



CORENET GLOBAL

VIRTUAL POP UP

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Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways

13 May 2020

What can you tell us about your experience thus far with return to work?

- Here in New Zealand, we are heading back to work tomorrow. From the conversations I have had with a lot of corporates, it is going to be a staged approach to start with, with about half the teams going back initially. Now, everybody is working through what that means, and in a couple of weeks we will see what the scenarios are. When we get to level one in our lockdown, that will be the safest, and then we will not need the same distancing rules that are required in the initial phases. Our return to work here is very different from the rest of the world because we have so few current cases. We do not think that in a year's time we will still have cases. At least, that is the projection we are all hoping for. Obviously, everybody wants to get the economy moving ahead as quickly as possible while doing so safely. Every country is different. Every company here seems to have its own policy and its own interpretation of the rules. To be fair, though, every state government has had so little time to prepare their guidelines. Everybody is working on the fly. We are not quite sure what some of the guidelines mean, but we will keep evolving it.

What is the latest from Australia?

- Our organization covers all of Australia. We have various kinds of properties within our portfolio, and we are considered an essential business. The biggest problem for us is going to be our big corporate sites. For our smaller sites and depots, we are looking at those in a practical manner and trying to ascertain what the challenges are in terms of social distancing and so on, the number of people we can have there, and signage requirements. These smaller sites are used by field workers who pop in and out, and they should be easy. Our main concern is the big corporate sites. I have been reaching out to our landlords and inquiring about their policies and perspectives for coming back to work. But rather than giving us direction, they are asking us questions: 'What are you looking for? What do you want to do?' My big concern is the lifts – getting our people up in the lifts. We will need a staged approach, with staggered start times. To help with this, we might even say that the new norm is working from home and being in the office will be an exception. We are trying to work out what is best. It will not be a one-size-fits-all solution. And the rules keep changing. Once you think something is set, the rules change. I would

like to see the landlords provide a bit more direction on how they think the building should be run. It is lovely for them to engage with the tenants and ask for their opinions, but I would like to see the landlords take a bit more responsibility for their buildings, rather than ask us to give them our wish list.

- We are seeing concerns about public transportation and lifts in New York City and San Francisco right now. I cannot imagine getting on a train, then a subway, then a cab, and then the lifts in the building. A lot of companies here in the United States are probably going to have people stay at home a lot longer than we think because they do not want to expose their people to all that.
- Yes, the public transport and the lifts are the two biggest bottlenecks I see here in Australia. I have had people tell me 'I am never getting on a train again.' Later, that could ease, but right now people are very anxious. Something else also has us really thinking. We were all set up for activity-based working, with a great space set up. But now all that great space might be used for small rooms instead. We could go backwards from all the ABW preparations we made. We need more communication with our staff, surveys and so on to get feedback to get a feel for how many people would be willing to work from home more permanently. It suits some people, others not so much.
- From a facilities perspective, you could potentially spend money on things you will not actually need. And of course, the core businesses are not doing that well at the same time you are being asked to spend money to protect people.

What is happening in Singapore?

- Unfortunately, we are still in lockdown. Until June 1st, the status quo continues. We have seen a lot of webinars on strategies for deploying the work force back into the office. Everyone has a different approach, and different concerns depending on the size of the organization, the size of the office and the number of sites. Overall, the commonalities are how to stagger employees, set up teams and schedules, increase the cleaning regimes, and look at ways to make those who must continue working from home be more comfortable.
- I am in Singapore as well, and what we found with different clients is that while the transition to working from home might have been a bit bumpy at the start, now it seems everyone is generally OK with it. As a result, the return to the office will be slower than people anticipated. Quite a lot of people were saying we would have a month and a half break, and then be back in the office. Now they are saying we can wait longer. People are taking more time and trying to be prudent. There does not seem to be as much pressure now as there was at the beginning for setting a date to get back.

What about other parts of Asia? What is the situation where you are?

- I am in Malaysia. We started our conditional movement control order last week. It is conditional because now we are allowed to go back to the office. Shops are allowed to open. But the majority of the public is still cautious. Not many people were back in the office last week. Among my clients, only about 20 percent were back in the office. This week, one of the main telltale signs is that traffic is worse, so quite a few people are back in the office. There seems to be a disparity between companies who say, 'please continue to work from home unless your function is essential' and those who are forcing their work force to come back to the office. Companies back in the office often have a Team A and a Team B, with both teams in the office, but members of one team cannot meet members of the other team. They are on a different floor. It will take a couple of weeks to see what is working and what is not.

What other thoughts do you have about returning to work? What are you hearing from landlords?

- Everyone here in Malaysia must wear a mask when they leave their home. Masks are required in the office too. Around the lifts, there is staggered entry for some buildings. Depending on how large the lifts are, the minimum number of people on a lift is four, and the maximum is five. They

have marked out the spots where people can stand. There is additional cleaning for the lift buttons. A number of landlords here have spoken to their third-party cleaning companies to begin new procedures for cleaning lifts, both the types of chemicals they are using and the frequency of cleaning.

- We have a guidance playbook on a global, regional, and country-specific basis. It covers the lobby, the lifts, and everything from home to desk and the return journey. Some of the landlords we work with are a bit more advanced and mature in their processes, while others push back and say all this is a tenant issue. Generally, everyone is working together for the greater good.
- In terms of gaining access to our sites, we are in no rush for that to happen. If it takes two or three months to get everyone back in the office, so be it. For us, it is safety over expediency.
- We are starting with a very low utilization at the outset, and we plan to top out at about 25 percent. We will redline every second or third desk so people do not sit too close to each other, and we will pull seats out of meeting rooms. A meeting room with a capacity of 10 might accommodate only two or three people. Our foot traffic will be one way only, both entry and exit. We will have sanitizing stations throughout the floor. We have assigned different teams to be in the office on different days. We will have additional costs, but that is secondary to the wellbeing of the employees.

What about the use of stairs to help with bottlenecks at lifts?

- I have been in some meetings with landlords who say they will open fire stairs to help with lifts. But others say they do not want two-way traffic on the stairs.
- Our plan is to have everybody come in the building through one entrance, and use the stairs and elevators there, and then when they leave, exit via two different sets of stairs.
- Is it OK to be closer to someone than two meters, if you are quickly passing them by in the stairwell?
- If you have the luxury of a few different staircases, that is great. But if you do not, and you use stairs instead of lifts, are you not just pushing people into a different problem?

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