



CORENET GLOBAL

VIRTUAL POP UP

A pop in community for **corporate real estate professionals**

Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways

24 March 2020

How can we in corporate real estate in the United States benefit from some of the experiences and lessons learned about what has already happened in other countries where the pandemic has passed and now the curve has flattened?

Our gut reaction was to reach out to our colleagues and clients in Asia and Italy to try to get some of their insights because those could be invaluable to the rest of us. We found answers that might be problematic. One, they are swamped. They are in triage mode. They are trying to figure out how to get everybody back into their facilities and ensure that those facilities are safe and sterile. They're working around the clock trying to deal with that and to prepare for the return of people to the workplace. The second thing we're finding is that there is some hesitation from a corporate standpoint to weigh in. We had several people willing to chat and then they realized they do not have corporate approval to talk about this. It has to do with what liabilities companies have in all this. Some companies are thus hesitant to share because of potential legal ramifications. I would like to hope that we can indeed have some honest conversations so we can help others be proactive.

How is the coronavirus affecting construction activity?

We operate construction sites globally. The coronavirus first impacted Asia, then southern Europe, and now it's affecting the United States, where the impact is different in different regions. It's a set of moving parts, and one must keep watching. The approach we're taking is that 'the show must go on' for our clients, employees, and everyone. At the bottom of the supply chain, there are hourly workers who might be employed by subcontractors. While the government has not come up with anything for them yet, they are keen to continue working. That brings me to another point: care of duty. If sites can be operated in a safe manner, then work can carry on if we observe the normal distancing of 2 meters. The UK has said it is OK to continue working on construction sites. It all comes down to safer practices, a stricter protocol, and then a good care of duty.

What are people doing to stay connected with their teams when everyone is working remotely?

To be less disconnected from our peers, we are doing a couple of things that are kind of fun. We are hosting a coffee hour with different groups. And we have a COVID-19 Yammer page and an I Work from Home Yammer page. We created a venue for people to just talk and share pictures of their pets sitting on their desks. That's a very real part of all this. Then we have a separate page for critical communications, so they don't get lost. This is keeping everybody's

morale up. We're hosting a happy hour tomorrow at 5:00, and we will all make our favorite drinks and get on Teams together with our cameras on and have sort of a bunny-slipper happy hour. So that's sort of what we're doing to keep morale up. People can have those impromptu conversations and just that natural chatter.

What if you're classified as an essential business, and need to maintain an ongoing physical presence despite the coronavirus?

As a Dept. of Defense contractor, we are considered an essential business, and we can keep our manufacturing plants going through all of this. This has some unique HR challenges in terms of who works from home and who must come into a facility. One thing we are struggling with is lining up appropriate resources if we did need to do de-contamination. We have secure areas and delicate equipment. All this has consumed a fair amount of time for me. It's certainly new territory for us.

What about cleaning offices and facilities that might have been contaminated?

If you have contamination, the CDC says you need to shut down the space for 24 to 48 hours before you go in to clean. They spell all this out in the CDC documentation. If your janitorial vendor is not following this information (in the US, at least) you need to find another one.

Enhanced cleaning is a matter of prioritizing the most important cases, which depends on getting good information. The COVID-19 test takes so long to confirm results. You might have an employee who was tested a week ago and went home, but you still don't know if they were positive or not.

The definition of different types of cleaning comes into the picture too. Everyone has their own understanding. Our company has created our own definitions so that at least everyone understands that when we go into a space 'deep cleaning' means one thing and 'enhanced cleaning' means something different. Having the same definitions has been very helpful.

Another challenge is the evolving guidance around how long the virus can live on different surfaces. We are concerned about handling cardboard and other materials. We are trying to be as vigilant as possible in giving good guidance to our employees, but this does seem to change every day.

How are you dealing with employee requests for equipment, workstations, etc., now that everyone is working from home?

We instituted an online form that employees can fill out. You use it to check out equipment, and then check it back in. We don't want employees to go out and buy equipment. There are protocols for disinfecting the equipment, wrapping it up and making sure it is safe when people pick it up. This is all done by appointment.

We carried out a global audit of all our staff for business continuity and working remotely. It covered several topics, including equipment, connectivity and ergonomics. The results were encouraging, and we found that many people appeared to be quite ready to work from home. We found that we had to do more to support our employees in 3 to 5 percent of cases. We also established forums not just to talk about work but more importantly how they were getting along. We want to support them going forward.

What about testing employees for COVID-19 once you're given the go-ahead to return to the office?

Anyone who is considering going back to the office will likely not do so until they feel comfortable that they will not contract the virus by someone who doesn't know that they have it and are spreading it. Will testing go beyond just taking temperatures, which is a lagging indicator of whether someone is spreading the virus? We need to figure out a testing protocol that allows us to know confidently that no one is infected in the office.

What impact do you think all of this will have on companies' future need for space?

There seems to be a feeling that this could be a life-changing event. One thing that will shape the future perspective on this is research on employee productivity while working remotely. For now, choice has been removed. Hopefully, when we all get back, and when choice is put back into the equation, people will crave the ability to make that decision again. We will need balance, and we will need to give people choice.

About CoreNet Global

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