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A **COVID-19** Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellbeing - Academic

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Return to the Modern Flex-Space Post COVID-19

The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020¹) highlights that COVID-19 spread, is from person-to-person through airborne droplets, which creates significant concerns on the type of preventative and mitigation measures that need to be taken before and when office workers return to their companies and workplaces. Through the lens of Generations X through Z, who increasingly represent the current workforce. We focus on the workplace wellbeing of

¹ <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019/question-and-answers-hub/q-a-detail/q-a-coronaviruses>

employees that are using “flex spaces”, with WeWork type space being our focus as this was a growing trend for creating modern day work environments to attract this type of employee. (See Slide 1 JLL Coworking Under Pressure). Key elements in a successful return to the workplace is safety and mitigation of any potential liabilities. If building preventative measures are not taken in advance of employee return, the psychological fear of a potential workplace outbreak could be high leading to potential employee attrition even if there is no validity to it (See Slide 2, Cushman & Wakefield Six Readiness Essentials).

In this report, we analyze how accessibility, social distancing, holistic hygiene and liability assessment of a building can help heighten the way an office building is perceived by the occupants alleviating or mitigating the presumed exposure to risk and possible psychological fear effect occupants might have. In addition, we provide a set of recommendations for corporate real estate professionals to consider as they navigate this “new normal”.

Accessibility Assessment

One of the most important issues in returning to the workplace is entering and exiting a building. Currently, occupants and visitors enter the building by opening doors, pressing elevator buttons, and using security ID cards. By utilizing technology, accessibility can be streamlined and more sanitary as the amount of physical touching can be significantly reduced.

- *Entering the Building*
 - Mobile applications
 - Smart device scanners at entrance/exit and/or parking garages
 - Smart entryway unlocking and locking
 - Secure access codes for guests
 - Automatic door locks
 - Sensor technology
 - Occupant density sensors alerting security when densities in an area are in excess of prescribed norms or legal limitations
 - Infrared temperature face scans with security notification for high temp outliers
 - Staggered employee entrance
 - Work shift adjustments (by day and time)
 - Appropriate prescribed distancing
- *Inside the Building*
 - Elevator retrofits
 - Smart device alignment with elevators for office floor access
 - Voice controlled elevators
 - Use of key cards/ID cards and smartphones used to sign-in/scan into a door

The New Normal - Social Distancing Assessment

Social Distancing is the new normal and a very powerful strategy to flatten the curve and slow the spread of a pandemic like COVID-19. Unlike being quarantined, social distancing is a tool of intervention and mitigation, a way of reducing the viral impact in the workplace by limiting personal contact, but allowing people to return to work. There are significant changes in the look and feel of the workplace that could be made to accommodate the impact of social distancing.

- *Efficient Planning of the Space*
 - Space planning/repurposing of gathering spaces (workstations, check-in, check-out booths and gathering spaces like coffee bars, game rooms and other relaxation areas or break rooms and cafeteria)
 - 6 feet distancing (See Slide 3, Cushman & Wakefield Six Feet Office) in all areas including gathering places (CDC recommendation)
 - One-way circulation rules
 - Plexiglas partitions among workstations
 - Personal accountability and clear workable rules of conduct
 - Repurposing some gathering spaces that can be workspace additions to accommodate social distancing
- *Occupant Density Management*
 - Defining max load capacity per floor by employee function

Holistic Hygiene Assessment

Maintaining strict hygiene standards in the workplace is vital for the perceived occupant risk assessment of their workplace therefore lowering the psychological fear they might be experiencing, decrease the potential of illness outbreaks, and raise employee morale.

- *Building Hygiene*
 - HVAC proactive prevention/mitigation of potential aerosol contaminants
 - Air ventilation (Slide 4, Fitwel Air Ventilation Recommendations)
 - Natural ventilation, by using wind and buoyancy to control airborne contaminants on a more frequent basis
 - Forced ventilation with proper HEPA filters and consistent upkeep traps 99.97% of dust, vapors, bacteria, and fungi particles that are 0.3 microns or larger
 - Optimize humidity
 - Preventing low-humidity conditions that are known to be breeding conditions for viruses
 - Adequate and frequent building cleaning/disinfecting/sanitization
 - Antimicrobial coating on commonly touched items
 - Door handles, light switches, countertops

- *Building Staff Hygiene*
 - Staff training and new protocol on practicing good and visible personal hygiene (e.g. masks, gloves, frequently cleaning and social distancing)
 - Workshops and training will be conducted on a regular basis
 - Staff illness and isolation protocol should be established
- *Occupant Hygiene*
 - Occupant hygiene protocol is established and distributed
 - Building staff should offer multimedia training promoting personal hygiene
 - Offering material for personal hygiene on a need basis
- *Visitor Hygiene*
 - Hygiene protocol established & appropriate material distributed (e.g. masks, gloves etc.,)
 - Visitors must leave the premise if they do not feel well

Liability Assessment

Liability is an important issue for landlords, tenants and office workers, however a specific pandemic clause has not typically been established unless there is a specialized use.

Responsibility for Tenants and Landlords

- Tenant and Landlord legally defined actions need to be put in the lease
 - Responsibility for setting new policies and procedures
 - Firm/Tenant specific
 - Building specific
 - Responsibility for making sure new policies and procedures are put into place
 - Contingent on the lease.
 - Aspects of the lease are always negotiable.
- Granted both sides will be concerned with each point made prior, but the enforcement of the changes will be where the liability is considered.

Potential Liability Risks for Tenants and Landlords

- The Doctrine of Respondent Superior
 - This principle makes an employer legally responsible for the wrongful acts done by an employee, if such acts occur within the scope of the employment.
- Paid Time Off
 - Increased PTO increases an employees' incentive to stay home when ill
 - Opposite leads to further infection in the workplace and increased risks

- Workers Compensation
 - Essential. Employee infected during employment shall be compensated for loss of salary as well as gained medical expenses.
 - Claiming compensation must be classed as an “occupational disease.”

Key Strategies/Recommendations

After considering a variety of prevention and mitigation actions, landlords and tenants can implement numerous strategies to avoid future covid-19 outbreaks. While lowering the perception of risk, we believe the following recommendations can also lower the level of psychological fear occupants might encounter within their workplaces. Following these policies and procedures will enhance work performance once employees go back into an office (or else see Slide 5, Social Distancing – Your Choice).

- *Phased Approach*
 - As the current flex-space workplace model is not conducive for social distancing, a phased return approach (employee shift systems) is essential, resulting in fewer spaced being occupied within the existing workplace.
- *Signage*
 - Effective communication through signage (posters, floor markings, electronic display).
 - Signage for foot traffic, markings on floors where queues could form, electronic displays and reminder posters at identified locations can ensure constant and timely communication with the workplace users.
- *Educational Training*
 - Building staff training in personal hygiene and building cleaning
 - Occupant multi-media training in personal hygiene and six feet distancing
 - Create a diagnostic tool to mitigate workforce anxiety
 - Visitor visual education on hygiene protocol
- *Occupancy*
 - A workplace analytics team, with the help of sensors and IoT devices, can provide data related to workplace behavior and occupancy
- *Certification*
 - Workplaces that are more resilient and follow all the outlined social distancing rules can be certified as safe workplaces by Fitwel, WELL or LEED.
- *Legal*
 - Government tax breaks for companies that meet or are above health standards
 - Legal statutes pertaining workers’ compensation will need to be changed in order to include infectious diseases
 - Insurance policies covering infectious diseases will see an increase in insurance premiums