



CONNECT



PRESENT



A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Environment & Climate Change, Team 2

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Input your submission below. Please remember that you have 1500 words to share your insights.

As the pandemic continues to take hold across the globe, it is obvious that corporate real estate is being drastically affected. Our team jumped into a deep mind-mapping activity of looking at ways the pandemic has driven change in real estate. As our real estate changes, what will that do to our corporate and personal sustainability goals? We looked at the impact of COVID-19 within three categories: new construction, building operations, and human behavior. As we examined these three categories and peeled back the layers about how our sustainability goals may be impacted, we discovered several common trends:

- Long Term Decrease in Office Space
- Shift to the Employee Home
- Internal Air Quality Issues
- Increase in Water Usage
- Changes in Commute and Public Transportation
- Single Use Everything

Long-term Decrease in Office Demand

Empty offices and excess real estate:

US workers are not going to return to their offices, which leaves us with excess real estate, which will take time to dispose or repurpose. Take the guesswork out and set the tone for what your organization believes the “new normal” will be. Focus on long-term reduced occupancy in offices.

- Change operating hours. With fewer workers coming into the workspace, morning start up and evening shut down times should be adjusted.
- Collaborate with engineering/MEP to identify ideal locations for your employee work stations. Keep safe distances in mind, locate workstations in ways that allow you to reduce the number of pieces of equipment needed to serve those areas.
- Prepare a plan to permanently repurpose or de-commission certain areas, keeping electrical consumption in mind and juxtaposed to life safety.
- Implement IoT solutions for remote monitoring of your real estate and spaces to keep a tight grip on emissions and spend.

Clean and healthy office spaces are a MUST:

Workers who must return to the office will impose higher requirements for office cleanliness requiring increase in cleaning and ventilation.

- Do not compromise on safety in an effort for sustainability and make sure your employees are aware of your priorities.
- Reduce use of excessive chemicals to preserve the health and safety of employees and equipment.
- Encourage clean desk policy to allow for frequent deep cleaning yet no need for repeat/excessive cleaning.
- Allow enough time between shifts/cleaning and when space is going to be utilized again, consider updating or staggering operating hours.

Re-building for the new normal:

Excess real estate, open floor layout and the shift to meeting venues over workspaces will require the redesign and rebuild of existing building stock.

- Create a new work schedule that incorporates those that can and cannot work from home to promote positive culture and balance fluctuating demand for space.
- While redesigning your workspace spend time focusing on how much space you will need based on the future schedule.
- Invest more into your space as it will be smaller than before.
- Provide specific office hours guidelines to avoid unexpected occupancy or wasting conditioned office space.

Key Takeaway: COVID-19 has created a permanent behavior change on our workers, prepare your offices space for reduced demand and increased safety requirements.

Shift to Employee Home

Responsibility Transfer:

As workers transition to working from home and office real estate winds down, there will be an increase in pressure to manage sustainability that is out of corporation's control.

- Evaluate capital allocated to sustainability and real estate to create financial incentive programs for workers who are interested in incorporating efficiency upgrades into their homes
- Consider similar strategies to corporations adding EV charging stations and offering preferential parking and free charging as an incentive to purchase an electric car.
- With continued rise in home delivery incorporate transportation and fuel into your sustainability effort.
- Refer to waste strategies to combat an increase in package waste:

Tracking and Data Acquisition:

Tracking impact will need to incorporate the efficiency of the individual in addition to the corporation. In addition, homes are significantly less efficient than offices.

- Require data sharing through incentive programs to help acquire and centralize data needed to evaluate carbon footprint.
- Collect data via surveys, isolate consumption to employee specific activities.
- Balance privacy and anonymity when acquiring private and personal data.
- Consider higher levels of scrutiny regarding personal data compared to corporate data.

Key Takeaway: Your sustainability strategy will have to change as responsibility shifts to the individual employee. Consider incentive programs to help employees make the right choice.

Internal Air Quality Issues

Poor Air Quality Spreads Sickness:

Internal Air Quality requirements (quantity of outside air, filtration, proper distribution) will increase due to a focus on Healthy Buildings. Several studies have shown poor ventilation and the circulation of infected air are major contributing factors to sickness worldwide.

- Mechanical HVAC Systems will need to be upgraded to align with IAQ standards.
- HVAC System upgrades are very costly and typically a ROI solely based on energy savings is above business guidelines.
- An IAQ upgrade for HVAC will include potentially replacing rooftop units and chiller/boiler plants. If this occurs consider upgrading to geothermal, high efficiency chillers, and HVAC with economizers to achieve energy savings as the HVAC ventilation and filtration is being upgraded.

Key Takeaway: If a HVAC system is being replaced/renovated due to IAQ requirements, this is a terrific opportunity to also upgrade the HVAC system to a much more sustainable design.

Increase in Water Usage

As people return to the office, there will be increased cleaning and hand washing which will cause a spike in water use across our real estate. We will be challenged how to counterbalance the water increase and continue support of Corporate Water Usage Goals.

- Are you installing hands-free fixtures? Upgrade to the low flow at the same time!
- Are you evaluating your incoming water supply, take it a step farther by evaluating rainwater harvesting.

Key Takeaway: As water systems are upgraded and modified, pay attention to how the system can be upgraded from a sustainability standpoint.

Impact on Commuting

COVID-19 Impact:

The drastic reduction in travel has resulted in immediate environmental benefits such as noticeably cleaner air (see viral photos of a clear Los Angeles skyline). Researchers in New York found carbon monoxide has been reduced by nearly 50% compared to last year due to reduced commuting & self-isolation ⁽¹⁾

- With increased reliance on remote work, fewer commuters allow an opportunity for the planet to continue to heal with variables being:
 - Encourage environmentally friendly commute alternatives such as walking and biking.
 - Partner with sales to evaluate whether your organization can successfully sell via virtual meetings instead of in person which requires travel.
 - Get involved with IT to remove barriers for virtual meetings, events and conferences to reduce travel and commuting
 - Partner with marketing to encourage virtual events and exhibitions in place of in person ones.
 - Take a greater consideration for office locations which may be convenient for workers to access by foot or bike.

Key Takeaway: As we exit the pandemic world, evaluate your travel habits to examine how to minimize use of vehicles.

Single Use Everything

Reduce, Reuse, Recycle – a thing of the past? Companies were eliminating single-use consumables before COVID-19 in lieu of reusable silverware, use your own cup, etc. As companies and the service industry move quickly to a single use world, some consumables may be unavailable as everyone is attempting to buy the same things.

- Streamline waste streams, remove desk side waste bins; properly dispose of biowaste (i.e., not in parking lots, waterways, etc.) Encourage reusable face masks. Conveniently distribute waste/recycling bins.
- Plan for long-term ways to reincorporate reusable products without risk (i.e., no-touch water dispensers).
- Reduce unnecessary goods/services.

Expectations are a changing! People are not adopting the “new normal” yet. Individual stewardship is vital to making long-term repair to the environment, so make it personal.

- Design signage with infographics.
- Make Sustainability part of the conversation/culture.
- Teach people how to protect themselves while still being mindful of their impact.
- Offset consumption with fun waste-pickup challenges and rewards.
- Set company/team targets and help people reach goals.

KEY TAKEAWAY: The best way to reduce the consumption of single-use materials is to encourage a work-from-home environment.

As companies and individuals begin to grasp the new landscape of real estate and the effects it will have on your sustainability strategies, do not view them as obstacles, rather see them as opportunities to make a positive change!

- COVID-19 has created a permanent behavior change on our workers, prepare your office spaces for reduced demand and increased safety requirements.
- Your sustainability strategy will have to change as responsibility shifts to the individual employee. Consider incentive programs to help employees make the right choice.
- As water systems are upgraded or modified, pay attention how the system can be upgraded to improve sustainability.
- HVAC systems are being replaced/renovated due to IAQ requirements, offering an opportunity to also upgrade the HVAC system for improved sustainability.
- As we exit the pandemic world, evaluate your travel habits, and see how you can continue to minimize use of vehicles and number of air and road trips.
- Reduce the consumption of single-use materials by encouraging a work-from-home environment.