



PRESENT



A **COVID-19** Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellness, Team 17

Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable):

- **Team Lead: Michael Gummey**, Allegis Group

Team Members:

- **Michael Gummey**, Allegis Group
- **Whitney Austin Gray**, International WELL Building Institute
- **Jane Garfield**, APG Office Furnishings**
- **Michele Hagen**, AECOM**
- **Holly Jones**, Afiniti**
- **Alfonso Alexandre Morales**, AISC – American Institute of Steel Construction
- **Lisa Philko**, AIREA
- **Carrie Smith**, American Society of Hematology

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

CoreNet Hackathon, Team 17: Workplace Wellbeing

How to Support a Diversity of Needs in the COVID-19 Workplace

Authors:

- **Michael Gummey**, Allegis Group

- **Whitney Austin Gray**, International WELL Building Institute
- **Jane Garfield**, APG Office Furnishings**
- **Michele Hagen**, AECOM**
- **Holly Jones**, Afiniti**
- **Alfonso Alexandre Morales**, AISC – American Institute of Steel Construction
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Overview

As part of the CoreNet Hackathon, Team 17 was asked to examine the topic of “Workplace Wellbeing” in the COVID-19 world. In proposing strategies, our team did not want to limit solutions to the physical workspace focused around cleaning, physical distancing, and employee shift management. Instead, we focused on how workplace wellness requires both environmental *and* policy interventions. To support the highest level of workplace well-being, we must examine the diversity of needs of our workers as they are returning to work, both in terms of their physical, mental, and social needs. In doing so, we understand there is no “one size fits all” solution. By pretending that work will return to the “new normal” is to ignore the needs of a diverse population who has vulnerabilities that may disadvantage their return to a traditional office space, or alternatively, may have needs that previously were not addressed in the pre-COVID-19 workplace, that now can be. Team 17 challenges companies, as part of their return to the workplace, to incorporate diversity into their overall strategies. We put forward a framework for thinking about how companies are going to support and leverage the diversity of needs in the COVID-19 workplace, with a renewed focus on placing people first and fostering workplace wellbeing.

Redefining the Issue

We anticipate that innovative companies will find opportunities to support the diverse needs of their people while navigating the new realities that resulted from our experience through COVID-19. Such companies will re-think how they handle the “9-5” work day, which may no longer exist in the world of COVID-19 with de-densification of buildings, alternative team structure, and alternative commuting scheduling. This means the need for a collective commitment by employers to embrace the idea that worker productivity may not require a traditional workplace setting to do it in. In the face of COVID-19, employees with diverse needs may have flourished in a “work from home” environment, especially as the demands of commuting, child-care balance, work schedules, and virtual connections are being re-examined. Those with disabilities that do not allow public transit use, or that require special workplace accommodations, are demonstrating that work-from-home can provide a high productivity without the four walls of a traditional office.

Key Populations

We focused on three main segments of the population that align with the business case for the return to a successful workforce: Neuro-diverse Populations, Vulnerable Populations, and Immuno-Comprised Populations.

- Neuro-Diverse Populations: Neuro-diverse populations include, but not limited to, segments of the population who suffer from Autism (or are on the autistic spectrum), have anxiety disorder, suffer from depression, or that experience post-traumatic stress disorders.
- Vulnerable Populations: Vulnerable populations include, but are not limited to, segments of the population that have one or more co-morbidities (i.e. obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular disease). These populations also encompass groups of people that are geriatric or becoming immobile, are pregnant or new parents, are from socio-economically disadvantaged groups, or happen to be caregivers of any of these vulnerable populations.
- The Immuno-Compromised Population: Immuno-compromised populations include, but are not limited to, those who have compromised health conditions, whether pre-existing or newly-acquired. Some examples may include people with cancer, diabetes, HIV/AIDS, trauma, or with congenital health illnesses.

Diversity of Needs Framework

We propose a Diversity of Needs Framework that can be applied to other populations not directly included in our initial analysis. It is important to note that this is not meant to be a comprehensive list of all populations or needs and that additional expertise from the fields of occupational health, human resources, and management are needed. Rather, the following is a call-to-action to support a powerful strategy for return-to-work in the era of Covid-19, and we encourage the ongoing dialogue on this topic.



Companies today need to consider an entire range of topics that may not have existed or were limited in their scope prior to COVID-19. While companies look to get back to the office and discuss business needs (and construction) or redesign of the physical office space for added flexibility, they also need to consider the following and how it will impact the populations that require these diversity of needs.

- **Testing and Privacy:** Medical or temperature testing of employees and the privacy concerns associated with that.
 - Who's in charge of the testing for the building or the individual office space?
 - When do employees give up personal privacy rights in order to be protected from infection?
 - What type of health information are employees going to be required to release in order to return to the office?
 - How is any medical or temperature testing data going to be stored?
 - How is the intersection between HR, Legal, and RE/Facilities going to be managed?

- **Liability**
 - Cleaning of the offices and who is responsible for the end result
 - How are office visitors managed?
 - Management of meeting rooms and common area

- **Remote Worker**
 - Flexibility and changes to the workplace
 - Daycare or school closings
 - Personal medical issues
 - Caring for others
 - Less structured workday
 - Employees who excel working from home

- **Company Culture and Education**
 - Managing flexible environments and work schedules for employees
 - Embrace Trust, Transparency and Empathy within the company
 - Keeping remote workers connected
 - No 9-5 workday structure for the WTH employees
 - Communication – Setting expectations so employees can focus on business priorities knowing that leadership respect and support their wellbeing
 - Leaders modeling expected behaviors to become part of the culture
 - Employee training
 - Manager training

Conclusion

COVID-19 has forced us to re-imagine collaboration tools, re-establish the way we work, re-structure companies by shaping new business models and re-store the long-forgotten balance between work and family. Companies must embrace different working models for their employees, and provide flexibility where needed. These actions are not a sunk cost, but an

investment that aligns workplace well-being with productivity and healthy business revenues. We continue to recognize that working environments must be able to respond to human needs, environmental needs, physical needs, and structural needs, all the while still supporting the core business needs and goals of each individual company. One size does not fit all; however, it is imperative to address diversity of our populations. These populations are, after all, a significant catalyst for propelling the economies of our commercial offices, even after COVID-19.