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A **COVID-19** Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Team #6, Workplace Wellbeing

Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable): HNI Global

Team Lead: Chloe Simoneaux

Team Members:

Thomas Irpan – ProLivings

Darrell Smith – Micron

Katie Schiavi – OTJ Architects

Michelle Boolton – National Office

Melinda McCann – Meyer Design

Mike D O'Brien

Francesca Gentile – Savills

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

Given the catastrophic loss of life from COVID, will wellbeing no longer be a 'nice-to-have' and instead become a 'must-have'?

Today, workplace wellness is no longer a trend, but a rapidly growing industry amplified by the COVID-19 event. By embracing workplace wellness as a 'must-have,' companies view a direct return in safer and healthier work environment, employee health, decreased absenteeism, and a higher bottom line. Companies must adopt a wellness initiative that is multi-faceted, consistent, engaging, and readily available to the employee in the office as well as at home.

The global wellness industry is growing, specifically in some key sectors related to real estate:¹

- Wellness Real Estate = \$138B Industry
- Workplace Wellness = \$48B Industry (Expected to grow to \$66B by 2022)

In developing a wellbeing program, organizations need to ensure that any wellbeing guidelines align specifically with company culture and business goals. The program should also be informed by on-going employee assessments, allowing the organization to ensure they're budgeting for and prioritizing what's most important to their employees.

Budgeting for a robust wellbeing program is critical to its success, avoiding any roadblocks in the development, roll-out, or on-going success.² SHRM has developed the lengthy list of considerations below to help uncover funding for employers.

What new protocols around wellbeing, mindfulness and enhancing health and safety should be introduced into the workplace?

The Covid-19 Pandemic creates opportunities for employers to provide commonly used building enhancements throughout their facilities that will improve employee safety today. These enhancements go beyond a requirement for a "safe" workplace and show concern for employee's wellbeing at work and provide a workplace that supports a healthy environment. The element of safety will also expand as a result of the pandemic where building security will involve monitoring not just who enters and what they are physically carrying, but also what they might be carrying. The responsibility to maintain the environment is shared by the employer, service providers, and employees alike.

Critical building features Include:

- Building Cleaning
 - Coordinate enhanced cleaning and disinfection; make it visible! Double the staff and leave real-time visual cues
 - Make cleaning supplies ubiquitous/available; products should be selected carefully from approved product list (i.e., CDC/EPA recommended) (7th Generation, EPA certain choice)
- Building Function
 - Add Touchless features (Sinks, toilets, AV controls)
- Increase air ventilation and maximize filtration
 - Maximize fresh air ventilation instead of air recirculation

- Implement UV or Ionization to 'kill' bad viruses caught on filters
- Increase relative humidity targeting higher (i.e., 50-65%) relative humidity, viruses tend to survive better at low humidity
- Ensure all are running as designed; increase frequency of changing filters; UV lights to clean the filters themselves
- Employee Safety
 - Establish employee temperature checks at entrance, provide PPE, hand sanitizer, disinfecting wipes within workspace area
 - Introduce Social Distancing Throughout – compliance to pre-determined sqft usable space guide with easy to follow circulation and seating guidelines that are communicated clearly to users

Critical protocols to include:

- Update/Expand Crisis Management Plan beyond Natural Disasters, Fire, Sudden Cardiac Arrests, Technological (such as chemical spill) and human-caused (such as active shooter) to include health (such as COVID event, Fatal food allergic); plan to include: entrance/exit strategy, staggered work teams, reduced density, etc.
 - Identify the triggers that send people in/out of office
- Appoint a designated crisis management team
- Effective communication & change management plan - keep employees informed with accurate and updated information, i.e., COVID Q&A Channel. Stop the spread of misinformation in the workplace. Including:
 - Highly visible signages
 - Entrance /exit strategy /back-to-work welcome guide
 - Testing procedures/temp check
 - App to confirm current state/survey (are you or any housemates ill?)
 - Update travel policy – who travels when and how do you cater to employee comfortability?
 - Opt-out or opt-in procedure
 - Face-to-face group meeting policy
 - Employee cleaning procedures/cleaning team
- Provide timely and useful advice to employees, including but not limited to practice good hygiene, face-to-face meetings, safe food handling, stay home if sick, and/or care for family
- Implement Remote Work at Home and/or Wellness Living Corporate Housing. Create an environment that fosters online collaboration

- Increase frequency of environment cleaning, airflow refresh, availability of hand-washing station, sanitizing wiper, no-touch trash can

On-going or preventative protocols to include:

(1) Promote good hygiene and socially responsible behavior to prevent virus transmission

- Don't go to the office if you are unwell, work from home and/or wellness living corporate housing
- Ensure all high-touch surfaces are frequently cleaned
- Provide highly visible signage and educational material

(2) Boosting employee immunity system – Our first line of defense against infectious disease. Now is the ideal time to address wellbeing at both an individual and organizational level to focus on building a strong immune system, and encourage healthy lifestyles through healthy eating, physical exercise, and mindful activities:

- on-site fitness activities, adhering to social distancing
- online fitness program including but not limited to no-equipment routine, in-room exercises, mindful exercises (yoga, meditation)
- discontinue buffet-style community lunch, healthy food options, educational resources on nutrition, and immunity

(3) Upgrade and Manage Air Quality

(4) Incorporate health into built environment

- Install room by room continuous air quality monitoring (Temperature, Humidity, CO2, VOCs, and Dust), set threshold, and alarm
- Install intelligent self-learning thermostat
- Leverage technology: Use online platforms to enable working flexibly and increase adaptability
- Establish clear parameters to working remotely: Make it easy for people to connect and access information

(5) Stress Management: The disruptive changes to people's daily lives and isolation measures lead to stressful, emotional situations. Ideas to mitigate negative impact:

- Connectivity and Continuity: Reduce the impact of social isolation by keeping connected with technology and best practices training for employees and managers
- Communicate: Be transparent and keep information clear and concise to achieve business continuity. Avoid ambiguity, which can contribute to increased stress levels and poor performance
- Provide ergonomic and/or renovation guidelines for home office or alternate workplace for health and wellbeing of occupier

- Put mental health on the agenda: Provide access to mental health information, i.e., employee assistance programs
- Invest in stress reduction training for employees and managers
- Create ambassadors for health and wellbeing

(6) Bi-annual assessment of real estate and workplace strategy based on utilization data/surveys from employees

Expanding Employee Benefits shows the company's investment in the physical and mental health of their workers. In addition to the basic elements of an employee benefits package, the following should be considered/customized for the organization:

- Work from Home Considerations
 - Home Office Budget
 - Best Practices / Distributed Work Training
 - Family support programs (i.e. flexible schedules)
- Mindfulness
 - Physical spaces dedicated to mindfulness
 - Resources / group rates to meditative apps or tools
 - Additional opportunities such as: painting, gardening, music
- Access to Nature
 - Enhanced biophilic elements to support cognitive functioning of employees
 - Natural light / Outdoor access
 - Ex: "Community" garden with training and educational component

What steps should be taken in the event of a COVID-19 recurrence?

The Covid-19 Pandemic provides an opportunity to revise and update the Business Continuity Planning and adjust accordingly from a future pandemic perspective. Initial responses regarding areas of focus for improvement are captured below and benefit from a post-event review after this event.

- Work from Home Support – expansion from current model
 - Technology – Cloud/Server support, hardware, and WFH improvements and planned upgrade costs, Software support and training pre-event
 - Scheduling – adjustable work schedules to accommodate family impact
 - Communications Cadence – both formal work communications and engagement activities
- Business Continuity Plan

- Avoidance/prevention – limitations on travel, visitors to workplace and enough prevention supplies stocked in advance (Sanitizer, face masks, disinfectant wipes, Social Distancing signage)
- Emergency plans for business support – key personnel identified and planned corporate housing for work-in-place needs
- Mental health support
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What becomes of our willingness to be in common spaces? Will people and companies be reluctant to use coworking spaces and shared office settings as part of their real estate and workplace needs?

Our need for a shared space is not changing, but what's in it and how we use it is. The physical workplace is an embodiment of company culture, and we need it to gather & collaborate, but how we do that and what that looks like is evolving as this crisis unfolds. Collaborative spaces will need to be more adaptable and consider including things like visual cues for cleanliness or mobile capabilities to support increased physical distance. We predict that in addition to a workplace or co-working spaces that support collaborative efforts, many employees will balance their work-from-home capabilities with the need more for dedicated focus spaces in the workplace.

Will this be the end of benching and other solutions without partitions (e.g., protection) from others around us?

Decades of real estate optimization and efficient planning has led many organizations to open plan or benching solutions. Our current state, however, now finds us grappling with new occupancy limitations to support the recommended social distancing. Spatial recommendations vary and could dramatically impact overall headcount within your space, but we do not imagine benching will go away overnight. However, we might expect to see:

- Product applications that are heavily vetted based on user's needs — i.e., increased mix of benching balanced with more partitioned solutions
- Strategic "Kit-of-parts" that allows additional partitioning or change of orientation in existing benching
- Increased support for remote or distributed working along with home office benefits

RESOURCES / REFERENCES:

¹<https://globalwellnessinstitute.org/press-room/statistics-and-facts/>

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