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A **COVID-19** Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Space Utilization and Metrics, Team 23

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The post-COVID environment continues to be an unknown landscape. However, organizations are quickly developing their approach to the new way of working and influencing the way employees will interact with the built environment. The return to work will be an evolving process stretched over a course of three phases containing metrics to influence the next move forward. Occupants, facilities and real estate teams, along with operations like legal and HR will be impacted and gathered metrics will guide their decisions. Phase one marks the return of essential employees and addressing of immediate safety concerns. Phase 2, 18 months later, involves widespread technology use for seat reservations, illness tracking, and redesigned workplace efficiency. Phase three moves another 18 months and marks the full adoption of a workforce connected through technology, working remotely or together in spaces that are widespread and easily monitored.

During this phase the physical space, policies and procedures of the office will be evaluated relative to new personal and public health guidelines. External limitations around the availability of materials, supplies and resources, as well jurisdictional guidelines, will guide the back to work process. Policies set during this time will be fluid and adapt over the next 18 months. The occupancy of buildings will be expected to be greatly reduced and influenced by entry and exit protocols. What once was security based on building safety will now merge with health safety considerations. Organizations will need to determine who is essential to be on site, how employees will conduct themselves, and what the triggers for retrenching will be. During this phase, the operational team will need to develop policies, define metrics, and determine the means for tracking user data for use in decision-making in the

subsequent phases. Work from home will continue to be preferred choice and close monitoring to productivity, wellness, and connection will be necessary to ensure work continuity. A proactive approach in phase one will support a smooth transition to phase two.

The data captured in early technology use from phase one will begin to identify the redesigning of the floorplate in phase 2. During this timeframe, the positive and negative feedback gathered from employee and operations input will need to be evaluated. From there adjustments can be made to the physical environment that better support the new way of working. The policies and associated metrics tracking will be phased in more broadly so that the future footprint of the office will be better informed and support a more flexible space. Organizations will continue to need to be prepared to retrench during this phase as all means and methods of addressing future contagions may not be in place and a resurgence may occur. This will also involve continued measurement of employee illness cases and a strong adherence to a new social contract of self-monitoring health. Phase two will also involve ongoing evaluations of remote work policies that will shape future real estate decisions.

After three years workspaces, along with the interaction between occupants and buildings, will have a well-established process created by the metrics gathered in phases one and two. Phase three marks the a new normal, identifying with advanced technology, defined privacy laws, and new building codes that society has naturally adopted. Working from remote locations, whether it is an auxiliary building, home, or headquarters will be expected and influence the way organizations purchase or lease space. Rather than focusing on major campuses, companies may choose to spread their buildings across geographies, greatly reducing travel time for local employees. This also affects workplace design and requires inventory to move easily and spaces to flex on demand. The cost per employee to work from multiple locations will become a budgeting factor and contribute to the overall facilities cost. Finally, phase three brings an elevated approach to technology with the widespread use of apps to track employee wellness, circulation, and building security. All become factors that could contribute to a new rating system for buildings, awarding the most compliant.

Space utilization and workplace efficiency is a technology that was in practice well before COVID impacted organizations, but the post-COVID landscape will require the full adoption of this practice for both personal wellness and design decisions. While the initial response is projected to revolve mainly around employee safety and supporting employees at home, phase two takes new learning from phase one standardizes it and begins to shape informed real estate and workplace design decisions. This lays the foundation for a new way of working that integrates technology seamlessly within organizations. It will guide real estate and facility decisions for adopting and maintaining multiple leases across geography. Defined protocols lead to wellness certifications that employees come to expect from their companies, while reservations systems provide ease in choosing to work from home or in the office. Operations will continue to play a critical role in ensuring company culture is not lost among a more flexible workforce, while the workplace provides easy flexibility to contract and expand based on the collaborative and privacy needs of its occupants. Combined the three phases provide a connection rather than a separation from the workplace. The immediate reaction to reduce real estate investment, limit employees, and divide the office will give way to technology driven decisions and flexible spaces that adhere to new protocols. Not only will the new environment connect people in new ways, it can set the groundwork to develop smarter real estate, environmental, and wellness decisions.