

# COMPANIES IN TRANSFORMATION

## WORKING WORLD 4.0 IN SWITZERLAND

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The question of what constitutes the frequently invoked Working World 4.0, and to what extent Swiss companies have implemented it so far, was addressed by a team of researchers at the School of Business of the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland in 2019. The team's specific focus was on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

**The authors of the study define Working World 4.0 as a strategic initiative of companies that aims to realize the potential of their employees.**

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## Cornerstones of Working World 4.0

On the basis of their research in the relevant literature and a survey of 1,144 companies, the authors of the study identified three cornerstones of the new working world:

People (employees)

Place (the work environment)

Technology (technologies)



The interplay has to be perfect.

## PEOPLE

According to the study, the success of new concepts relevant to employees basically depends on the corporate and management culture, the cooperation between the employees, the company's reputation as an employer and the training and continuing education of the employees. The most urgently needed employee skills are a capacity for learning, willingness to change, flexibility, team orientation and a capacity for cooperation.

## PLACE

Two thirds of the companies surveyed estimated that a modern work environment is based on flexible working times, which entail new organizational structures (e.g. virtual teams) as a logical consequence. The process of designing the physical workstation focuses on aspects that can be directly experienced, such as lighting, temperature and acoustics. The results of the study also pointed out the great importance of interaction zones as well as places for cooperative work and catering facilities for the employees.

## TECHNOLOGY

The list of technologies that are considered relevant includes hardware (notebooks, tablets, Wi-Fi, VoIP and conference systems) and a broad range of software applications (collaboration tools, cloud platforms, CRM and document management systems, ERP solutions, instant messaging and online learning platforms).

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### The physical workstation

Thanks to these technologies, people could theoretically work from anywhere. Nonetheless, the authors of the study believe that a shared place of work is an important factor of Working World 4.0. It forms the framework for the intense sharing of ideas, inspiration and networking. The authors emphasize that the close proximity and mutual visibility of employees increases efficiency, because personal interaction is much more direct, more precise, and faster than communication via e-mail and telephone. As a result, the office continues to be important in Working World 4.0 as well. However, in many companies a reorganization of the physical space is needed.



Sharing ideas, inspiration and networking are important functions of the physical place of work

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### The status of implementation

The survey shows that Working World 4.0 is still a relatively unknown concept for most companies in Switzerland. Only 12% of those surveyed indicated that they had already reached an advanced

stage of its implementation. Another 45% are now in midst of the transformation stage, and for 43% this process is still in the future. According to their own assessments, small and medium-sized enterprises are somewhat further along the road to new forms of work than large companies. Some 13% of SMEs said they had mastered the challenges involved, but only 8% of large companies made the same claim.

In the experience of the companies taking the survey, the most significant barriers to transformation are a lack of know-how (42%) and an organizational structure that traditionally tends to be rigid (41%). Other factors that can delay or even prevent measures promoting transformation are other priorities (35%), the lack of a suitable strategy (33%) and a shortage of personnel (33%). With regard to these factors, there is hardly any difference between SMEs and larger companies.

In spite of these obstacles, it is anticipated that Swiss companies will drive the transformation with a greater sense of urgency in the future. According to the respondents, the reasons for this forecast include the pressure to innovate (66%), the need to improve internal communication (64%) and the goal of becoming more flexible (55%). Further goals related to Working World 4.0 include increasing a company's own attractiveness as an employer (54%) and the need to make its own organization more customer-friendly (50%).

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE STUDY

The results of the study carried out by the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland/School of Business were published by Marc K. Peter (ed.) as *Arbeitswelt 4.0 – Als KMU die Arbeitswelt der Zukunft erfolgreich gestalten*, 2019.

The documentation can be downloaded at <https://www.arbeitswelt-zukunft.ch/>.

The study was based on extensive research of the relevant literature and a survey of 1,144 companies. Of this total, 774 survey respondents were categorized as SMEs.

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