

Members Respond to the Coronavirus Challenge

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What's the biggest work/COVID-19 challenge you're facing this week?

Most employees are required to be back in the office (work on-site). However, most schools are still closed. This poses challenges for most parents to return to work. In the university where I work, teaching and learning are conducted 100% online. Lecturers are still struggling to maintain the same depth of engagement with students they could have in a classroom setting.

What's the current situation in your city relative to opening non-essential businesses?

Restrictions on public activities were first implemented under the Movement Control Order (MCO), enforced on March 18 to curb the spread of Covid-19. Seeing the number of new cases are now under control, the government has declared the Recovery MCO (RMCO) which will run from June 10 to August 31.

All social activities including religious activities, education and businesses will be reopened in stages. In Kuala Lumpur specifically, most commercial activities are now allowed to reopen including barbershops, hair salons and night market with strict SOP.

Local tourism activities are also allowed. However, premises such as pubs, night clubs, entertainment outlets (cinemas), reflexology and karaoke centres will not be allowed to reopen.

How do you think COVID-19 will bring about permanent changes in corporate real estate and workplace strategy?

During the MCO, some businesses have started to plan to relocate to cheaper areas. Some small and medium enterprises have begun negotiating rent reduction with their current landlords. I think there will be more office/business relocation in the first year after office re-boarding.

Many still want to go back to work to feel connected. We (in Malaysia) have seen a lot of changes in the workplace since the movement control order (MCO) has been lifted which includes stricter hygiene protocols and physical distancing measures. The Ministry of Health of Malaysia has issued the social distancing guideline including increasing physical space between workers at the worksite (at least 1 metre apart). I think the pandemic will also force the workplace to rethink the design and amount of space needed per employee. As people want more private spaces, there could be less of an open-floor-plan workspace in the future. Most meetings/discussion rooms would not be occupied for another several months.

Stricter hygiene protocols will be the highest priority in the first few months back in the office. More regular cleaning and sanitation schedules. Health screening at point of entry will be common in most offices and shops. Separate entrances and primary circulation for staffs and visitors (including the lifts) are now common.

Although MCO has been lifted, many still opt for WFH to reduce travelling (particularly employees who have young children, health issues and elderly).

More video conferencing facilities will be set up in the office to allow collaboration between those working on-site and working from home.