

# Perks on the job

Product development in the internal areas of companies is lagging, and it is not just the younger generation that wants more. Knowledge work requires much more than ever of the individual employee and fringe benefits will therefore evolve in the coming years and become even more intangible and work-oriented.

It is not so complicated: you just develop everything, including your internal products and services such as leadership, work environment and perks. Young people under 30 expect more from you as an employer than older generations, including better pay, faster advancement and more benefits. But this is not the only reason why our companies and organizations must develop. The very nature of work requires something quite different of workplaces than most are able to deliver.

Take perquisites – “perks” or “fringe benefits” – as an example. Perks have become an increasingly important competitive tool in the labor market and more have been added to the list in past years. Most are essentially about money or materials good, such as free phone, company car, home PC, parking passes, newspapers, insurance, TV license, discount, broadband, fruit and meal plans – much of the discussion is about whether these should be taxed.

## Motivational perks

I believe that perks will increasingly become intangible goods or, rather, experiences, and become more workplace-based. Traditional and material perks satisfy needs at the bottom of Maslow’s needs pyramid, while perks such as psychological help and preventive massage lie higher up. While we are in now in a “crisis period” and may even face a temporary step down in the pyramid, we are inexorably moving toward the top of the pyramid and beyond. Up there, it is much more about what we can achieve together, about collective consciousness and

about co-creation. We are beginning to learn that if we are to seriously realize ourselves, we need each other. This applies to climate, our planet and, not least, our modern life.

Perks are carrots. Their purpose is to motivate us, acknowledge us and make us loyal. They are supposed to help ensure the relationship between employee and company persists. They should make the company attractive and relevant for us, and give us the commitment and energy to help the company even more. Can a car, discount card, and a meal plan do that? I doubt it. Material perks might spark us for a short while, but not in the long term. In the long run, we seek something entirely different from our work. I believe we want growth and development on many more levels than we can measure today.

So the perks of the future will be on the job. Many may want to keep the car, phone and laptop, but these alone are far from enough or good enough. Our neighbor gets, and our employer’s competitors offer, the same. We all know that only authentic relationships – not strategic – count when it comes to the crunch. So I ask: what can your company offer you, a knowledge worker, that nobody else can?

## The perk as product

As a product, the fringe benefit is no different than any other product. If we do not develop them further, they fade away. We know that most well-educated people do not want to work more, even if marginal tax rates are lowered. We prefer time off, which is a perk in more and more companies. But what do we need to want to work (more) for and in an organization?

I think it requires a good workplace environment, one that is developing, diverse, open and collaborative. More than anything, knowledge workers want visionary leadership and recognition. We need new work cultures – cultures in which mistakes are not only acceptable, but encouraged. We need to cultivate chaos. We need to rid ourselves of the antiquated, rigid framework in which we use terms such as “working hours” and “work/life balance” and where we continue to strive to achieve recognition for our desire and skill in development work. Overall, we need renewed recognition of creative and innovative work processes, which are a huge part of the result that any product or service is.

Imagine you could choose between working in a company that is only “in it for the money” (and only measures your “performance” against performance targets and profit) or a company that, in addition to profits, has a goal to develop, change for the better and help improve the world? Which would you choose? Or if you could choose between working in a zero-mistake culture or a Hot Spot-culture? If you could choose between the quantitative perk or the qualitative perk you can feel in the form of job satisfaction, which would you choose? Would you choose more money (whether cash or material perks) or an atmosphere that makes you happy every day and gives you a lot of development opportunities?

Google, for example, gives employees one day a week in which they can “work” on anything they want. They can read a novel, go for a walk with a colleague, sit in a cafe and watch people, talk to someone they do not usually talk to or whatever it takes to help them move forward with a task or find. We tend not to tally all the things that add up to a good product or fantastic service. Because corporate perceptions of what is and is not work impede us. Reading and answering e-mails are work; cultivating our network is work; putting on a new pot of coffee is work; talking is work; sitting in silence is work; seeking inspiration is work.

## In the long run

As a rule, knowledge workers are not driven and motivated only by money and short-term profit, they are more driven by opportunity, development and innovation. This applies not just at the product level, but also when it comes to influence how we organize development and

knowledge work and how we manage this kind of work. When knowledge workers do not get the opportunity to contribute what they can and want, neither their professional life nor their organization develops. We end in a situation in which the company drives the employee, not the other way around.

Talented knowledge workers demand visionary, effective and appreciative leadership. Many knowledge workers give not just their time and skills to their employer, but also their personal commitment – even their hearts and souls. What they expect in return is recognition and development – professionally and personally. And here, cold cash and material perks are far from enough, because it is not these that get them out of bed in the morning and gets them to work extra hard and long – in the long run.

Sources: Analysis of Ugebrevet A4, 2008. [www.wow-women.dk/artikler/andre-artikler/frynsegoder.html](http://www.wow-women.dk/artikler/andre-artikler/frynsegoder.html). The article “Innovative questions” by Gitte Larsen, Protocol.

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## SEVEN EXAMPLES OF FUTURE PERKS

- # 1 Hot Spots!
- # 2 Conversations! (instead of presentations)
- # 3 Cooperation! (instead of competition)
- # 4 Meaningful meeting culture! (participating only in meetings where you can bring value to others or get contributions from others)
- # 5 Wasting time! (doing what you’re passionate about – this starts a lot of good projects)
- # 6 Experiments! (experiments first and planning later – create interaction between thought and action)
- # 7 Doubts, mistakes and chaos!

Source: *10 examples of good management practice*, an inspiration folder from the *Management Ideals of the Future* theme workshop held November 5, 2008 at Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies. Chosen by Thomas Geuken, industrial psychologist and associate research director, and Gitte Larsen, futurist and editor, both at the Copenhagen Institute for Futures Studies.

## HOT SPOTS

Transparency, reciprocity and doubt are essential elements of innovative knowledge work. According to Lynda Gratton, professor of management at the London Business School, companies must create Hot Spots. In the foreword to her book of the same name she writes: “Hot Spots are places and times where cooperation flourishes creating great energy, innovation, productivity and excitement. Hot Spots can be workplaces, teams, departments, companies, factories, cities, industries, coffee shops, hallways, conferences – any place or time where people are working together in exceptionally creative and collaborative ways.”

A Hot Spot has three elements:

1. A “cooperative mindset” that applies both internally and externally in the enterprise, and which to a large extent depends on how the leaders look at cooperation and competition.
2. “Boundary spanning:” managers and employees must burn to learn, develop and share knowledge – even with people outside the company and with people who are different from themselves.
3. Finally, a real Hot Spot requires an “igniting purpose.” Without a vision, a task or a question, the energy required to prompt a Hot Spot never materializes.