

Change in momentum

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The first phase of the COVID-19 outbreak was mainly about finding fast solutions and crisis management to manage the day-to-day business. Now we move on to a new phase, a hybrid reality, where we combine working from home with days at the office. Nursing homes are carefully opening up again and companies are redesigning their future business processes. How are we going to proceed? And what experiences do we take with us?

Accelerating digitalization

Where change normally takes years, the pandemic is now gaining momentum. The COVID-19 outbreak is accelerating digitalization, where in addition to technological innovation, we also need more human flexibility and ingenuity. The basic rules are constantly changing, with governments setting the frameworks in which we can get back to work safely. The companies DSM and ASML are quickly adjusting to this new reality. They are combining smart ideas from their employees with innovative technology.

DSM finds work balance with virtual coffee breaks

DSM is an international scientific company that focuses on health, nutrition and sustainable living. With more than 23,000 employees all over the world, you can imagine that COVID-19 has a significant impact on communication and cooperation in the organization. For example, in just one day the company logged 80,000 calls in Teams! Peter Dew Chief Digital Officer at DSM: "For DSM, Teams is the lifeblood that's keeping our organization connected, collaborating, and working in a way that gives us confidence that we can continue to operate during the pandemic."

Despite the enthusiastic embrace of Teams to keep the business running during the pandemic, DSM leadership also encourages staff to take virtual coffee breaks together so that they don't spend all day in business meetings. Peter: "We want to keep that balance between human interaction, which you would normally get around the coffee machine, and productive work. The future of work at DSM will be very different compared to how we perceived it even a few weeks ago. It's possible to do a lot of work remotely, but what's clear is that the need for communication has never been greater."

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DSM quickly adapts to the new situation and helps out where possible. DSM's COVID-19 initiatives do not have a commercial intention. This varies from the use of their own expertise and knowledge for nutrition and health to bringing companies from the extensive DSM network together. At the request of the government, they also produce large-scale personal protective equipment for healthcare workers in the Netherlands.

ASML is always on location thanks to augmented reality

Another Dutch multinational that is making significant strides in this new phase is ASML, the market leader in advanced lithographic machines for the semiconductor industry. While augmented reality was on the roadmap for several years, it was suddenly pulled up because of the COVID-19 epidemic.

At ASML the placement and maintenance of machines at customer's sites is important – travel restrictions and quarantine measures made that more complicated. Engineer Thomas Weinlandt and his team came up with an innovative and safe AR solution that allows ASML's experts to be present 'on location'. Thanks to Dynamics 365 Remote Assist and the Microsoft HoloLens Headset they put themselves in the same space as the machine.

"The real value of the technology is that we can support our customers faster and more effectively than ever before." – Thomas Weinlandt, engineer at ASML.

Thomas: "In the past, if there was a major issue we had to get someone on a plane as quickly as possible. Because of COVID-19 this was not possible anymore, but every second that a machine is not running does cost a company money. AR technology makes it possible for our technical experts to provide support anywhere in the world. We have less travel expenses and the machines have a significantly shorter downtime. The real value of the technology is that we can support our customers faster and more effectively than ever before."

Temporary or structural change?

These two examples show how sudden change can be the starting point for innovation and new opportunities. Thomas from ASML shared us a nice quote, which I would like to share with you: "The only thing we know is that we don't know. The only thing that's certain is the extreme uncertainty of the situation." The future will tell, whether we are talking about temporary initiatives now, or structural change.