



CORENET GLOBAL

VIRTUAL POP UP

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Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways

As a result of COVID-19, companies are thinking about how they are going to protect their employees' health and wellbeing. Will there be permanent or long-term changes in workplace policies in terms of the use of thermal scanners or other screening requirements? If someone shows up for work and does not pass, what happens next?

- I can certainly see that kind of situation occurring. Someone comes to the front door of the workplace with an elevated temperature, and they are turned away. They say 'I have to come in. If you make me go home, you must pay me. I feel well enough to work.' What happens when the employee does not have a work-from-home option?
- Like all of us, I have gone to work before when I felt like absolute crud, and just muscled through the day because there is work to do.
- I do not have an answer to the question, but I would like to add something to it. Will companies in the US require their employees to use contact tracing apps? I bring that up because in one of our earlier calls a member from Asia mentioned how wonderful it was that their employer had this app that they could use to easily check whether their employees had been in a hot spot. This person thought it was a good idea to have this app on their personal phone, but I cannot picture that happening in the United States!
- We have started the process of going back to work. Team A comes in Mondays and Wednesdays, and Team B comes in Tuesdays and Thursdays. On Fridays, nobody comes to the office. Before you go into the office, you get a health-check e-mail. The first question is 'are you going to the office?' If you answer yes, you get a second question: 'is your temperature under 100?' If you answer no, you are instructed to stay at home and work from there. Because we can easily work from home, the question of getting paid (or not) does not apply to us, and there is no financial incentive to falsify the response. We have not considered a contact tracing app. That probably would have big legal ramifications.
- The Canadian government is proposing a policy (national, for all employees, not just government) to have 10 days paid sick leave. This will limit the need for employees to come to work when ill and continue to spread the virus. If citizens can stay home and be paid, they contribute to a safer society.

- I am from the Netherlands. We are in such a different lockdown than other countries. We are more like the Swedish model. None of these examples of monitoring employees, taking temperatures and so on are applicable in the Netherlands.

Is there an increase in cases there?

- No. The number of new cases is slowing down. They have stopped announcing new cases because the number is below 10. The cases we have today are laborers coming in from abroad to work here. We are reopening, and shops are open. Our company is shifting away from working from home and toward returning to the office. We were not told to avoid going outside, as some countries did. It has worked out well for us.

We are looking now to a phased approach for coming back to work and reopening our spaces. Of course, the way we used to work two to three months ago has changed. How are companies looking at their overall real estate footprint and how it might change in the future when they have the opportunity?

- I am from Canada. I have colleagues here in provincial and other governments who are looking at a 50 percent reduction in their footprint because working from home is now a reality. It is also prudent risk management. We have talked about it in the past mostly as a business continuity strategy. Certainly, there will be a new normal, and it must be driven by input from our health authorities. And of course, employers need to have a healthy, safe work environment for their employees.

But what about collaboration? In my company, people loved being at home, but now they are missing the interaction and being together with colleagues. How is that playing out in Canada?

- Everything is on the table to ensure that we have collaboration. We have full electronic collaboration tools. We can have team days. If our occupancy is at 20 to 50 percent, Team A can come in on one day, and Team B on another day. One hundred percent occupancy is just not an idea anymore. We cannot guarantee employees' safety when they take public transit, touch elevator buttons and so on. It is just not worth the risk.

What if a vaccine is developed?

- Yes, a vaccine could change everything. But even then, what happens when the next pandemic comes? For now, we are conceptualizing what our space will look like. It must be safe. We are blocking off workstations and thinking about hallways and corridors. How do we manage risk when people are lined up at the coffeemaker in the kitchen? It is all about adding working from home as a big component of our strategy, so we spread our people out and lower the density.

We have spent a lot of time talking about the 'new normal.' But does anyone think we will get tired of this – all the restrictions – and go back to the 'old normal?' Here in the US over the holiday weekend, we saw crowded beaches. Will companies get more relaxed over time?

- Yes, people will get tired of the new normal and will want to go back to the old. But as it relates to real estate, you are talking about money, and about shareholder profit. If you can shrink the space, and spend less on real estate, you can make more money.
- I think there is a difference between the risk that people are willing to take vs. the risk that companies are willing to take. You are taking a personal risk when you go to the beach, but companies are taking the risk when people are coming into the office, and they are responsible. What level of risk is a corporation willing to take? That could be very different from the risk an individual might be willing to take.

- Among corporations, I can certainly see changes in policies, and I do not think that they necessarily will be relaxed. There will be changes, such as wearing masks. Companies will try to protect themselves from a legal standpoint in the event somebody is sick.
- If we were having this conversation at this time last year, we would have been talking about culture, collaboration, and amenities. I do not think those topics will go away. Once there is a vaccine, it could be a very different conversation. While I do think people will work from home a lot more, that will be somewhat offset by the fact that people will want more square footage per employee. I do not think it will be a 50 percent reduction for everybody, but it could be that high for some. Some companies will want more space so they can spread out. It is a bowl of alphabet soup. We will have to wait and see. Once there is a vaccine, the legal liability will be largely removed, as will the health risk, and it will be a different conversation.
- Might all this prompt companies to want more real estate, not less, because of the way they are working now? Before, companies were compacting people into open spaces and consolidating into smaller work environments. Maybe now they will create floor plans that have larger social distancing capabilities. Some teams could want to be in the buildings to collaborate. And management might want people in the buildings.
- This could be where the pendulum starts to swing back from the high-density benching environment. I am not necessarily saying we will go to high-wall cubicles, but I can see the overall square footage per person increasing. It had been coming for some time that people were not comfortable in the tight environments anyway. Will we see companies taking more real estate? I do not think so. I think the work from home piece will balance it all out, so you get more space between employees without having to add more space.
- Extra space is not on the board for us right now.
- By reducing space and by working remotely, we reduce drastically the power of working as a team and the ability to quickly arrange informal meetings. Serendipity will disappear.
- From an African perspective, it will be interesting to see if WFH will be a long-term solution, or if there will be a stronger push to work from our traditional places of work.

Are there any solutions out there to convert to voice-activated floor selection in elevators?

- I saw mention of a floor-mounted system where you use your feet to select your destination.

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