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#CREweek

Q&A with Martin Clarke:

Has the pandemic accelerated the trend of coordinating the various corporate functions of real estate, HR and IT?

The pandemic has forced the groups to work more closely together. It's interesting to see how some of the initiatives championed by real estate over the last few years have, in the last 12 months, become mainstream and embraced by other support functions. HR is taking a much more prominent position on working practices as it relates to 'place'; and an acceleration in investment by IT departments in mobile technology which is needed to accelerate some of the workplace strategy programs that real estate have been exploring for some time. All of a sudden here is a business imperative to move these issues forward.

How does the current environment present corporate real estate (CRE) professionals with an opportunity to lead in their companies?

Corporate real estate holds a unique collection of data:

- Data on who comes to the office through security access control systems
- Data on official headcount and contractors that are present on premises
- Unique perspectives on headcount growth across business units by geographical markets

These types of data have become increasingly important to company leadership in these times. CRE in many respects has many years' experience of building infrastructure to support hybrid working. As business requires these to be built at scale, corporate real estate has experience to call upon which helps lead the business through these difficult times.

How has the value of CRE professionals increased over the last 10 years, and particularly during the pandemic?

Corporate real estate and facilities was once purely about brick and mortar and operations. Alternate working practices enabled by technology have raised questions about the purpose of office environments. Some of the more advanced CRE teams have recognized the shift and transformed more into a workplace experience practice, where the focus is on the employee and customer experience within the physical environments.

What do you see for the future of corporate real estate?

I don't see a radical shift in thinking but I see an acceleration in implementing concepts and ideas that have been talked about for a while but have struggled to gain traction. Access to data on employee behavior patterns will fuel the development of ideas around the best use of corporate assets to support a productive workplace.