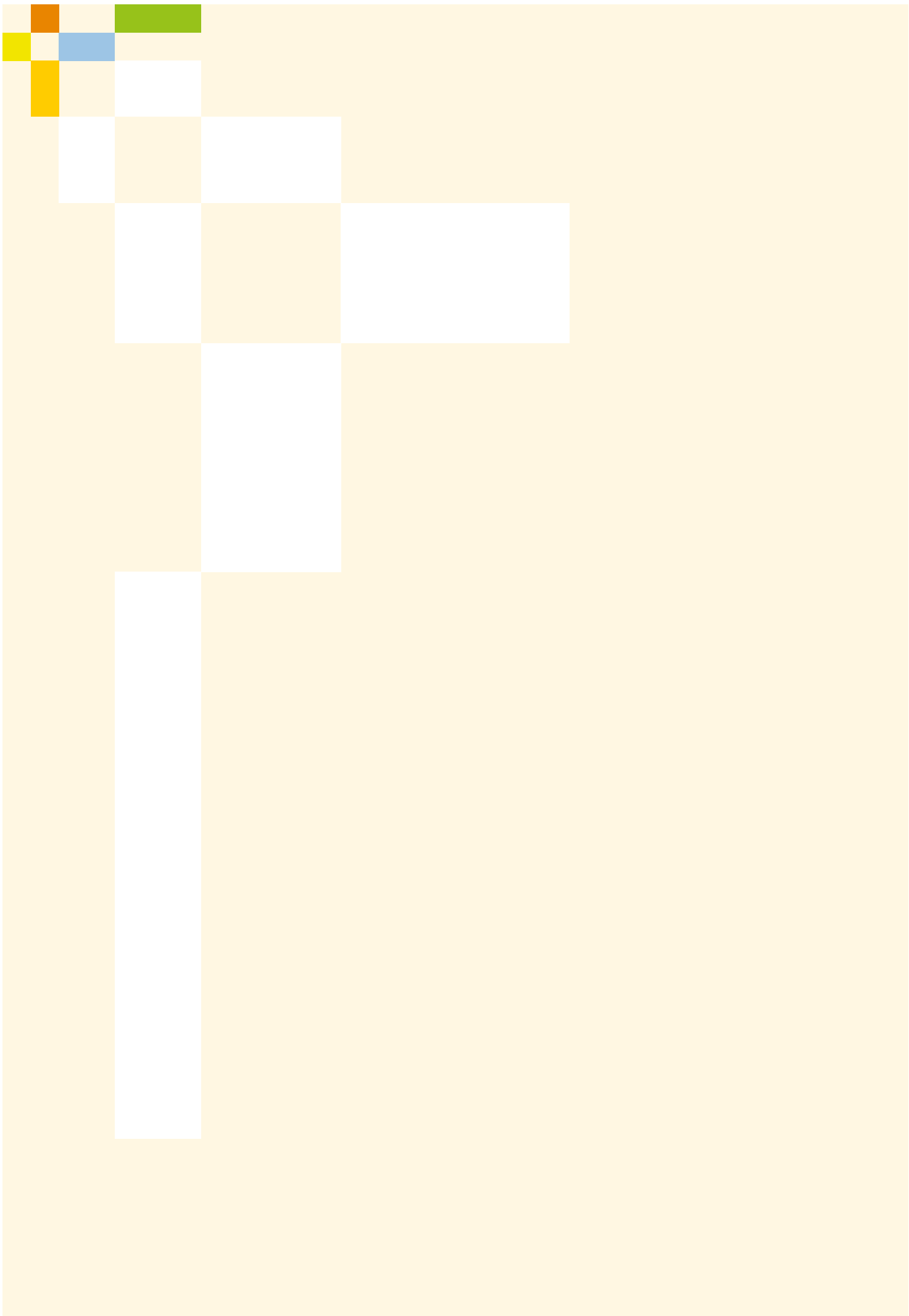acatech IMPULSE

From a Presence Culture to a Culture of Trust

Seven Theses on Mobile and Hybrid
Working presented by the Human
Resources Working Group

**Joh. Christian Jacobs, Henning Kagermann,
Stefan Oschmann (Eds.)**

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NATIONAL ACADEMY OF
SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

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The acatech IMPULSE series

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Foreword

We need a massive **leap in productivity** in Germany over the coming years, notably to cope with the economic consequences of the coronavirus crisis and the challenges of demographic trends. **Digitalisation** will be key to dealing with these issues. Alongside technological change, we are seeing **changes in the working environment**. In the course of the digital transformation, work processes and management and organisational processes in companies are being radically redesigned, permanently changing our understanding of work and the nature of work.

The coronavirus crisis has further accentuated these trends. Employees and organisations had to **react promptly and at** unprecedented **speed**, shifting their work processes and operations into the (partly) virtual environment where possible, working from home, making increased use of digital tools and finding a new work-life balance. It will be crucial to derive long-term benefit from the opportunities presented by the promptness and speed of change we have seen recently and to use the experience gained from the crisis in the future. Companies, employees and business partners want to **work together in partnership to shape** the transformation.

acatech's Human Resources Working Group (HR Working Group) is therefore looking in depth at how **opportunities for innovation and good work** may arise from digitalisation and how it is pos-

sible for good, creative and productive work to be done remotely or in hybrid models. There is a core belief that employees are the best experts when it comes to designing their own working environment. As responsible individuals, they should have the opportunity and autonomy to co-design the digital transformation, rather than just "going with the flow". Placing more trust in employees in this sense requires a rethink from both managers in the company and from business partners and legislators.

Against this backdrop, this thesis paper summarises some of the key results of our work and is designed to contribute towards open political and social discourse on the future of work, irrespective of the policy approaches of parties, trade associations or trade unions. To that end, the HR Working Group would like to engage in dialogue with other stakeholders in politics and administration, business, science and society.

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1 Starting position

The digital transformation and the coronavirus crisis will result in lasting change in work processes and organisational processes in companies and therefore in the nature of work itself. A key element of many companies' crisis strategy has been allowing employees to work from home in order to reduce personal contact and slow the spread of coronavirus. **Hybrid working models** or a flexible mix of various forms of work and organisation both within and outside the company will continue to be seen in the long term.[1] In response to surveys, around 70 percent of human resources managers indicate that they will be offering more mobile working[2] after the pandemic than was the case before the crisis. Many decision-makers have recognised the useful **potential for flexibility, work-life balance and resilience**. Adopting a flexible approach to where and when work is done and giving employees the freedom to organise and design their own work schedules result in a win-win situation for employees and companies. Not only does this increase the attractiveness of employers and result in greater employee loyalty and more applications from (urgently needed) qualified staff, it also leads to higher levels of employee satisfaction and motivation. Many employees are indeed demanding assurances that companies will offer them individual flexible packages.

In addition to the opportunities offered by mobile working, it is also important to take its limitations into consideration. Adopting a systemic approach, an increasingly important role is being played in business by new forms of **work organisation and work culture**, the expansion of **digital infrastructures**, the professionalisation of **digital collaboration** and the issue of health and/or **health maintenance**. Among policymakers, these new forms of working and of organisation should be more strongly promoted and facilitated. Uncertainty about legal issues and economic consequences is preventing the adoption of appropriate solutions which also meet operational requirements. These include issues relating to working hours, tax law, and balancing work with family life.

In this context, work must be reorganised and regulations adapted. The changes affect all business segments, the entire management and the organisation. If business processes and models are transformed, the customer interface will, for example, become more digital, more spontaneous and more flexible. These developments require employees and employers to adjust their behaviour and be constantly willing to learn. This usually results in a significant skill shift. The transformation must be designed so that companies and employees both derive benefit from it (resulting in a **win-win** situation).

If we seize the opportunities presented to us by digitalisation, we will ensure prosperity and employment in Germany. Employees will be able to adopt a more flexible, autonomous, independent and creative approach to the way they work. A prerequisite for the transformation is a new governance which promotes the willingness to change and creates the freedom to experiment – within companies and with regard to regulation. Trust in the motivation of employees and in their self-management skills is key here. We have to trust people more and take them seriously as responsible designers of their own working environment.

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1 | In line with Fraunhofer IAO, we take the term "hybrid working" to mean that it is expected there will be a greater blend of presence-based working/collaboration and remote working/collaboration in the future, and this will be seen as more of a matter of course. Many organisations are currently devising visions and examining options for combining the positive learning experiences from the past twelve months with earlier ideas on implementing presence-based work and cooperation. The assessment as to which elements of work and collaboration in the future should be presence-based and which should be remote will change with time, depending on the nature of the contacts, the specific work content and the objective of the cooperation, as well as on the level of trust that has been built up, the IT equipment available, and the corporate culture in the individual organisations. Hybrid working offers the opportunity to combine the best of both worlds and to achieve additional goals such as sustainability and a better work-life balance.

2 | In general, "mobile working" means working temporarily and on an irregular basis in places other than the main place of work defined in the employment contract. Such places of work may be diverse: at a client site, on a train, in a hotel, but also at home. The terms for this form of working vary and include mobile work and flexible work(ing).

2 Most urgent action areas

To make good, creative and productive work possible when work is being done remotely or in hybrid models, three action areas in particular should be at the forefront of operational considerations. In addition to a **corporate and management culture** which encourages independent autonomous working, tailored **spatial and technical solutions** are required. We can still see room for improvement in this area in Germany if we also wish to remain attractive as a location for innovation.

The transformation into a **corporate culture which facilitates and promotes hybrid working** will only succeed if management and employees are involved in the process of change from an early stage. In crisis mode during the coronavirus pandemic, pragmatic solutions and ad hoc decisions were often the order of the day, but how can we find durable **medium to long-term approaches** based on our experience of the pandemic and on the solution processes and operational processes that were devised during the crisis?

Digitalisation and the experience gained during the coronavirus crisis have meant that performance is taking on a new meaning, with a move away from a presence culture towards a

1   Actively co-designing the corporate culture

2   Increasing empowerment through openness and trust

3   Refining the management role model

4   Creating a framework for trust-based collaboration

5   Rethinking the role of the "office"

6   Targeting the use of tools and analytics applications

7   Devising guidelines and clear parameters

Figure 1: An overview of mobile and hybrid working (shutterstock/Inspiring and acatech)

results-oriented culture. This gives employees the opportunity to work **flexibly** and **from any location** if they have access to appropriate information and communications technology. In future, performance and productivity will correlate less strongly with presence in the office. Furthermore, there will be a need to maintain employees' motivation and (mental) health and to strengthen identification with the company even from a physical distance.

2.1 Corporate culture

Practical challenges

Established structures and processes in the company need to evolve in order to satisfy the growing need for flexibility and autonomy. The **conflict** here **between the need for flexibility and the need for stability** is nothing new but has always been the focus of corporate activity. However, as a result of the recent developments described above, the need for greater flexibility of time and location has gained enormously in importance, compared with the need for stability. This is set against reservations expressed by management, executives and employees that mobile working may lead to a loss of i**dentification and cultural affiliation** with the company and qualms that **social contacts and networks** may not be as easily maintained when working virtually. There is also a concern that remote working will mean that employees' **performance** will be insufficiently **creative and innovative**. The company will need to adopt appropriate strategies in response and find the right balance. Experience during the pandemic has shown that hybrid forms of working entail a different and greater need for (formal) communication to compensate for the absence of informal communication. The lack of chance meetings and the greater difficulty involved in establishing relationships and networks in the virtual environment require a continuous cross-team flow of information and conscious steps taken by employees and management to counter the problem, so that they remain connected and continue to interact. Cross-functional collaboration and flexible cooperation need to be strengthened and internal silos torn down. When employees have greater flexibility as to where and when they perform their services, this presents companies with greater challenges.

The aim must be to create a corporate culture which is a catalyst for productive hybrid working and takes a holistic approach to the changed parameters. This goes hand in hand with a greater need for employees' independence and personal responsibility.

Possible solutions / Vision of the future

> **Thesis 1: Each individual employee should be involved in designing and living the corporate culture.**

The key question at the heart of the **ongoing development of corporate culture** is how we can transfer existing strengths into tomorrow's world. Existing strengths should continue to be enhanced efficiently based on established business, while at the same time allowing **free space for** the creation of **visionary solutions and innovations**. In the course of the transformation, good practice will not fundamentally be called into question, just refined in individual cases. One-to-one mapping of a presence culture with established processes, communication patterns and workflows onto a (partly) virtual environment is neither possible nor effective. Employees and management must play an **active** role in **co-designing** the transformation of the corporate culture.

The quality of hybrid forms of working will continue to improve as a result of regular communication between management and employees. To promote social cohesion, they need sufficient scope and opportunities for **informal interaction and networking**. Regular **feedback** (bottom-up and top-down) and continuous **dialogue** are becoming increasingly important. Models geared towards individual control must continue to be developed into integrated feedback tools for work teams and project teams. Above all, these should promote and place even greater emphasis on collaboration and creativity. In tandem, there is an increasing focus on **teambuilding** measures which involve all team members in the change process, irrespective of whether the employees are working mainly remotely or are physically present. Ongoing dialogue with business partners allows for a constructive approach to addressing concerns and for the consideration of different needs.

> **Thesis 2: As key elements of corporate culture, openness and trust form the basis of employee empowerment.**

Flexible and hybrid working models require a **balance between trust and transparency when considering overall team performance.** Team spirit, creativity and employee identification with the company are based on **open exchange and dialogue**. This

requires mutual trust, even if employees no longer work in a single place or at the same time. The **issue of trust** is important not only for management, but also between co-workers. **Clear and transparent communications** provide the necessary framework here. Other requirements are a strong **feedback culture** and clear agreement on objectives. These should focus on results achieved rather than individual activities as the basis of employee performance assessment. Where possible, the assessment of individual performance should not be linked to the number of hours the employee is present or to attendance at a place of work.

The **openness to change** which is crucial for the transformation to succeed requires processes that permit precisely this type of openness. The **reorientation of operational performance management** has a critical role to play here. Modern performance management must be able to take **a holistic view** of employees' performance and incorporate qualitative feedback from their environment. Static annual performance assessments are replaced by continuous, transparent ad hoc feedback, which takes account of peer feedback and is employee-driven rather than management-driven. This process strengthens collaboration and team acceptance.

An open and trusting corporate culture also offers opportunities to share information on **preventive work in the area of mental and physical health**, thus expanding the healthcare options available. In hybrid working models, if employees have no personal contact or this is severely restricted, the employer's duty of care becomes more difficult. Other (digital) situational prevention measures include IT-supported processes for external assessment and self-assessment, the provision of virtual courses and digital toolboxes.

2.2 Leadership

Practical challenges

Managers have a key function in the transformation of existing working and organisational processes. This does not mean that employees require less management in hybrid working models, but that there must be a rethink of the **role of managers** and the value added by management. Looking towards the future, managers will continue to devise rules and structures. They must set clear **rules for productive collaboration** and prioritise issues. At the same time, decision-making powers and responsibility for decision-making must be credibly delegated and employees given enough **freedom to perform their duties**. There has to be a productive balance between transparency and control. Overall,

a manager's job will change and become more **the role of an intermediary**. Rather than being an instructor, the manager will become a facilitator.

Another challenge of hybrid collaboration is the need to engage extensively with **fostering employees' talent and personal development** in line with these latest requirements. Here, managers need to have sufficient time and capacity to be able to advise employees remotely, providing guidance as they work, in order to boost their employees' potential and/or identify their development needs and initiate appropriate personnel development measures.

Possible solutions / Vision of the future

> **Thesis 3: The management role model must be refined – moving away from transactional management towards a transformational management culture.**

Fundamental norms and values of management culture, some of which have been established in companies for decades, must be brought into line with the new working models. The paradigm of top-down management is outdated, although bottom-up management (alone) will not succeed either. A promising modus operandi would be first to define the desired vision for management and then to derive further measures taking the status quo as a starting point. The meaningful question to focus on here should always be "Why?". This is how corporate identity can be reconciled with the new view of management. The employees should be involved at an early stage in this cultural change process and changes should continue to be communicated in a transparent manner.

Trust-based management models require not only adjustment to existing management models but also extensive support for the change in culture through measures designed to develop talent and personnel. This is the only way in which management can drive the changes forward in a credible and competent manner, "leading from the front" and creating the right conditions for change to take place in their company. Training as well as communicating with other managers will facilitate **reflection about current and future roles**. The revised **"good management" criteria** should be applied in the course of the selection and induction of new managers. Lifelong learning is one of the success factors for changing the management culture and must be one of the strategic considerations right from the start.

On the one hand, managers should play an active part in changing the culture and should live their (partly new) role. On the other hand, they must also fulfil their function as **role models**. Various coaching and mentoring measures may help managers to relinquish control and allow for a greater level of trust, so that they are able to create an environment based on **self-organisation** and to support employees' ability to handle **flexibility** and **responsibility**.

> **Thesis 4: Trust-based collaboration between managers and employees requires a new framework system; team charters support the change.**

In parallel with the changes in how management is viewed, team structures must also be transformed. A joint **collaboration framework** comprising guidelines can be formulated. The creation of a **team charter** helps the team enter into agreements and initiate a design process from the new type of collaboration for which the employees themselves are responsible. A forward-looking approach for managers in the company and for business partners would involve adopting the motto **"providing employees with free scope to act and with accompanying guidance"**, rather than adopting a "control and secure" principle. Drafting guidelines which work across hierarchies reinforces the common understanding and **commitment** of the team members and takes various business perspectives into consideration. The basis for drawing up a team charter should be the **purpose** defined by the company management: i.e. the one common idea and the common goal. This focus on the meaning attached to the company's activities improves employee motivation and the identification of employees with the company, especially in the course of the transformation of the existing corporate and management culture.

A key element of a team charter is the practicability of and commitment to collaboration. Pragmatic solutions and arrangements for (hybrid) collaboration must be devised within the teams. Clear and transparently communicated **rules for work in the office and outside the workplace**, such as how team members may be reached in the course of mobile working, should be an integral element of the agreed arrangements. Systematic knowledge sharing is required, even when work is being done remotely. The use of planning tools and tools for interaction and communication provides support for reliable collaboration regardless of location and time. As well as establishing the way in which work will be performed, managers should work together with employees to arrive at a precise definition of the company's objectives and

key performance indicators and to determine how results and progress will be managed. In a hybrid working environment, this is based on trust rather than control. This greater level of **autonomy** is crucial for the **empowerment** and self-organisation of employees and makes a participative working environment possible.

However, establishing a common framework cannot succeed in a fixed one-off development process. Instead, companies should **adopt an error culture**, in which errors are allowed and there is a willingness to learn from those errors, and where adjustments are possible and everything is continuously questioned. To do this, periods of time for **review and feedback loops** can be agreed, since there is no master plan for designing the working environment of the future which could anticipate all conceivable developments and establish appropriate regulations. Transformation will come mainly from **experimentation**.

2.3 Infrastructure and facilities

Practical challenges

Existing **workplace concepts** in companies are still too heavily based on the rationale of the five-day office week with hierarchical structures and workflow rules. To be able to depict adequately how reorganisations and hybrid working models would operate, workspaces must be **flexible and individually customisable**. Considerations relating to **technical equipment** and connectivity both in companies and in the course of mobile working should focus more heavily on new business practice. Digital **collaboration tools** should be suitable for agile, creative working in teams. Reinvestment in digital solutions is necessary. Particular attention should be paid here to the **professionalisation of digital collaboration**. Overarching security issues and technical issues as well as the individual skills and qualifications of employees are key prerequisites for success. The aim here must be **to avoid a double digital divide** – between large and smaller companies on the one hand and between highly-skilled and low-skilled workers on the other.

Possible solutions / Vision of the future

> **Thesis 5: The role of the "office" must be rethought. No longer simply a place where work is done, it will become a key place to meet and with which to identify.**

The office will continue to be an important anchor for every employee. However, the **type** of work done on corporate premises will be different. In future, employees will increasingly use the office as **a place for social interaction**, agile project work and creative work. Flexible workspaces such as those in co-working spaces are also suitable for project work. For concentrated, focused work and routine work, employees will be encouraged increasingly to work from home or an in places other than on company premises.

In future, office design will therefore be based on providing optimal **support for activity profiles**, with a focus on social interaction, collaboration and innovation. It will be possible to book rooms for quiet working as required or for employees to work together with others in flexibly designed meeting rooms and project rooms and in collaborative open workspaces and communication spaces. Office concepts are thus increasingly adopting a differentiated approach similar to the concept of **activity-based working**. Hierarchical or workflow issues fade as a result into the background.

Alongside an increasingly flexible attitude to **where** work is done comes a similar attitude to **when** it is done. This creates greater opportunities for achieving a better work-life balance: e.g. by engaging part-time workers.

> **Thesis 6: Successful work/collaboration and the successful use and design of workspaces will increasingly be achieved in the future through targeted use of tools and analytics applications.**

Digital booking systems can be used to help manage work capacity and space available in a cost-effective manner and as needed. Here, (intelligent) technologies and digital tools are enablers and drivers of the **flexibility** and **multifunctionality of premises**; it must also be possible to book workspaces on a temporary basis and they must be available for special events. Suitable collaboration tools are crucial here. Creative and agile forms of work and complex problem-solving must also increasingly be able to be depicted digitally, while always respecting the right of the individual to informational self-determination.

Employees' **digital skills** play a key role here. An ability to handle digital technology and media confidently is indispensable. Given the increased amount of work being done using hybrid working models, being able to handle digital tools to make virtual and international collaboration possible is becoming ever more important. Key competences, which will become increasingly important in future, continue to include **creativity**, **problem-solving skills**, **the ability to collaborate** and also a capacity for **self-management** and self-directed learning, a willingness to embrace change, and independent thinking and decision-making.

> **Thesis 7: To make good, productive work in the hybrid model possible, employees and managers should be supported by appropriate guidelines and clear parameters.**

In addition to clear and **transparent regulations** and answers to key questions from employees (such as "What financial support and incentives are there to enable me to work from home? Who is insured and how? How do I record my working hours?"), other requirements include ergonomic, functional **equipment** at the office premises and at home, **efficient IT** and good **training opportunities**. Each business needs to look at the extent to which it is possible and sensible for the employer to provide equipment components for work that is flexible in terms of location, or whether the employer should provide subsidies or whether pooled purchase orders should be submitted. Companies' support packages will include tips on how to stay healthy when working from home, checklists for employees on how to set up an office at home and guidelines for managers, in particular on how to design lasting solutions for mobile working.

Rules of conduct for communication and common work procedures are crucial to team collaboration. These include, among other things, clear communication between employees and managers about their availability and about the balance between synchronous and asynchronous communication. Regular community formats to exchange internal best practice about hybrid work formats will create added value.

3 Outlook

Business, government, social partners and employees need to play an **active** role in **co-designing** the transformation of the world of work, in order to create and exploit opportunities for growth, prosperity and employment. In addition to operational approaches and an environment where employees have greater autonomy and share responsibility for good, productive, mobile working and working in hybrid models, government can also support and underpin the commitment of employees and companies. In this context, revising existing working time regulations would be a helpful initiative, to ensure greater flexibility in actual working conditions. **Adjustments** to digital infrastructure and also to existing statutory and legal requirements within the altered framework must be discussed; **international expertise** should also be taken into account here. On the basis of this thesis paper, the HR Working Group will focus even more strongly on the topic of mobile and hybrid working.

Another aspect to consider here are the **opportunities and limitations of mobile working**, because we are well aware that not all employees have access to mobile working or, due to the nature of their professional activity, not all employees are able or willing to work from home or at another location outside the office, at least some of the time. It is therefore mainly employees in knowledge industries and employees working in administration who have the option of performing (some or all) their activities on a mobile basis. This may but should not be equated with requests from the employee or from the company that the employee work from home, dependent on the availability of suitable space and equipment. On the other hand, employees who work in an industrial operating environment, who may for example be engaged in shift work, are much more rarely able to work from home, due to the activities they perform or their working conditions. To design **solutions tailored to the individual while at the same time meeting operational requirements**, the decision in favour of mobile working should be taken in consultation between employer and employee. Ultimately, employers must be able to decide whether and how mobile working can sensibly be incorporated into everyday operations.

However, if one takes into account mental wellbeing, identification with the company, and social connections with bosses and colleagues, as well as the sharing of expertise in a personal setting to promote creativity in the development of ideas and solutions, it is clear that a total or permanent shift of all operations to working from home or mobile working ought not to become the norm.

In the course of digitalisation, activity profiles are changing very rapidly into their information-processing and knowledge-processing components. This opens up new opportunities for the expansion of forms of work which are flexible in terms of location. Many companies are currently trialling new forms of work organisation and work culture in **experimental zones**. Pilot studies are being conducted, looking not only at opportunities for virtual collaboration between various locations (remote collaboration), but also increasingly at the potential for automating processes and at the use of (intelligent) digital technologies for servicing and maintenance. Enhanced time synchronisation of research and practice can help here.

This gives rise to a number of basic questions, which need to be considered by entering into social dialogue. How can hybrid teamwork in the company be enshrined as a fundamental principle without exacerbating the problem of a "two-tier society"? How can management culture, working processes and organisational processes help here?

Jointly, we want to engage in this dialogue.

acatech – National Academy of Science and Engineering

acatech advises policymakers and the general public, supports policy measures to drive innovation, and represents the interests of the technological sciences internationally. In accordance with its mandate from Germany's federal government and states, the Academy provides independent, science-based advice that is in the public interest. acatech explains the opportunities and risks of technological developments and helps to ensure that ideas become innovations – innovations that lead to greater prosperity, welfare, and quality of life. acatech brings science and industry together. The Academy's Members are prominent scientists from the fields of engineering, the natural sciences and medicine, as well as the humanities and social sciences. The Senate is made up of leading figures from major science organisations and from technology companies and associations. In addition to its headquarters at the acatech FORUM in Munich, the Academy also has offices in Berlin and Brussels.

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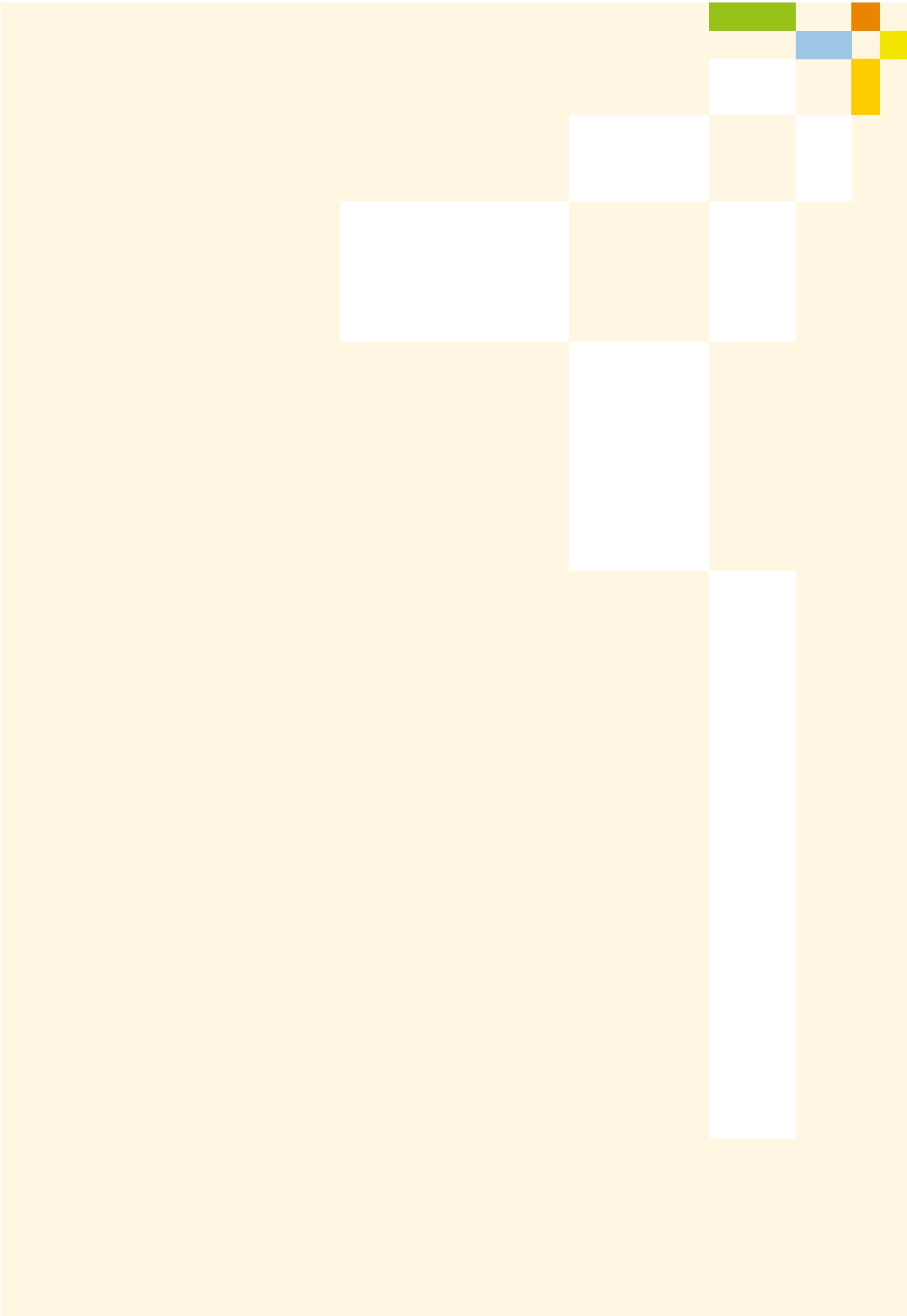
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Many companies are facing the challenge of making sustainable use of the digitalisation push and retaining and strengthening the opportunities presented to employees and companies by mobile and hybrid forms of working even beyond the duration of the coronavirus pandemic. Experience has demonstrated which areas of potential for flexibility and resilience are useful here. However, this requires a transformation into an organisational and management culture which promotes autonomous and independent working. Moreover, designs for office premises and opportunities for (digital) collaboration have to be adapted and refined.

acatech's Human Resources Working Group (HR Working Group) has addressed the issue of how good, creative and productive work can succeed on a mobile basis or in hybrid models. In this area, we can still see room for improvement if Germany also wishes to remain attractive as a location for innovation. This acatech IMPULSE publication presents seven theses on the collaboration of the future, which we see as a proposal to the various stakeholders in the digital transformation. The theses are designed to facilitate future-oriented organisational development and to promote productivity, innovation and good working practice in Germany.