



Part I

Six tips to get more out of working in the office

Linda Mostert, behavioral and change expert at YNNO

After 2.5 years of working from home a lot, work seems to have predominantly returned to the office. But the feeling still prevails in many places: 'is this it?' What is striking at the moment is the dissatisfaction with the office and the legion of examples of half-empty offices, where people work solo. The people who attend constantly disturb each other, resulting in people often being tired at the end of the day and feeling they have barely achieved anything. From my work as a behavioural and change expert, I, unfortunately, hear stories like this too often in contemporary work issues. Every day, my YNNO colleagues and I are committed making the world of work a better place, which is why I am convinced that we can do things differently.

How? For that, I would like to share some tips, drawing on project experiences and scientific behavioural insights, such as Self-Determination Theory on basic psychological needs and motivation. But also insights about current motivators in work where McKinsey & Company publishes studies about, the basic principles

of systemic viewing and knowledge about the Psychological Contract. If you want to know more about this, I would like to refer you to the attached resource list.

In this part, I focus on tips related to the three basic psychological needs autonomy, competence and

connectedness. Part II explores two basic systemic principles: order and exchange. I have distinguished between practical tips for you as an employee and for you as a manager.

Fixed or changeable?

I regularly hear: *'We humans have a minimal capacity for change, so we are stuck in our habits and (organisational) culture'*. Habits and culture are nothing more than a solution to reduce complexity and give meaning. If we have to analyse every situation from the beginning, it will take (too) long. It does not mean that we can never change. We have the capacity and energy to change, as long as the path for change is cleared and we have motivation.

The scientific evidence found in the last 50 years on the importance of growth, autonomy and connectedness as the essential basic motivational needs in our work is overwhelming. We need satisfaction of these needs to be motivated to do our work and to move with change. It is, therefore, advisable to find out what concerns there are about fulfilling growth, autonomy and connectedness and which ones are legitimate.



Tip 1

Take into account new work rhythms

Autonomy is a motivator that we need to consider from two sides. Autonomy in choice of workplace was small for office workers in recent years; we were not allowed to go to the office. On the other hand, that autonomy was very high in other areas. Many of us entirely arranged our own day. It proved very motivating to finally have space, for example; to play sports a few times a week, pick up the

children from school yourself or walk the dog. However, you must compromise on this when you return to the office. Again, you do have the benefits of meeting physically, but you will also have to reconcile the new, different work rhythms as a team or, more broadly, in the organisation. While the ensuing concern about losing our autonomy may not be entirely legitimate, it seems so because we have become spoilt by now. We assume we have gained certain rights through the freedom of working from home. The fear of losing what we have keeps us from being open to something new.

My tip for you as an employee: It helps to realise that change is necessary to eliminate unsatisfactory feelings around office work. Unfortunately, no change comes without pain or loss. However, decide what loss is acceptable and take it. Consider the costs and benefits, not only for you but also for the team and the organisation as a whole. Reflect on your new working rhythm and make explicit agreements on this with your team. Use your calendar - which should be open to colleagues - to make it easy for everyone to maintain this rhythm.

My tip for you as a manager: Listen to the underlying layer of objections made. Deepen concerns about autonomy, which often emerge as personal preferences. Discuss individual and team concerns. Suggest a solution to legitimate concerns. For example, use buddy pairs to mitigate extremes; one person may experience difficulty with something that another is very strong at. Leave room for the team to correct each other and invalidate objections that do not hold up, so that the team reaches collective agreements.



Tip 2



Use the office as a place to learn and develop

We are constantly looking for a challenge and what is good for us. We are willing to invest energy in our competence and we need it to stay motivated. Unfortunately, this is precisely where organisations have been lagging behind for the past 2.5 years: development, which includes both personal and organisational development.

My tip for you as an employee: Schedule very specific appointments with colleagues to reflect and develop together and open your calendar to them to schedule these appointments more efficiently. You don't have any experience with such sessions? Good examples of commonly used Agile Scrum Retrospectives and brainstorming techniques can be found online. Throw balls around in your team what opportunities you see to work on development. Only participate in consultations with questions; contribute to a culture in which you can drop out without emotion (in between) for consultations that do not add value for you.

My tip for you as a manager: Check whether it is true for you that development needs to catch up. Should more training courses be taken? Has the number of patent applications dropped? Are people less motivated? Then ensure the office supports contact, reflection and working on new initiatives to the maximum, with centrally located creative and informal spaces and encourage their use. Ask team members if they find each other effortlessly. Solve problems for the team related to understanding availability or collective agreements on work rhythms that align.

Tip 3

Embrace inequality in the team

Chances are that you need to go to the office more than you think necessary. Let me explain. Like other animal species, humans have always been used to working together because



it increases our chances of survival. Our basic needs can be traced back to our origins as herd animals, who needed connection with others to learn and survive. If a herd of elephants split up five days a week to physically work together only on Tuesdays and Thursdays, the weakest animals would not survive (Wawoe, 2021). It works the same way in our organisations. It works the same way in our organisations. Recent studies by McKinsey and others show that employees currently prioritise themes about connection over things like salary; for example, appreciation by supervisor and organisation, work-life balance and the feeling of a shared identity rank at the top. There is said that employers do not yet respond well to this, and that is why so many people around us are resigning.

My tip for you as an employee: Take some time to reflect on your role. If you belong to the weaker in the herd, make sure you get heard clearly. If you belong to the stronger, consider what others need from you and be prepared to meet it. Also, reflect on the most important motivators for you in work and to what extent they are met. Do you feel at one with the organisation's identity? Are you still in your place here?

My tip for you as a manager: Don't focus on the average physical presence required for team members, but look at the spread and the extremes. Vulnerable employees should be actively involved in these choices. Besides including them, excluding others contributes equally to connection. Exclude people who do not have a say in your way of working and the use of the office, for example. Help the team focus on

the work and decide what is needed to achieve set goals. Let teams make their own agreements that they need to make among themselves and especially with other teams to get the bonding in order. Try experimenting, with their input, to improve the work and use of the office. In addition, invest in the sense of purpose; the much-discussed 'purpose' and the extent to which your team members identify with it. You didn't manage to keep employees motivated? Then always ask about the reasons for leaving in an exit interview. You will often get full disclosure and valuable information for improvement there.

These are my three tips on autonomy, competence and connection. Take advantage of them and, above all, let me know if the tips helped!

In part II, the other three tips will follow, which are connected to two basic systemic principles, and you will read whether you can really go to the office differently without having the feeling: 'is this it?'

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Part 2

Six tips to get more out of working in the office

Linda Mostert, behavioral and change expert at YNNO

In Part I, I shared tips on how to get more out of working at the office based on the three basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and connectedness. Tips on how to function pleasantly, effectively and productively so that you go home at the end of the day feeling fulfilled. As a behavioural and change expert at YNNO, my colleagues and I are committed to making the world of work a better place every day, which is why I am convinced it is possible.

In Part II, I elaborate on two of the three basic systemic principles: exchange and order. The tips are based on my own project experiences and scientific behavioural insights, such as Self-Determination Theory on basic psychological needs and motivation. But also insights about current motivators in work where McKinsey & Company publishes studies about the basic principles of systemic viewing and

knowledge about the Psychological Contract. If you want to know more about this, I would like to refer you to the attached resource list.

Tip 4

Temper expectations



Teams and organisations, like a herd, are a living system. Living systems flourish with the right arrangement, (re)bonding and exchange. In other words, who (or what) takes precedence over whom (or what), who belongs to whom and what is given and received between them. I have already said a bit about (re)bonding in Part I, so I will now focus mainly on the principles of exchange and order, where the exchange between organisation and employee concerning office use is interesting, as well as the exchange between different colleagues.

What we expect from the exchange between the organisation and employee, beyond what is stated in our employment contract, is often implicit. This concerns the employee's expectations of the organisation for which they are making efforts and also the obligations felt in return. We know from research that, unfortunately, satisfaction is mainly related to what one expects to get, as opposed to what one actually gets. Our expectations of office work have become higher. Coloured by working from home where we had the convenience of our own favourite coffee, the ideal temperature, a room set up to your liking and - perhaps - hardware of our choice. We expect more luxury in the office than at home (Oldman, 2022). We also expect more attention from employers to individual vitality, because of the negative effects of working from home that we have experienced. Because we include all our heightened expectations, the employer is likely to disappoint.

My tip for you as an employee: Compare the expectations you had before and after corona. Consider what contract you mentally have with your employer, whether these are appropriate and realistic expectations and whether you both meet them.

My tip for you as a manager: Discuss with your employees what the expectations are outside the employment contract. If necessary, outline for your employees what acquired rights they claim are not mutually agreed upon and what is agreed upon. An open and healthy exchange sometimes also needs to stop things. For example, interventions on individual vitality sometimes do not help tasks move forward or even work against them. Think of yoga rooms, fruit baskets and diet coaches; these are often only used by healthy employees.

Tip 5

Come to the office for the right reasons



Organisations with a strong organisational culture perform well and develop themselves. The quality of exchange between colleagues determines this culture. Exchange is about products we deliver to each other and knowledge exchange, also called task cohesion. In addition, it is about social cohesion. I hear many legitimate concerns about exchange in the office. Apparently, we do not yet manage to meet physically in the right way. I regularly hear that employees attempt to solve this by going to the office, but then experience that the building is half empty and everyone is working solitarily. Next time, they make the choice (for the wrong reason) to stay home anyway.

My tip for you as an employee: Discuss the exchange among yourselves. For many teams, the pandemic was a magnifying glass on connection and exchange problems that were there before. Therefore, start at the beginning. Go back to what is on paper. Good job descriptions help with this; take out personal preferences. This gives space to sort out cohesion at job level. Then engage in a conversation about your and your colleagues' social cohesion and individual needs so that you can improve on that too. Align your work rhythms and come to the office focused on working together.

My tip for you as a manager: Avoid trying to solve this problem by mandating a fixed number of office days. In teams where the exchange is disrupted, before corona, it was also not in order. Help the team see and address the causes of the disrupted exchange. Also, fine-tune your own working rhythm and desirable exchange with colleagues, because you will not be the first manager to be physically invited to something every day.

clear frameworks that define the path individuals and teams can choose to do their work. The organisation determines these and takes precedence over everyone's personal preferences. This ordering is needed for the system to flourish. Within the frameworks, the importance of autonomy is high so that we stay motivated, as I mentioned in tip 1. But autonomy is worth nothing if it is underused due to lack of direction.

Tip 6

Let everyone make their own choices within clear frameworks



In recent years, I often use a picture of the Vecht through Utrecht as a metaphor to explain the importance of clear frameworks. You see the river with a bridge over it, several boats going in different directions and one making a sharp u-turn. The banks of the Vecht symbolise the

My tip for you as an employee: State what you need from the organisation. I regularly think back to the days when I supervised outdoor training courses. Often, teams had to complete exercises in which participants were blindfolded and waited for instructions from a supervisor. The most successful teams had one thing in common: the team leader took the team through what the final result should be, and the team members indicated what they needed to contribute to it. If a team leader starts telling team members step by step what to do, things go wrong at the first best obstacle. In today's zeitgeist, it is essential that your manager or team know that you sound the alarm if you run into something. Then they can further give you the freedom you need.



De Vecht. Image: Nisangha/iStock

My tip for you as a manager: Take your employees on an inspirational journey, offering room for meaning and imagination. If one knows the end goal, little management is needed. Then employees use their creativity and problem-solving abilities to overcome most of the bumps themselves. For example, if you work with self-managing teams, delve into the organising principles that ensured success at Buurtzorg (Thieke, 2022). Even in this type of team, it is required for the organisation to give direction and for you to pass it on to the team where necessary.

At YNNO, we put people and work first. That means we are convinced that employees are the experts. They are the ones who know best what their needs are. However, we do all need a different perspective and education from time to time to reflect on our needs. Also, an environment that is receptive to change so that we don't get stuck in old processes with our new habits. With my tips, I hope that together, step by step, we can improve the world of work.

To conclude

The conclusion is: Yes, things can definitely be done differently. We don't have to go to the office with a feeling of "Is this it?". There is something to be gained when we physically work together. With the right energy and motivation and some shifts, we can improve how we work and the office's role.

If you want to know more or exchange views, please contact me!

Linda Mostert
linda.mostert@ynno.com
www.ynno.com



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