



CONNECT



PRESENT



A **COVID-19** Virtual Ideation Experience

**Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellbeing\_18**

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

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## “Our Way Back “

Our brains are wired to create frameworks, built from past experiences, that help us navigate situations with little thought or effort.

Now envision the grocery store: we wait in long lines, wear masks, sanitize our carts, pay behind glass walls, wipe everything down with Clorox and shower immediately afterward. Something our brains used to handle seamlessly is now disrupted and becomes a stressful task.

Our “new normal” will disrupt our mental frameworks. When we cannot rely on automated decisions, we use up cognitive resources and drain ourselves even on simple things, meaning we barely have anything left for the bigger things.

According to a poll conducted by the [Kaiser Family Foundation](#) from March 25-30, as Coronavirus continues to impact daily life in the United States, mental health impacts are intensifying. More than 4 in 10 (45%) of adults feel that worry and stress related to COVID-19 has had a negative impact on their mental health, up from 32% earlier in March. These outcomes will certainly come into play as employees are asked to return to the office, and building owners, facility managers, and employers will need to work together to rebuild trust in the workplace.

By pure definition “Workplace Wellbeing” is centered around the physical and mental wellbeing of occupants. As we offer these strategies, we keep in the forefront that “fear trumps data”. Essentially, no matter how we design and prepare the space, people will seek the mental wellbeing of trust, transparency and safety. [\(slide 1\)](#)

### Preparing to Re-enter[\(slide 2\)](#)

**Communication:** Communicating the ways the building design and operations support health will be vital to building trust and promoting occupant perceptions of safety, and should be transmitted through a variety of mediums—such as newsletters, signage, and webinars—to ensure occupant awareness.

Patience and flexibility, coupled with regular and ongoing communications, will minimize negative impacts.

- Share respective expectations of landlords and tenants, updating lease negotiations to include cleaning standards and reporting of cases.
- Discuss plans to manage queues in lobby and elevator vestibules.
  - Percentage of employees returning to the office
  - Sequencing of work schedules to distribute arrival and departure volumes
  - Updates on one-way traffic-paths, elevator cabs, or stairwells
- Post-Occupancy Evaluations. Surveying provides occupants and key stakeholders with an opportunity to voice their concerns, which can be especially useful and empowering during a time of uncertainty.

**Social Distancing and PPE:** This is a shared responsibility of the Owner/Manager, Tenants, and their employees. Many state and local municipalities have or will be implementing guidelines and mandates regarding distancing and face masks/coverings.

**Pandemic Preparedness Plan:** Successfully responding to any kind of emergency requires planning for the unexpected. Putting preparedness plans in place is a preventative step that can enhance occupant confidence. *Sample:* [Institute of Real Estate Management](#).

**Cleaning Practices:** Regular and thorough cleaning is key in preventing transmission. Cleaning protocols (that adhere to CDC guidelines) will be even more important in building employee confidence as offices reopen. [Brady safety sign](#)

**Emerging Technology:** While regular cleaning and disinfection will be sufficient for many spaces, there is emerging support for new technology that can support cleaning efforts, such as Ozone generators, UV-C ([slide 3](#)) lighting and the latest technology, far-UVC lighting. High levels of Ozone and UV-C lighting are known to be hazardous if used in an occupied space so we should be careful when considering when to use these methods. New oxidizing films that can be applied over surfaces can also be considered.

**Mechanical Systems** ([slide 4](#)) within the building can be leveraged to improve indoor air quality and reduce the potential for aerosol transmission of airborne viruses.

- ❑ **Ventilation:** Higher ventilation rates are associated with decreased disease spread. Natural and hybrid ventilation strategies have demonstrated success when it comes to saving energy while also maintaining optimal indoor air quality for occupants.
- ❑ **Filtration:** Research suggests that filtration of recirculated air may be effective in reducing transmission of airborne infectious diseases. Air filtration is one part of a complex air quality system, and before upgrading, the capacity of the existing HVAC system must be considered. While some can only handle MERV 13 filters, others might be able to successfully install HEPA filters.
- ❑ **Humidity:** More humid environments are less hospitable to virus survival and transmission. The evidence indicates that maintaining indoor humidity above 40% is associated with a significant reduction in the infectivity of an aerosolized virus.

**Landlord Re-Occupancy Checklist:** ([slides 5 & 6](#))

## **Creating our New Normal**

Aligning company goals with employee preferences will help determine both your initial re-entry plan and long-term real estate strategy. After determining who is essential on-site, also consider who wants to go back. For many companies, we'll see an increase in remote work, particularly for heads-down work. For others, employees may live in a cramped city apartment, have children or other distractions at home, or prefer to physically be around other people.

## **Quick fixes for near-term** *(slide 7)*

**Furniture and Office Set-Up:** A staggered re-entry should align scheduling to reduce density and friction points in the physical space. You can leverage existing furniture and space, supplementing with add-ons and rental options. Get creative with desk and/or partition screens (plexiglass, glass, fabric, or laminate), bookshelves, plants, lockers, filing cabinets, mobile partitions, or collapsible walls.

For benching, employees can sit every other seat or in a checkerboard layout. Add mobile peds and hooks to each workstation to stow away or hang purses or jackets.

Tweak the direction of desks to account for one-way traffic paths to limit exposure. Areas like open lounge seating, conference rooms, or gathering areas and cafes can be converted into space for workstations.

For free address seating, assigning employees “neighborhoods” provides a sense of choice while limiting exposure. All work surfaces should be designated to one person per day, though, and should not include shared items prone to harboring germs, like keyboards, computer mice, or telephones.

## **Forecasting for long-term**

**Furniture and Office Set-Up:** You will likely need to change your office layout, and your set-up should be easily changeable, moveable, and adaptable should another event impact your workplace. *(slide 8)*

Consider investing in upgraded workstations with plenty of space and storage, diversifying with high top tables and standing furniture options, which allow people to congregate without being cramped around a conference table. Materials that are easy to clean and non-porous will help with infection control -- think healthcare, but with a more residential feel.

**Acoustic Wellbeing:** Distancing and separation won't be enough to cover speech privacy requirements and focused work. Implementation of the “A,B C's” should be considered. *(slide 9)*

**Cleaning:** Hand sanitizer and cleaning expenses will increase with higher demand. We recommend using data from integrated systems (like occupancy sensors, visitor management portals, and security/access control) to pinpoint high-traffic areas that require extra attention. Touchless soap dispensers, faucets, toilets, and doors will help prevent germ spread.

**Remote employees:** To improve remote work environments, allot funds for new desks, ergonomic chairs, and monitors. Consider setting aside funds for improved teleconferencing, as well as installing video conference enclaves in the physical office. Technology will be crucial for remote workers to stay connected, so employers may need to provide stipends for home internet and phone services.

**Personnel Management:** Too much change at once can result in dramatic experiences for employees. To avoid fear of the office environment, communicate frequently about expectations and FAQs. Heightened focus on change management will ensure employees are comfortable and following new protocols. While changing remote working policies, reconsider sick leave and PTO policies as well, putting employee mental and physical health first.

**Physical Health:** Whether employees are in the office or working remotely, employers should encourage being as active and healthy as possible. Suggestions to create healthy habits in the workplace:

- Conduct standing or walking meetings
- Implement reward programs, earning points for mental & physical health activities
- Provide options for active desk options, sit-to-stands/ under-desk bike/ elliptical machines
- Reimburse equipment or memberships that promote well-being
- Take frequent walk breaks
- Make sure the office has plenty of natural light
- Provide clean water and healthy food

**Employee Experience** It will be difficult to find the balance between safety and normalcy. Consider the following to activities and surveys (*slide 10*) to engage employees and promote company culture:

- Virtual happy hours
- Group community service or fundraisers
- Step challenges
- Interactive games online
- Recognition programs
- Online message boards
- Hosting a virtual book club

## **Moving Forward**

Workplace Wellbeing begins and ends with the occupant, but in serving the occupant we must also remain purposeful to the planet. A key element to keep in mind is that there is no “away” and when we strip out all the current spaces to replace and add, we must be mindful of the impact to landfill and to waste. Additionally, buildings (LEED) and spaces that support wellbeing (FITWEL and WELL) are foundational in material health, responsible resourcing, and clean air.

By working together to address the physical building, minds and hearts of employees, and the environment, we truly believe we can all achieve Workplace Wellness post COVID-19.