

Collaboration and Flexibility - the crucial elements of the hybrid working model

Companies are moving towards the hybrid model which allows a combination of work-from-home and work-at-office. Jaromír Staroba, Member, ABSL Board of Directors and Prague Digital Hub Director at AbInBev tells us about the changes the company went through during the pandemic and the ongoing challenge of bringing people back to the office while implementing the hybrid model.

How many people work in the Prague Centre and what percentage of them work remotely now?

Presently, we have over 700 colleagues working for us in our Prague Digital Hub. At the early stage of Covid-19 pandemic, we implemented 100% work-from-home to protect the health of our employees.

As of October 2021, we've implemented a 50/50 hybrid model where people use a flexible combination of work-from-home and working at the physical office, in full compliance with local legislation. Working at the office helps people collaborate better. We see over 50% of occupancy of our offices in most of the days.

When did you start with the transformation to remote working and which functions did you begin with?

The idea to rework our offices into a digital collaboration space began almost 3 years ago, much before Covid accelerated the industry to change.

In 2019, we experienced the initial challenge in how people will react to seats that are not individual but are shared, and them combining 'home office' with collaboration time 'at-the-office'. Covid-19 helped us with the change management.

Today, people work in the office for 50% of their time (October 2021), and 50% from home. Employees usually decide the days when they want to come in to work. We aim to allow them to work in office in teams or groups where they will be able to collaborate together and get the best out of the time they spend here. But today's challenge is - how to get people back to offices in a compliant way.



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How do you tackle this challenge and what's unique about your remote working strategy that you're proud of?

It's important to listen to our people, react to their needs and make the office seamless in terms of technology and facilities. We have also implemented features which people appreciate – children's room to better integrate mothers back to workplace, or games room which links to our new capability that is run from our center – E-sports team that organizes virtual gaming tournament. We are a beer company and want to connect our people to our product – so we built a bar and terrace where our teams can enjoy tasting our products after work.

We also spent sufficient time explaining to our colleagues about why we want them to implement the hybrid model. That collaboration and bringing people together is part of our culture and today our offices are more than 50% full again.

How did technology help you to achieve efficiency and effectiveness?

We knew that a hybrid model cannot be achieved without proper organization and technology. You can use excel to track who comes to office, if you have a staff of 20 people, but not 700.

That's why we developed our application BMS (Book my seat) that helps us organize the office space. People can book seats for days at work. We also have a new feature, where they can book their parking in the office garage.

This system is critical and very useful in case someone in the office is detected to be ill. Because then this system helps to back track the persons sitting beside them during those days and protects their health by asking them to test and/or self-isolate.

Several other offices in ABInBev have implemented the tool and we are also happy to share this great practice with other companies.

How easy was it to manage people and data protection?

We have a solid internal Data Protection team. They provided all the advice needed to use the tool in full compliance with all the required regulations.

Did you face any staff resistance while implementing digital tools? How did you overcome it?



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Some people had questions during the announcement, but we managed to explain it convincingly and in a positive manner. We believe that the time they come to the office can be used for their benefit, and that part of our culture is to bring people together. The involvement of leaders was key to this approach which helped us handle the overall change management.

Were there any special achievements during the 2020 remote working period?

I am proud that we earned the trust of our stakeholders and customers and were even growing as a business services center in 2020 and 2021.

We achieved one of the best results in business KPIs and stayed efficient thanks to our strategy and BMS app.

How do you see the strategy for remote working in the future? Will you make it completely remote?

I would separate – short term still with some Covid outbreaks and long term.

For the short term, if there is period in the year when the situation with Covid worsens, health of our people is the priority and we do not insist on hybrid model.

As for the long term: The purpose of our company is “Bringing people together for a better world” and we believe that collaboration at work is a crucial element of our culture. I spoke to many newcomers who felt lonely or not included in their teams because of trainings that happened only virtually. They haven’t met their leaders or colleagues for over a year and this negatively influenced their performance and state of mind. I am energized when I meet my colleagues in the office for coffee and can listen to their ideas and proposals.

I personally see the future in our hybrid model where people can use the best of both worlds.

As told to Kavita Krishnamurthy, Editor, SSC Club