

Is There a Nordic Perspective on Hybrid Work?

Hybrid work was the topic of many seminars and discussions at Nordic Workplace 2025. One question that emerged was whether there is a distinct Nordic interpretation of how a hybrid workplace should be designed. Three Nordic experts—Henrik Järleskog from Sodexo, Suvi Nenonen from IFMA Finland and the University of Helsinki, and Helle Lohmann Rasmussen from DFM in Denmark—shared their experiences and visions.

“Future workplaces are not directly linked to buildings, tools, or organizational policy documents, but rather to societal factors. These change faster than commercial properties can adapt. The future is *distributed work* – *not remote work*. With new technology and AI, we are moving toward a time when organizations may lay off employees while simultaneously hiring new ones and increasing overall productivity,” says Henrik Järleskog, who bases his conclusions on international studies of how companies have organized work after the pandemic.

“Large organizations with more than 100 employees—around 30% of all workplaces—operate full-time in the office with a high share of synchronous work. Approximately 65% of organizations apply hybrid work, which is typical for Sweden and the Nordic countries. The proportion of on-site work is higher than remote work, and the majority of work is synchronous. Teams meetings are concentrated between 9 a.m. and 5 p.m. Only 5% of organizations can be considered fully flexible with asynchronous work models, where what matters is how work is done, not where. These are often new, fast-growing companies building a different corporate culture.”

What Do These Models Mean for FM?

If work is defined by the question *why* rather than *where*, flexible spaces based on individual employee needs are required. Integrated technology platforms free us from the physical workplace while also reducing the number of tools, as not everything can be provided to everyone at the same time. Henrik also points out that ESG and the trend toward sustainability are not reversible.

“FM needs to develop systems that enable distributed ways of working. The leaders of the future will not be replaced by AI, but we will gain new, virtual colleagues. AI frees up time for tasks beyond routine work—such as communication with users and customers—and supports systems that promote both excellence and work-life balance.”

A Slow Return to the Office

Helle Lohmann Rasmussen notes that it is difficult to identify clear examples of how new trends are affecting workplaces in the Nordic region. “We don’t know how many companies are trying to enforce full-time office attendance. These efforts are mainly driven by large organizations seeking a return to full presence, but they often face resistance.”

Suvi Nenonen introduces the concept of *multi-location work* to describe the merging of home, office, and co-working environments. “Society currently offers few services for those working

outside the traditional office environment. Students who are asked say they want meaningful work and a flexible lifestyle—they are attracted to public institutions, which they believe can offer this.”

Suvi adds that people in the Nordic countries draw energy from nature. “We build homes close to nature, and proximity to nature increases well-being. However, hybrid work carries a risk of isolating us from colleagues. Research in Finland shows that we become more fatigued after a full day of Teams meetings at home, and that it is easier to recover from social fatigue in the office than from cognitive fatigue in solitude.”

She also refers to a Swedish study highlighting the importance of having the opportunity to work outdoors, in sunlight and fresh air. “The result is increased well-being—digital meetings both enable this and prevent it.”

Helle observes a shift in how work is governed in the hybrid world. “We see more written policies on hybrid work. Today, top management makes decisions on how work should be organized; previously, this was handled by middle management. In the Nordic countries, there is a strong focus on attracting and retaining satisfied talent.”

What Are the Differences in the Nordic Region?

Asked about the main differences between the Nordic countries, Henrik Järleskog says the Nordic region is far ahead in developing new ways of working. “We introduced activity-based working already twenty years ago. Flexible working models are standard here compared to Central Europe—and even more so compared to Southern Europe. Nordic companies are good at analyzing organizational needs, while in the U.S., leadership often takes a more directive approach.”

Helle adds that in the Nordic countries, there is a strong belief in *management by trust*, and that the region is among the first in the world to adopt new solutions. Suvi agrees, noting that the Nordics are ready to develop and invest in infrastructure, while Henrik points out that the Nordic countries lag behind in AI development. “We use AI, but we are not the ones developing the solutions.”

In summary, the panel agrees that the FM industry must learn to “play a new piano” and offer services that support multiple ways of working.

Opinions differ on whether AI or flexible work will have the greatest impact on work in the Nordic region over the next five years. Suvi believes AI may pose a threat to human qualities such as empathy. Helle is more optimistic and sees AI as the most significant change of our generation, eliminating tedious and time-consuming routine tasks and reducing the need for working hours. Henrik believes large organizations will continue to focus mainly on structured work, where AI will have only a partial impact.

There is also ongoing discussion within the FM industry about how hybrid work policies affect recruitment. Helle points to *hygge* and social interaction as reasons for employees to return to the

office. Henrik believes the number of conferences will increase as people need to meet in person, for example for strategic discussions. From an academic perspective, Suvi sees concepts such as *Time Design* following *Service Design* and *Space Design*, introducing new ways of sharing information. In the Netherlands, vacant workplaces are offered to students when hybrid workers are not in the office.

Conclusion

Overall, the experts believe that leadership in the Nordic countries is well equipped to adapt to the hybrid workplace. Henrik suggests that the informal meeting at the coffee machine may be replaced by AI-driven algorithms that connect people with both problems and solutions. Helle warns that technology could become a blind spot and that control systems may be perceived as intrusive or uncomfortable. Adapting to new needs will require sensitivity from leadership—and possibly entirely new FM services with a Nordic profile.