

NewNormal policy: enhancing productivity while remote working

Information on the case study:

Organisation: Siemens

Size: 320 000 employees

Location: München, Germany

Sector: Digitalisation for industry and infrastructures

Operational context

The coronavirus pandemic was a great challenge for many enterprises who had to switch to a digital working environment. Siemens was no exception and developed its new policy “New Normal” in order to survive and adapt to the rapidly changing reality in the professional world.

The problem/opportunity

During the most critical phases of the pandemic, Siemens developed a variety of flexible solutions to ensure the safety of employees and the maintenance of all the company's services. Siemens opted for a remote working model in the long term, where people can work remotely 2-3 days a week if their work amount allows it. Global surveys of Siemens employees had confirmed the desire for more flexibility and individual solutions in terms of work location.

What was done

Mobile working not only refers to home office, but rather to the fact that employees may choose, through consultation with their manager, the workplace where they feel most productive. The hybrid working model therefore includes working environments such as co-working offices.

According to Roland Busch, Deputy CEO and Labor Director of Siemens AG, this shift also involves a different management style that is geared towards results, not showing up in the office: “We trust our employees and empower them to shape their own work in order to achieve the best possible results.”¹ To this end, a central IT platform provided employees with all relevant information as well as specific training for managers. Growth mindset and empowerment - i.e. encouraging lifelong learning and empowering employees - are the two central cornerstones on which the new management style is based. According to Siemens, the company believes that only those who are open to change and new ways of working will remain relevant for the job market in the future.

The team responsible for the “New Normal” working model gathered the input from employees from many different sectors: Strategy, Human Resources, IT and business representatives to address as many needs as possible.

¹ K.SOMBORN, [Siemens etabliert mobiles Arbeiten als Kernelement der „neuen Normalität“](https://press.siemens.com), press.siemens.com, München, 2020.

Ever since the pandemic, Siemens has taken many measures to keep on promoting empathy, communication and teamwork even while remote working. For instance, Sonja Hoppe (Head of Business Excellence at Siemens IT Applications Platforms & Digital Solutions) explains:

We soon started to enter into more intensive personal exchanges, carried out more virtual interactions, and again stand-ups, frequent virtual team and ad-hoc bilateral coffees to check how colleagues are and to exchange experiences. We also had a virtual offsite with joint learning and fun elements organised by highly creative team members. The preparation for our virtual Christmas cooking has just started with a call for favourite recipes from the various countries of the team members.²

Another important Siemens initiative in the areas of inclusivity, empathy and mental health was the integration of the GROW2GLOW³ coaching movement, which explores personal or professional challenges. This company-wide network, initially focused on coaching women, gave employees of all genders the possibility to receive three hours of free coaching as social distancing and remote working began.

When after the end of the pandemic concerns about the new hybrid work possibilities started to rise, such as possible limited social interactions or collaboration opportunities, Siemens introduced the app “Comfy Flexible Spaces”⁴ in June 2022. The app is supposed to support employees while implementing the NewNormal policy. Key features included:

1. In-Office preferences: Employees could indicate their preferred workspaces or in-office days and at the same time see the ones selected by their colleagues. As a result, connections within the company improved.
2. Coworker Future Filter: Employees could check when relevant coworkers would be in the office, helping them plan their schedules and easing onboarding for new hires by enabling connections across teams.
3. Coworker Delegate Booking: This feature simplified meeting organisation and space reservations by allowing employees to book spaces for teammates.

² G. ADENAU, [Siemens IT teams and the ‘new normal’ culture: staying connected for mental health and employee wellbeing](#), LinkedIn.com, 2020.

³ An initiative born from a broad-based group of women who met in München and discussed the squandered potential of the company. Many certified coaches were missing a target to spread their knowledge to and many women in the company struggled to climb the corporate ladder. The participation is voluntary and follows the “pull principle”: whoever finds the time can contribute and you can leave without pressure. From I. HOFMANN, [‘We just started’ – The beginning of a grassroots movement](#), blog.siemens.com, 2022.

⁴ M. PALMER, [Siemens adds hybrid work collaboration tools to its workplace technology solution: Comfy](#), press.siemens.com, 2022.

Tools like this app are helpful to minimise the 'empty office syndrome'⁵ and foster a sense of community between colleagues.

Outcomes

For Siemens, the shift to the NewNormal has generated several benefits: The possibility of switching between in-person and remote work has turned the office into a place where people meet and interact, instead of just working from 9 to 5. At the same time, the company reports that the NewNormal policy has improved self-determination, resilience and general performance of employees. Letting them work independently and responsibly is strengthening the company's allure, thus increasing the diversity of its teams. This working concept now affects employees in 43 countries, and it always takes into account the local legal requirements, such as the rights of employee representatives, specific requirements of different job profiles and individual preferences. It is essentially based on a mutual agreement between employees and managers.

References

- G. ADENAU, [*Siemens IT teams and the 'new normal' culture: staying connected for mental health and employee wellbeing*](#), LinkedIn.com, 2020.
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- SIEMENS WEBSITE, [*Arbeiten bei Siemens: #NewNormal*](#), siemens.com, 2024.

⁵ A phenomenon that arises when employees return to the office only to discover a nearly empty workspace. The feeling of regret is inevitable after such contexts of isolation, which cause employees to be even less inclined to return.

From S. COLLIS, [*How to Prevent Your Office from Becoming a Ghost Town*](#), Amicus.com.au, 2024.