

# THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY EVOLUTION



*of*  
**WORK CULTURE**

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A TOOL TO OPTIMIZE THE MEANS TO ATTRACT AND RETAIN THE BEST TALENTS

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Globalization leads to a strong international pressure on improving productivity and efficiency. The ability to attract and retain the best talent is widely understood to be crucial to companies' business success. Only by having a strong core of talented, passionate and self-managing employees, capable of sustaining the responsive and innovative capacity of the organization to create results, will companies be able to act in the now and anticipate change. A major barrier in creating such an employee base is represented by the work culture characteristic of the majority of companies today. It fosters interruptive work environments, preventing employees from focusing and executing, and induces overtime in order to meet deadlines. There is a constant lack of time and the employees are too busy to act in the now, which drains the resources needed to innovate and interact with the market through the company's guiding vision. These conditions cause employees to refrain from assuming responsibility, which undercuts the core values and the goal of achieving the promise of results for those we serve. The solution to these organizational issues is to create a new flexible innovative work culture that is grounded in the acceptance of differences in work times and spaces. The tool to facilitate such a cultural shift is called Life Navigation. Life Navigation aims to empower

people to take responsibility for managing their time, design an individualized space and time for work, and fosters a new perception of work, life, and their inter-relationship. It emphasizes that the most highly productive individual employees will be those who are allowed to work when they are at peak energy and efficiency. It strives to manifest a work culture where flexibility, productivity, and individual life quality are integrated, and in which differences in work time and space are socially accepted.

Life Navigation has been implemented since May 2007 in the Danish affiliate of the Chicago based healthcare company Abbott, and after only two years, Abbott Denmark was awarded The Best at Work-Life Balance in Denmark, with 90% of the employees reporting that they have the flexibility needed for them to balance professional and personal needs.

This paper discusses how the implementation of a new flexible work culture will aid companies in attracting and retaining the best talent while also managing the challenges of the business scene. It evaluates the benefits from the creation of a new and more flexible work culture, and closes by introducing Life Navigation as the tool that can aid in this cultural evolution.

# INTRODUCTION

We find ourselves in a time of conflict between industry and knowledge, between assembly lines and brain activity. Once upon a time companies simply needed the body and that body just happened to have a brain. Today more and more companies need brainpower, and those brains just happen to have bodies. Work has to a great extent become *an invisible brain activity that can happen anytime and anywhere*.

In the transition from body movement to thought movement, work goes from being a visible activity to becoming an invisible activity, and when work is 'made of thought' the managers need to provide the employees the time and space to do their work, at a time and in an environment energizing for them. In other words we need individualized management for each employee.

Gary Hamel<sup>1</sup>, one of the world's most influential business thinkers, claims that the management model that predominates in most large organizations is now out-of-date. This model has its roots in the late 19th century, and was invented by Frederick W. Taylor to solve one overriding problem: how to get semi-skilled human beings to do the same things over and over again.

In the industrial workplace the physical work was both visible and measurable directly in the production process and the role of the management was to support the same rhythm and speed among all the

employees because the physical work necessitated it. The human being was considered to be a machine that was required to perform the same movement time and time again and was paid to move, not to think.

The logic of the industrial workplace in the shape of visual presence as a measure of work in time, along with the criterion that career success demands piling up such hours, still has a tenacious grasp on the consciousness of both managers and workers. But the paradox of invisible work is that it takes place all the time. Work and spare time run more and more together, and it makes no sense to measure invisible work in the time of physical presence at the workplace.

The reliance on old norms for working is presenting a growing need for new frameworks for the invisible work of the mind. It is, however, only a minority of companies that are capable of doing so, as they are constrained by the limitations of their current industrial work culture.

The role of the management in the 21st Century has changed. Management has to support the rhythm and speed of the individual. In other words, in the end it is the different speed and pace of the individuals that create the results on the bottom line. Are you ready to enter the 21st Century Work Culture?

# AN EVOLUTION OF WORK CULTURE

The concept of work culture is today characterized by two very different paradigms: the paradigm of the industrial work culture and the paradigm of the innovative work culture. The former has dictated how companies should organize their production and workers for centuries – the latter has only just arisen in the horizon on the global scene and is still in the making.

Just a few decades ago it was commonplace to compartmentalize life with reference to physical space, which made it easy to live by the norms dictated by a spatial classification of life. When at home, one was “at home” or “off,” and when at work, one was “at work” or “working.”

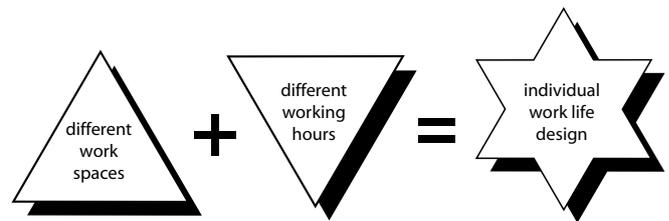
The industrial mindset emphasizes visible work and physical output, requiring a fixed work place and exact working hours, and thereby supporting the collective work design.



In the industrial work culture, work is visible, and the collective work-life design dictates fixed space (the office) and time (nine-to-five) for work. For example: John works at the office everyday from 9-5. He chooses only one workspace (the office) and he has fixed working hours from 9-5.

However, as the companies’ external environment has changed, the need for work of thought increases, which advocates that work can be executed at different times, and in different places, depending on the individual rhythm and times of peak per-

formance. We need to create a new version of the old compartmentalization of life, because the new realities do not facilitate the recreation of clearly demarcated limits between work and spare time. However, we can learn, we can adapt, and we are able to utilize the advantages of modern technology while we ride in its tides of change.



In the innovative work culture, a major part of the work is invisible and the individual work-life design is key. For example Simon is working 11-7 instead of 9-5 and in different environments that provide energy and inspiration. The innovative work culture accepts, and encourages, different spaces and times for work.

To attract the individuals capable of creating valuable thought output, companies need to move away from the antiquated and rigid industrial thought paradigm, and move towards the new innovative and flexible work culture.

Companies must find an optimal balance between these two poles of work culture, benefiting from both the structure and discipline of the industrial work culture, and the flexibility and freedom of the innovative mindsets, and from this new balance develop a new and unique work culture.

## The Industrial Work Culture

The industrial mindset often results in a high degree of centralization, limiting the need for initiative and self-motivation, and allowing for mass-tailored management of visible work. The industrial work design is formed to support, control and measure the work of the body. Work and output is structured by the *uniformity of clock-time*, providing for the same long working hours at the *office*, thereby ignoring the individual's rhythm, sense of time, and time planning. In the industrial work culture, it is the social rhythm that provides focus, embracing fixed workspaces and work times, as the *collective work design*.

As attention is often directed towards the process, employees lack their own focus and direction, creating grounds for a false sense of urgency. It leads employees to invest in the belief that they are extremely busy, disabling their capacity to navigate in true value-creating directions, as well as wasting resources and energy on mistaken priorities and increasing levels of sick absence. When Employees claim constant urgency, they miss out on what is essential for prosperity, and neglecting the information relevant for success and survival.<sup>2</sup> Due to the associated complacency, it becomes a vicious circle that limits the organization's ability to develop and maintain a high level of responsiveness.

### *Collective Work Design*

The majority of companies believe that a flexible work culture already exists. They may have included flexibility in the corporate policy, and allowed for the employees to manage their own time to ensure a good work-life balance. They offer a work-day at home and a claim of no face-time, perceiving it as the means to attract and retain the talent of the future. It is, however, the minority of employees that fully take advantage of these offers, leading to an unhappy, inefficient, and stressed organization. The core issue is that while organizations proclaim and give employees flexibility in theory, they neither teach them how to use it, nor create a context of social acceptance for this flexibility. Controlled by the fear of missing out, being prevented from

climbing the corporate ladder, or being frozen out, employees refrain from making use of these offers, and continue working as hitherto. Work life is business as usual with overtime and "pole sitting" until they simply burn out. The main problem is that the individual employee is afraid of being judged as "uncommitted" or "unambiguous" by peers and management. The behavioral pattern is rooted in the mentality of collective work design mentality of the industrial work culture. The phenomenon of physical presence is still important. We seem to have a great need to see each other's bodies at workplaces all over the world. The industrial mindset "I see you then you are working" can be seen as an expression of the need to control each other's body movements. When do we show up? When do we leave? When do we take time off? Here a core principle is the principle of comparison: All employees work under the same conditions and norms i.e. "When I sit here 8 hours, then you should too". Visible engagement and early-late hours are a prerequisite, and diversion from the collective performance norm is penalized with social expulsion.

### *Work-Life Balance*

Fifty years ago the balance point between work and family life was more or less a given, because the woman was oriented towards the needs of the home and family, and the man towards work and career/providing for the family. Today, however, there are many different kinds of families and working methods. This means that there is no longer any stable balance point between work, family and leisure time, with the result that new balance points continually need to be found through individual choices. These choices, however, exist in a complex ecology of social life and culture, and the situation calls for new modes of personal and professional conduct, both from the society at large, and from the corporate world, if we are to make the most of our potential in terms of productivity and life quality.

The current and predominant perception of work-life balance is also subjected to the influence of the industrial work culture, which perceives work and life as two competing aspects that are adapted to

social rhythms. That is, the industrial work culture strives to establish a clear separation between the two, where work is conducted at the office from nine-to-five and where the optimal work-life balance is equivalent to working less. This is exemplified by the dominance of part-time, parental-leave, and sick leave, which all represent options that provide a 'one-size fits all' perception of work-life balance. A generic definition of work-life balance has been imposed on employees, ignoring the individual's interpretation and evaluation of work and life and their interdependence in relation to the individual lifestyle.

However, as the expectations and demands from the organization increase, it becomes impossible to maintain this balance. As the employee lacks clear directions, work takes on an inefficient and unsatisfying dominance, as employees try to prove commitment and performance through overtime work and their own, often unrealistic, standards and targets. This has spurred a range of work-life strategies that dominate peoples' lives, and often lead to inefficient and value destroying activities:

- Employees believe that if they sprint through their eight hours of work, using all their energy, then they are showing commitment, performing, and maintaining a work-life balance. However, the result is that they are unable to think spontaneously and creatively at work, they are exhausted and find it hard to engage in family life with enthusiasm when home, balance is not created, as work indirectly invades life.
- Employees feel guilty when working from home, as it is not perceived as work, and they worry about their colleagues' opinion and gossip at the office. The result is that they 'cc' a lot of people on too many e-mails, just to prove that they are active and committed. The core issue is that in the current perception of work-life balance, the individual believes that work can only take place at the office.

- Employees are never really fully present; at work they think about life, feeling guilty about not spending enough time with their children or not exercising enough, and when at home, the thoughts are occupied by the uncompleted tasks at work.

## The Innovative Work Culture

Today companies operate in a setting where the majority of work is done by brains. More than 80% of a company's value is immaterial – the value lies in concepts, ideas, innovation, creativity, management and brands.

Companies therefore need a strong core of talented employees capable of leveraging the innovative capacity of the organization to substantiate its responsiveness by acting in the now and anticipate change. In terms of employees, companies need to develop a strong employer brand and a profile as a great place to work – a company where trust, flexibility and an acceptance of differences among the colleagues characterize the culture. This will enable companies to optimize the organization and results through access to the best capabilities and knowledge wherever and whenever, not only beckoning new employees, but also retaining them. All this will directly affect the bottom line.

To attract and pull the best talents towards the organization, the organizational charm must be grounded in a new and more flexible innovative work culture that empower employees to innovate, navigate towards value maximization, and act with a long-term perspective rather than simply reacting and feeling victimized by lack of time and interruptions.

We have to transform the visible industrial work culture: "I can see you – therefore you work" into the invisible innovative work culture: "Even if I don't see you – I still know that you work" so that there is an acceptance of different work styles and different ways to align work and personal life. If the company wants to optimize the potentials within its employees, it needs to become the facilitator of possibilities for working at the times, in the rhythms and in the spaces most befitting their needs. It is becoming more and more important

that every individual knows his or her inner processes in relation to hours of work, work rhythm and work space. There are productive benefits from allowing a choice in the space and time for work and focusing on where and when the individual employee productivity peaks, in order to ensure goal attainment. Work is no longer limited to the office from nine-to-five. Rather, work will create valuable and innovative output when the employees have the flexibility and trust to manage their own time and efforts, and when people can take responsibility in managing their production of invisible work, guided by a clear set of goals that ensure focus and organizational alignment. This means that companies by creating a facilitating environment for brains will unleash a large potential in the work force and henceforth entail substantial productive benefits.

#### *Individual work design*

Brains demand individualized management. The value lies in individual brain performance and therefore we have to create work times, spaces for work and work rhythms that suit each individual talent. The value creation of the talented and knowledge-generating employees depends more on their personality characteristics and how they live, than fixed places and times for work.

Each employee is different, guided by an individual genetically based biological clock and rhythm, which determine the optimal times for their work and life. Research shows that 50% of people function best when they arise at a time later than the average chronotype<sup>3</sup> – the midnight to 8 a.m. sleep schedule. Respecting the natural biological rhythms enhance peak performance: Each individual performs best when allowed to follow his or her personal biological clock and rhythms. Therefore, adaptation to it is a prerequisite when work is predominantly the invisible work of thought.

This further supports the argument for individual times and spaces for work; as such flexibility will improve both individual productivity and corporate performance, while boosting job and personal satisfaction. Individualized management for each employee nurtures the differences between employees (professional and personal needs and wants),

allows for additional differences (space and time), and provides the spaces for individual biological rhythms. It will positively affect the corporate bottom line, reducing the drain through lowered sick absence and recruitment costs.

#### *Relation between Work & Life*

Companies have to make sure that they attract the best talent and the best talent is increasingly demanding to align work and personal life.

As the transition towards a more balanced and flexible work culture occurs, management needs to start focusing on managing life as well as work, supporting a change in the perception of work-life balance. It is all about performance, and the ways in which employees manage their own productivity, allowing for the employees, on their own initiative, to combine home and work activities, thereby eradicating the detrimental boundaries that have existed between work-life and home-life.

All of this supports a consideration of the relationship between work and life on a strategic level, as it has an actual effect on the bottom line. One element is the general increase in productivity, but research<sup>4</sup> also indicates that by inducing actual social acceptance of work-life balance, and providing flexibility, employees have a higher tendency to work overtime, as they can self-manage. That is, the flexibility is utilized by the employees to optimize their output and quality of overall work/life, instead of using it to manage the conflict that may exist between home-life and work. This is a strong value proposition in the battle for the most talented employees, which is fundamental both in attracting and retaining these talents.

This underlying foundation for the perception of work and life, as part of a new work-life culture, is called freedom-based performance. That is, while granted the flexibility and choice of time and space, the outcome and performance level continues to be monitored and ranked, ensuring that the employees are in fact productive and not just exhibiting general activity. And by knowing their exact focus and target, through individualized management, the employees are able to achieve peak performance.

### *The Role of the Management*

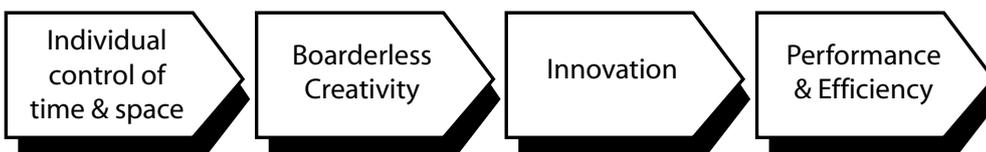
The Role of Management in the industrial work culture was time control and body control. This management model was perhaps suitable when it came to control the visible physical work, which demanded the same rhythm and speed of the workers. Now that so much of working consists of the movement of thought that is invisible in the production process, the management has to move towards supporting interplay, interaction and facilitating individual flexibility to work during the most effective times and in an energizing and inspirational environment (not necessarily the office).

The new role of the management is a central element of the new work culture, and with the increased individual flexibility and self-management, it becomes more important to set clear goals for each employee, ensuring that there is congruence between these and the organization's overall goals. If invisible workers are to secure the future value increment, it is necessary to create the frameworks that will advance personal initiative that produces value. The managers have to cultivate the unused growth potential of the invisible workers, among other means, by moving from comparability towards differentiation and flexibility, thus creating room for different rhythm and speeds of work.

We need managers who are able to tap the potential of every single employee through the recognition and trust that one is able to achieve a goal in many different ways. It is therefore necessary that the new work culture manager has a mastery of improvisational management – that is to say, to be able to create the framework, the mutual vision, and the mutual goal – but at the same time let the employee find his or her own way to the goal.

The employees are no longer able to hide their true efforts behind long working hours and activity, which might previously have compensated for lack of performance. As the new work culture is much more transparent, focusing clearly on results and outcome, the individual employee has to work hard to structure, plan and execute in order to reach the targets. Because the future does not look like the present, a management of brains is necessary to maximize the potential of invisible workers to lead and act in the now, and so making use of the new possibilities that are continuously arising. The managers must make sure that the employee uses his or her creative abilities within the established frameworks. It is the managers that need to set the overriding guidelines, that is, the managerial team creates the stage and set for the invisible workers to enact the play. The values of the invisible workers must also be in accord with the values of the company, to make sure that the improvisation is made on the basis of these shared values.

When invisible workers are aware of their optimal work situation, and have found the optimal balance between time of performance and time of recovery, they must be guided towards creating value-adding symphonies. The symphonies are created in teams of invisible workers characterized by a mutual platform from which they can improvise, a good understanding of the roles made possible by a visualization of the professional chords of each other, and where the performance of the team is made possible through the changing solos of the members of the team as well as the ability of the teams to deliver on a stable underlying rhythm.



Providing employees with increased flexibility and the ability to self-manage will spur creativity, ultimately leading to innovative solutions and contributions. As innovation is a key parameter for sustainable corporate performance, it will contribute to the whole organization, and the increased freedom of time and space will enhance the employees' efficiency.

# The Barriers to Work Culture Evolution

The majority of top-performing organizations are prevented from assimilating into the new work culture by a number of limiting factors that suppress internal dynamics and repel the new employees needed for organizations to innovate, act in the now, and interact with the market. In total, five factors have been identified through substantial preliminary fieldwork indications, and include management mentality, firefighting, 'I have no time' mentality, interruptive work environment, and victim mentality, as the most dominating factors that hamper the individual and organizational performance.

## *Management Mentality*

The primary barrier preventing the assimilation to the new work culture mindset is the mentality of management, fearing that employees will take advantage of additional flexibility, while being unable to assume sufficient self-management and control. As work becomes increasingly invisible, there are intensified attempts to control the employees physically, under the presumption that, "If I can see you, then you are working." That, in spite of the fact that by trusting the employees and encouraging more individual flexibility, an organization's value of total output is likely to increase and the ability to attract and retain employees will most likely improve.

## *Firefighting*

Firefighting subjects the organization to actions taken in a reactive role, as there is no excess capacity or excess resources to ensure that employees, and the organization as a whole, are proactive and able to respond immediately to market demands. The ideal company manages to find a balance, shaping and leading trends as well as responding to them, which supports the need to act in the now while also foreseeing and setting the new trends. That is,

to have a focus on the customer and the market, companies need to be able to respond and react to the continuous demands and needs, while also acting to spur new customer plans and opportunities.

## *'I have no time' Mentality*

Often the source of the overall problem – too little time, space, and too many deadlines – is the result of some very simple and basic factors, which when pooled can become a massive and immense hurdle. For example, the lack of meeting and e-mail culture, as well as the dominance of collective organizational perceptions suppressing diverging inputs, represent two focal hurdles. These effects cascade directly into the organization, which then experiences increased employee turnover, sickness, and a fragmented organization with different norms and behavior arising across divisions.

## *Interruptive Work Environment*

Often employees feel that they "cannot work at work" because of a constant stream of interruptions.<sup>5</sup> It can take up to 20 minutes to refocus each time an employee is disturbed, and this often forces them to use their personal private time to meet the deadlines and the performance targets. This leaves no excess capacity in the form of energy, time or brainpower with which employees can reflect and lead change, and they end up feeling exhausted after a day at the office. Employees are thus constantly overruled by a tsunami of projects and deadlines, and reactive adaptive behavior becomes the standard, ultimately reducing customer intimacy and satisfaction.

## *Moving Beyond Victim Mentality*

In such a work culture, a person may choose to remain in the stance of being a "victim." The first step along that road is to deny responsibility for their condition, and place the cause outside themselves – onto the people and circumstances they identify as the "victimizer."

"I can't do anything about it," says an employee, which is an expression of the powerlessness that confirms to the world that they have been victi-

mized. From the “victim” point of view, it is the management’s responsibility to create a good work-life balance. The solution to this dilemma of reactive behavior is to provide the tools and skills of *Life Navigation*, in the supporting context of a new work culture.

By empowering the employees with the tools to be effective and self-responsible, they realize their capability for using knowledge of their peak performance rhythms, time management, selection of direction and navigation points, and the pace that supports performance in the form of innovative excellence.

Given these skills, along with developing the social acceptance of self-management and performance-based evaluation, employees naturally seize the opportunities to take responsibility for planning their work, learning to say ‘no’ and vigorously proceed to create an individualized, efficient and productive work and life relation.

## Entering the 21st Century Work Culture

By holding on to the industrial mindset, organizations forfeit a number of opportunities that would otherwise have been plausible and manageable with a new and more flexible work culture. It is, therefore, imperative that change is encouraged, and that top management is involved in the design and reformation in order to ensure support and the evolvement of the new culture throughout the organization.

The above indications clearly mark the beginning of a new trend that should encourage organizations to trust their employees, realizing that it is futile to control and measure the processes involved in invisible work, and that the organizational gain will be more valuable by refraining from adhering to fixed work frames that only encourage pole-sitting (to show endurance), rather than performance results. In order for companies to attract and retain the best employees, companies need to provide the right tools, enabling the employees to prioritize, focus, perform, and innovate – ultimately uniting flexibility, productivity and life quality. Once manifested, the organization unfolds in an organic fashion, unlimited by fixed working hours, the frames of the office, or the negative and guilt creating comments from co-workers, such as “did you have a nice half-day off?” or “are you always fashionably late?” that otherwise foster a hostile and energy draining work environment. The new cultural flexibility and trust basis creates a unique modern work culture, representing a source of differentiation, further strengthening the employer profile for actual as well as potential employees, with all the attendant gain in value.

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*“Life Navigation is basically about prioritizing and making deliberate choices on where you spend your time and attention. It is different from Work-Life Balance, as it does not set a clear demarcation between the two things. Rather, it represents a holistic approach, focusing on the*

*way you manage your time and make good choices in the face of the sheer tsunami of options with which we, as human beings, continually are confronted. It is about navigating in that sea of endless possibility.” Camilla Kring, Ph.D. Managing Director, Super Navigators ApS.*

# LIFE NAVIGATION

The evolution of work culture is facilitated by the implementation of a new mindset, which is the key to change the individual's perception of work and life, marking a break with the collective work design, and providing tools and work frames that allow each employee to optimize his or her efforts and assume self-management. It introduces a new work culture into the organization that enables companies clearly to differentiate themselves culturally, thereby supporting the attraction and retention of the brightest unique talents.

The concept behind this new work-life culture is called *Life Navigation*. It is a contribution that is implemented on an individual and collective level, challenging the industrial mindset and striving to manifest a work culture where flexibility, productivity, and individual life quality are united, and differences in work time and work in different environments are socially accepted. Life Navigation

aims to make people aware and conscious of their prioritization of choices in work and life, providing them with the time and space to think and reflect.

For the past two years, Life Navigation has been introduced to individuals and affiliates in the northern part of Europe of the Chicago-based health-care company Abbott, challenging the mainstream perception of work-life balance, and instead encouraging *work and life integration* that is individually managed, but also collectively accepted. Life Navigation allows companies to use this internally driven cultural change to develop a great, top performing organization which is:

- Customer focused and process-driven intimacy
- Innovative and proactive
- Efficient and effective
- Long-term sustainable

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*Life Navigation is an investment that establishes the foundation for an innovative culture through the education of employees to handle self-management, and thereby optimize their contributions. Life Navigation allows companies to obtain results by building trust and self-responsibility in the context of a new work culture.*

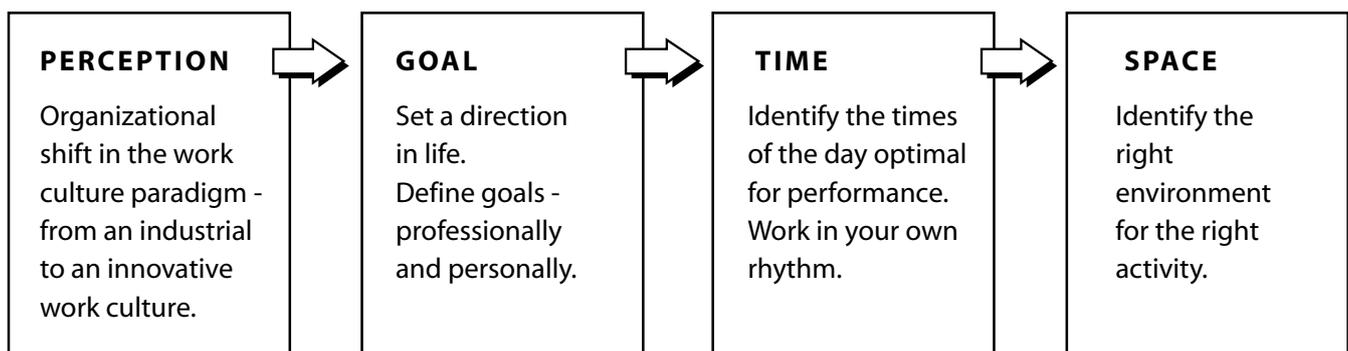
## The Concept of Life Navigation in Brief

*Life Navigation* provides a comprehensive and consistent set of best practices for a new work culture, promoting a focused and structured approach to achieve business effectiveness and efficiency while at the same time strengthening the employer branding. It is a tool to optimize the output of the workers of thought whose labor is largely invisible, by creating an understating of the integration of work and life.

Life Navigation creates a flexible and supportive work culture, capable of integrating flexibility with self-responsibility. Individual choices of work times and workspaces are more flexible, and employees are trusted, which spurs motivation and dedication. It is this fundamental shift into new modes of trust, discipline, respect, and acceptance of different work times and work places that allow for the establishment of an effective new work culture. Further, its long-term sustainability is ensured by the concept's

strong core structure, respect for deadlines, task awareness and responsibility, which, when supported by modern and efficient performance measures, ensures that the organizational differences can be unleashed and still contribute to the organization's performance.

The ultimate purpose of Life Navigation is to transform individuals into *Life Navigators*, human beings capable of integrating flexibility with self-responsibility through the right tools, and thereby achieving the optimal integration of work and life. The skills of navigation inject an improvisational capacity into the organization that enables the employees to lead and act in the now, and master the ability to envision and act simultaneously. This allows the organization to manifest the maximum value from each talent in the company, which might remain otherwise unexplored due to the lack of energy, time, and focus caused by the continuous tsunami of tasks. Further, by setting clear expectations for employees, they are able to design the optimal space and time for work, supporting the need for utilizing the full potential of employees in a top performing organization.



The figure illustrates the four fundamental steps involved in becoming a Life Navigator. First the perception in the organization is changed, welcoming differences in work times and spaces. Next, the individual goals for work and life are outlined, and the individuals identify the optimal times and spaces to reach the goals. It is a process of teaching individuals to focus their efforts to optimize output through the individual choice of optimal time and space for work.

## The Cultural Shift

The *individual employee's perception of work and life* is central to Life Navigation. Before the organization can mobilize itself and benefit from a new work culture, each individual member of the organization needs to understand that the purpose of creating integration between work and life is to ensure performance excellence, collective success, and life quality. To this end, mutual trust between employees and acceptance of differences in work habits, times, and spaces all need to be ensured. This social acceptance creates a new common corporate language, causing the individual to feel that the group approves of his or her individual rhythm and needs, thus enabling individual reconciliation.

Work can take place *anywhere and anytime*, and in the new work culture it is up to the individual to find the right physical frames and times to create optimal output. The employees can no longer lean back passively, continuing the previous ways of work-life balance; instead they have the flexibility and support to actively change their work-life to match their preferences. The individual employee must learn to self-manage to fully benefit from the work frames provided by the new work culture. Even though Life Navigation provides the tools to navigate, it is still up to the organization to support the new individual work design and life strategies, as it is the only way to ensure a collective change, one that ultimately spurs the individual change.

It is, however, a difficult process as it confronts the founding pillars of work and life, and by knocking some of these pillars over, the safe foundation of habits and familiar norms is shaken. Instead of following the masses, or crowd, and synchronizing actions, the individual has to take more responsibility and initiative, as well as actively master and manage time and focus. The individual initially is removed from a comfort zone,

and is required to talk about, and reflect upon, life and work, in order to create the optimal individual frames. It requires effort to come to self-knowledge, and to use these new insights to accept and adapt to one's personal rhythm for optimal performance, and find the right personal integration between work and life.

## The Organizational Benefit

By implementing Life Navigation and creating a new work culture, organizations will benefit in the following areas:

1. *Work-Life Satisfaction*: By developing a work culture that reconciles top performance with life quality, a much higher degree of employee satisfaction will emerge. High levels of work-life satisfaction ensure recruitment and retention of talents and it saves costs to sick-leave. Most employees conclude, after experiencing the new work culture and its associated advantages that they would not want to work anywhere else.

2. *Unique Differentiation*: as an international company, working across different time zones, flexibility is a keyword for the organization as well as the customers. Also, the new work culture is a means to attract the best talents, providing for unique differentiation from industry peers.

3. *Higher Efficiency*: As employees learn to prioritize and focus on the projects and tasks that create the most value the organization becomes more efficient. There is less time waste on non-important tasks, non-productive meetings and the amount of time consuming e-mails decrease and employees are more motivated, energized, and productive which leads to better business.

Generally, the introduction of Life Navigation into the organization represents an investment that

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*Life Navigation starts on the individual level, relying on the individual to enact self-discipline, structure and planning to ensure that time and space is created for efficient work. This occurs in a collective process, which ensures that the new and more flexible work culture gains a foothold, and the perception of work-life balance shifts to refer to work and life integration.*

*"Life Navigation has given me the tools to work structured, and prioritize my tasks, while also changing my perspective on work; today I feel more responsibility, which means that I feel like giving more back."*  
Marketing Assistant, Abbott Denmark

induces changes, which prepare companies to manage and operate on the future business scene. It supports a stronger corporate profile and brand, attracts more qualified employees, optimizes efficiency and output of human and non-human resources, and reduces costs related to sick absence and recruitment costs. Some of these have an immediate effect on the organization, whereas others manifest over time, such as the increase of brand value. Nevertheless, the effects are positively loaded and cumulative.

## The Three Levels of Implementation

The Life Navigation journey consists of three steps, each step preparing the individual and the organization to make the final cultural shifts. It is a practical, step-wise process, and each step requires a different focus and approach, which is further adapted to the specific organization, allowing for an individual design.

### *Steps of Work Culture Evolution*

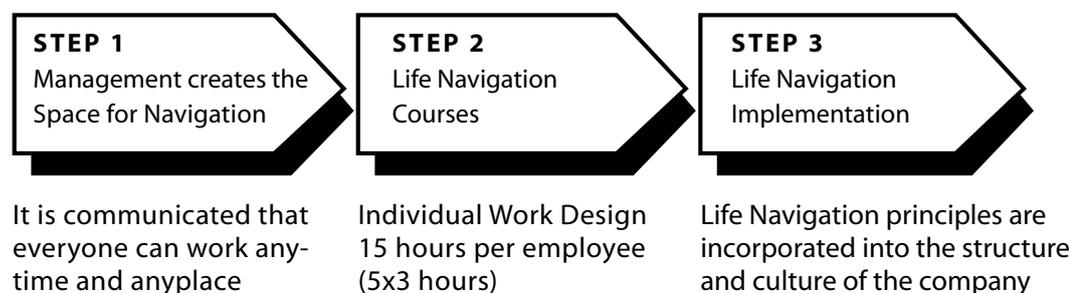
Step one places a focus on establishing acceptance from the management, permitting the employees to actually manage their individual times and spaces for work. Once given this permission, the employees need the tools to manage the flexibility, and to ensure that the social acceptance and tolerance emerges organically from within the organization, and not only because it is dictated from the top. Following that, the essential tools for self-management in a new work culture are provided in the second step, through five course sessions, which center

on the individual's ability to create an overview, focus on the important targets through prioritization, and chose the optimal time and space for work, thereby evolving into a true Life Navigator. Together these first two steps represent the "soft" change that the organization undergoes.

To ensure organizational support, legitimizing and encouraging social acceptance of the new work culture and common language, the Life Navigation principles should be incorporated into companies' policies, standards, branding materials etc. which can be utilized as a powerful tool in the branding and recruitment process. This latter step represents the step of grounding and embodiment of the shift, the "hard" change, which is more tangible and visible compared to the soft change, which occurs primarily on an emotional and cultural level.

The three steps mark the official implementation of Life Navigation, as each subsequent step builds upon the preceding one. However, as previously mentioned, it is a gradual process, and in order to ensure that the new work culture is firmly rooted in the organization, preventing employees from falling back into their old habits, provision of follow up courses and sessions yields optimal results.

Companies wanting to retain and attract the right talents will benefit from implementing Life Navigation. The sooner the organization initiates the process to change the work culture, the sooner it will be able to leverage itself, and see an effect on its employee satisfaction evaluations. It will induce further flexibility into the organization, and allow for the company to develop strategically.



This represents the three steps that move an organization along the path of a journey to implement Life Navigation. The first two steps focus on the individual employee, facilitating change through the acceptance from peers and management (collective). Step three represents the substantiating of the changes, which occur on a more operational level.

# THE ABBOTT DENMARK CASE: BEST AT WORK-LIFE BALANCE

In 2008 Abbott Denmark was awarded the company *Best at Work-Life Balance* in Denmark<sup>6</sup>, marking the result of having worked with the implementation of Life Navigation for two years. This recognition proved to both management and the employees that Life Navigation provided.

## Before Life Navigation

Life Navigation was first introduced to the Danish subsidiary in December 2006 as part of a teambuilding workshop, focusing on the balance of work-life and private life. The participating employees were very enthusiastic about the new work culture mindset, which encouraged them to request that management introduce Life Navigation through the whole of Abbott Denmark. This was effectuated in May 2007, with Life Navigation being introduced as a mandatory program that would change the work culture in Abbott Denmark, and improve the employees' performance and motivation.

Prior to the Life Navigation phase, the Danish Abbott office was dominated by constant interruptions and firefighting, which significantly suppressed the overall work performance, and made it difficult to manage the continuous tsunami of new projects. It also made the majority of employees claim that they "could not work at work," which forced them to invade their private lives by working overtime to meet the deadlines and targets. This was further intensified by the clear bias towards "do it all," versus prioritizing and "saying no," caused by a lack of clear targets and goals that would otherwise have

provided the focus needed by each employee to select and decide on the important short-term tasks to reach the long-term goals.

The individual employee's work and life sphere was further invaded, as agendas were fluid in time with no acknowledgement of individual schedules and plans. There was a general disrespect for the individual's need to immerse and focus. This caused considerable agitation, and ultimately led to longer workdays, further intensified by the long, unproductive hours in rush-hour traffic experienced by the majority of the employees. All this led to a general mentality of "I have no time," and the employees feeling victimized, which limited the capacity needed to think creatively and improvise, as well as reducing their inclination to assume responsibility and focus on the end-results. Consequently, Abbott Denmark was reduced to a reactive organization instead of a proactive one able to act in the now and anticipate change.

In addition to the issues mentioned above, the office atmosphere was hampered by sharp and hurtful remarks that followed automatically if an employee came late or chose to leave early. Statements such as "did you have a nice half day off?" or "are you working from home, again?" created a hostile and uncomfortable work environment, forcing the employees to work long hours at the office to prevent guilt and organizational exclusion. This also proved that even though the management team believed that they had designed a flexible workplace, the employees were unable to benefit from it, as they did not have the tools to manage and fully understand

the concept of flexibility. Instead there was an innate need to control each other, wanting to make sure that there was output from each employee and co-worker from nine to five, as a minimum. This made Abbott Denmark a static organization, dominated by firefighting, stress, and high employee turnover levels, as well as a high level of dissatisfaction with the work-life balance.

It was necessary for Abbott Denmark to radically change the situation if they were to retain and attract the talents needed to enhance Abbott Denmark's performance, as well as become the best workplace in Denmark. They had to create a cultural foundation that would spur employee satisfaction, and remove the dysfunctional constraints of a workculture that praised pole sitting and firefighting.

## After Life Navigation

After only two years with Life Navigation, Abbott Denmark is able to present a list of outstanding results, proving the success of implementing a new work culture based on structure, flexibility and trust.

Today, Abbott Denmark is characterized as a flexible company of Life Navigators, supported by the *Abbott Culture Survey* in 2008, where 90% of the Danish employees stated that they now have the flexibility they need to balance professional and personal needs. Further, since the introduction of Life Navigation, the organization has experienced a 30 percent increase in net sales per employee and a reduction in recruitment costs of 50 percent. Additionally, employee turnover has decreased from 31 percent to 11 percent, followed by a 300 percent increase in unsolicited CVs, supporting that the new work culture attracts employees.

Key Performance Indicator (KPI)	2006	2008
<i>Work-Life Balance satisfaction</i>	39 %	90%
<i>Employee Turnover</i>	31%	11%

Indicator	Change (2006-08)
<i>Unsolicited</i>	CVs+ 300%
<i>Recruitment Costs</i>	- 50%

The table outlines the results that Life Navigation has achieved after two years in the Abbott Denmark subsidiary. There is a clear benefit in terms of lower costs and increased sales, and importantly, the improved ability to attract and retain the best talent.

These results demonstrate that several of the perceptions and habits that dominated the work culture of Abbot Denmark before Life Navigation have been confronted and changed. Today the individual employee is aware of his or her own optimal work rhythm, and the collective group, the organization, respects and accepts it, honoring the individuals who are able to integrate work and life, and thereby ensure high performance and quality of life. It is socially accepted that the individual employee manages and coordinates working hours and working space, and everyone is allowed to work from home – from assistant to general manager. There is true social acceptance of different ways of navigating in work and life, which also means that vicious and guilt-creating comments are no longer heard in Abbott Denmark. Instead, the work culture is built on trust and flexibility, which spurs motivation and retains and attracts talent.

*“It really comes down to the simple message of using the work hours in a completely different way, and thus making them the most effective.”*

*Alexander Würfel, General Manager, Abbott Denmark*

The interruptive environment, which used to make it difficult for the employees to focus and perform, no longer exists, and has been replaced by a sense of respect for other peoples' time. The space needed for reflection, immersion, and innovation has been created. Focus has also been facilitated for each individual, reducing the amount of firefighting and creating a more positive work mentality. The Abbott employees have a clear overview of their tasks and goals, and they are able to prioritize them, which means that they have assumed responsibility of their own performance, leaving the victim role and abandoning the claim of always being "so busy" due to lack of overview and focus. The employees now have the time to interact with the customers and truly understand their needs, and furthermore have the capacity to innovate new ideas that can meet those needs.

The proven success of Life Navigation and the new work culture has made Abbott Denmark realize that in order to continue to extend its leadership in medical product segments and become the *Best Danish Workplace* by 2010, maintenance of the new work culture is essential. Abbott Denmark has therefore introduced Life Navigation as a mandatory program for all new employees, and has also provided for several annual follow-up courses and events.

## Further spread of the Life Navigation enzyme

Following the success in Denmark, Life Navigation has been implemented in two other European Abbott subsidiaries, which are starting to report back positive results similar to those experienced in Abbott Denmark.

In Norway, Life Navigation was implemented in May 2008, and after only ten months (March 2009) Abbott Norway was nominated and has risen to be among the Top 10 *Best Places to Work* in Norway, as well as the "Best medical company in Norway," having experienced an increase in employee satisfaction from 58 to 89 percent. The percentage of employees affirming the question, "Is Abbott a great place to work?" rose from 82% to 95%. In Ireland, Life Navigation was implemented in the beginning of 2009, and there also the new work culture has penetrated the organization and provided revitalized energy and commitment. Both subsidiaries have shown great dedication and motivation from day one, and are today more self-managed. Further, in the summer of 2009 Life Navigation is intended to start up in Abbott Netherlands, initiating a cultural change in an organization of 130 employees.

Abbott is a top performing organization that represents ambitious, hard-working, and critical individuals. They dedicate their time and efforts to initiatives that they feel provide valuable payoffs. Their appreciation of Life Navigation, their eagerness to attend follow-up courses, and the integration of Life Navigation and Abbott's values, all provide strong indicators of the added value that Life Navigation has provided within the Abbott subsidiaries. Abbott has started a cultural evolution – one that is creating trust and providing flexibility to all employees. This is a radical change within a fairly established work culture, and it will influence the whole organization and its future strategies. It is therefore also essential that there is true and long-term commitment, as once the employees are granted trust and flexibility, there is no way back to pole sitting, one fixed workspace, or fixed working hours.

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*"Work-life balance was a major issue in Abbott, and was characterized as a management problem. Life Navigation has dealt with this, providing the tools to become more effective in the daily life."*  
Division Director, Abbott Denmark

# NOTES

1. Gary Hamel (2009): "Moon Shots for Management" (2009), Harvard Business Review
2. J.P Kotter: (2008) *A Sense of Urgency*, Harvard Business Press
3. A chronotype is your biological rhythm. There are more than 100 different chronotypes. 10-15% of the population is A-chronotypes i.e. A-chronotypes have a daily rhythm from 6-22. 15-25% of the population is B-chronotypes and a B-chronotype could have a daily rhythm from 10-22.
4. Anders Raastrup Kristensen (2008): "Metaphysical labour – Flexibility, performance and commitment in work-life management", Ph.D dissertation CBS Denmark
5. "There is a psychological switching of gears that can require up to 45 minutes resuming a major task that has been interrupted. More than a quarter of each 9-5 period (28%) is consumed by such interruptions." J.B. Spira/J.B. Feintuch, Basex 2005
6. Nomination given by The Center for Work-Life Balance ([www.CBAF.dk](http://www.CBAF.dk))

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

The *Life Navigation* concept is developed by the Danish consulting company Super Navigators ApS. For further information please visit the home page [www.supernavigators.com](http://www.supernavigators.com), or contact Managing Director Camilla Kring directly via e-mail: [ck@supernavigators.com](mailto:ck@supernavigators.com) or mobile: +45 2893 8973