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corp-up

## Responding to a quantum shift in **{work}**

How to balance immediate needs with  
a long-term view of the new normal



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About this {document}

# The implications of Covid-19 are profound. Workplaces have already been disrupted in every region and in every industry.



And with so much uncertainty still ahead of us, it is difficult to make concrete and stable plans. As we navigate this crisis and attempt to understand the long-term implications for workforces and workplaces, we are drawing on the knowledge of our diverse network of global experts.

Our mission has always been to help organisations improve the employee experience, putting people at the heart of workplace design, supported by data. This work now seems more important than ever, as businesses place even greater emphasis on the safety and wellbeing of the people they rely on.

This document outlines insights and strategies to guide organisations as they adapt in the short term, and prepare for the new future of the workplace in the years to come.

# {Foreword}

Our lives have changed in ways we never imagined. We can no longer meet, work, travel, eat or socialise as we used to. The world of work moved rapidly from business as usual to travel restrictions, office closures and work-from-home mandates. These changes will affect how we design and manage buildings in the future.

**P**hysical distancing has directly changed the way people inhabit and interact with physical space. Offices that previously buzzed with activity now lie empty or underused as workers stay away. And working from home brings its own challenges, prompting most businesses to learn and adopt new methods to help employees manage their performance and wellbeing during this unprecedented time.

**The longer this crisis persists, the more likely we are to see transformative and lasting changes in behaviour.**

Restrictions on movement will reduce demand for travel, which should lead to reductions in air pollution and a much greater emphasis on sustainability.

Agile working has become a necessity for some, as change and decision making need to happen at a greater speed than before. Remote working was already on the rise, but this shift will see it gather significant pace. Businesses seeking new accommodation are likely to require less desk space per head, with a greater proportion of offices devoted to collaboration and meeting rooms.

Investment in IT resilience will be necessary to support alternative working arrangements, while emerging solutions such as robotics may be used to help detect infections and sanitise buildings.

**As global leaders, we must take action with empathy, transparency and humility.**

We have always helped organisations shape the workplaces of the future; creating inspiring environments that attract great talent, making successful digital transformations that enhance the user experience for employees and visitors, and designing quality services that enable employees to do their best work.

We must respond to the current and urgent threat of Covid-19, be prepared for unexpected turns in the road ahead, and begin to lay the groundwork for what our lives and work will become.

**Yannick Villar | Wx CEO, Co-Founder**



# Putting {people} first

The employee experience has come front and centre. The best organisations were already providing the support people needed to do their best work before the virus broke out. But it is now more important than ever as employees have to adapt to new ways of working.

Every business should consider increasing practical support, as we expect the focus on wellbeing specifically to grow.



Physical distancing and self-isolation tactics continue to be recommended or mandated by health officials, so companies have no choice but to reassess how they manage their operations and service their customers. Many have reacted quickly, doing what is required to keep the lights on and their employees safe.

As more of the workforce discovers they can be effective working remotely, these organisations must enhance their capabilities to keep people connected, engaged and safe - physically and mentally. Every business should consider increasing practical support, as we expect the focus on wellbeing specifically to grow.

**Developing rich personas can help us better understand what employees need and how they want to work, while detailed daily journey maps help highlight critical touch points throughout the employee experience.**

We believe we will emerge from this public health crisis with renewed appreciation for a people-centred, data-driven approach to workplace design and management. An approach that drives organisational performance and values, as well as enhancing the everyday human experience.



# Today's workplace {questions}

Improving and encouraging greater employee collaboration was one of the dominant trends of the pre-pandemic workplace. New ways of working were emerging, with the aim of enhancing productivity, creativity, innovation and agility.

**N**ow, these aims must be balanced against new efforts to limit direct human contact. And that is just one of the many questions facing organisations about the post-pandemic workplace.

## Is this the death of the open-plan office?

Open-plan offices have long been the subject of debate. Proponents say they improve collaboration and many large corporations embraced them in a bid to break down barriers between teams. Opponents say the potential for increased noise and distractions does more harm than good.

The debate may finally be settled not by productivity levels, but by the need to reduce office density. Open-plan offices typically accommodate more desks in less space, but these spaces are not likely to flow into each other as much when a new approach to hygiene is the priority.

We are likely to see wider corridors and doorways, more partitions between departments and larger desks so people can adhere to physical distancing guidelines. Ultimately, we will need to redefine the role of the office to reflect the needs and requirements of the future.



**Face-to-face interactions dropped by roughly 70% after firms transitioned to open offices, while electronic interactions increased to compensate.**

Harvard Business Review

### Can skyscrapers survive?

Tall buildings carry a certain prestige. Companies are willing to pay a premium for a landmark address, while employees benefit from opportunities to meet and exchange ideas both within teams and between companies.

But skyscrapers may become less efficient. People will be less willing to cram into lifts or work in buildings which house so many people, often in close proximity. There may be new regulations that dictate a minimum area per person in each office and larger lobbies to minimise overcrowding.

Under these conditions, high-rise buildings would be less attractive to occupiers, and less economically viable for developers.

### Are we heading for a hands-free future?

Co-working, the space sharing economy, has revolutionised the real estate market. Companies benefit from social interaction as they learn from each other, share information, explore ideas, and get feedback while working in one space. However, this proximity may seem less tempting without appropriate strategies in place.

According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Covid-19 spreads easily through coughs, sneezes and by touching contaminated surfaces.

Given the risk of the latter in the workplace, business leaders may look to combine physical distancing with hands-free technology.

An Eden McCallum study shows 74% are planning or already implementing greater use of automation. Employees will rarely have to touch a surface with their hands to navigate through a building. Lifts can be called from a smartphone, avoiding the need to press any buttons, while office doors will open automatically using motion sensors and facial recognition.

### Could Covid-19 be a catalyst for decentralisation?

People's attitudes towards living and working in cities seem to be changing over fears the virus spreads more easily in busy urban centres. The pandemic may lead to decentralised business centres, with smaller units spread across wider geographies.

Local centres may be strengthened as suburbs replace large business districts in metropolitan areas. Harris Poll data revealed nearly a third of Americans are considering relocation to a less crowded area as a direct result of Covid-19.

This sentiment, combined with concerns about the risk of having an entire workforce concentrated under one roof, could see business leaders make significant changes to their corporate real estate and location strategies. This may mean implementing work-from-home arrangements, or a 'working-near-home' strategy for those who cannot work from home.



95% of business leaders across the UK, Europe and North America are already implementing or planning greater use of remote working on a permanent basis."

Eden McCallum



# User journeys and the new {employee experience}

Even before the pandemic, work was less and less about a place that people go, and more about what people do. Now, the vast majority of business leaders in the UK, Europe and North America say they have permanently implemented more remote working, or are planning to.

84% of people believe they should not be required to return to an office until Covid-19 is no longer a threat, if their work can be done remotely.

Harris Poll



For knowledge-based businesses specifically, the workplace is wherever an employee chooses to connect to their business network and access the resources they need. It might be at home, it might be on a train, or it might be on a customer's site. Many can operate just as effectively as if they were sitting at their own desk in an office. Some even more so.

From our perspective at Wx, people are what matter most during these unprecedented times. We have been busy imagining the post-pandemic workplace, and considering the actions companies can take to transform themselves from the ground up.

**We believe exploring prospective user journeys creates an opportunity to make a positive impact on the employee experience, particularly for those working remotely.**



## 1 Preparing / Working from home

*"What's my agenda today?"*

*"Where is the most appropriate place to do my work?"*

We can expect employees to have some new choices as the most productive way to complete their work varies from day to day. Their decisions will be driven by data regarding workspace availability and external factors such as weather conditions, traffic and safe transportation. They will require social and technical support from their employers to remain connected with their work community.

## 2 Curating the third spaces

*"If I cannot work from home, where?"*

*"What amenities are available locally?"*

Not everyone has the space or conditions to work from home. Local options may be considered before committing to a commute to the office. These options will be curated by companies to meet guidelines on safety, sustainability, security and privacy.

## 3 Commuting to work

*"How do I get to work?"*

*"How can I reduce risk during my commute?"*

Concerns over the potential spread of viruses on public transport may lead to radical changes.

Many who do not own cars may now intend to buy them, increasing demand for parking. We are also likely to see more bicycles, scooters and other alternatives to public transport.

## 4 Working in the office

*"What should I expect when I do come to the office?"*

*"How will I remember new procedures and ensure I behave appropriately?"*

Visual cues will help employees keep the appropriate distance.

Signage installed throughout the workplace can communicate new protocols and safety procedures, while arrows on the floor can be used to direct one-way flow in narrow corridors. Employees will require technology that supports their safety as well as streamlining their tasks throughout the day.

## 5 Welcoming visitors

*"How can I host visitors and make them feel safe in the office?"*

*"How can I interact with visitors without risking the safety of my colleagues?"*

Visitor management systems and signage installed in reception areas will keep visitors fully informed about health screening checkpoints, isolation areas and physical distancing requirements. They can also convey sanitisation and disinfection guidelines.

## 6 Having meetings

*"Is my face-to-face meeting necessary or can I do it virtually?"*

*"Is the meeting room I booked the right size?"*

Organisations need to limit on-site meetings. Numbers of attendees will be restricted to maintain physical distancing, while employees will be encouraged to use video conferencing and other virtual meeting technologies.

## 7 Eating and drinking

*"What are the food options available for me today?"*

*"If the canteen is overcrowded, where else can I eat?"*

Employees should have healthy food and beverage options that help improve the immune system. Companies will need to accommodate changes in employee behaviour, and adjust offerings to reflect new dining requirements as occupancy levels change.

## 8 Recharging

*"How can I stay healthy while working from home or working in the office?"*

*"With all these changes and new procedures, how can I stay relaxed and focused?"*

Organisations need to help their employees stay healthy. This can mean refreshing their mind and body with exercise and meditation wherever they work, or offering appropriate wellbeing programmes to create opportunities for relaxation and stress management.



# A {holistic approach} to your future workplace

The post-pandemic world of work requires a robust, evidence-based reinvention of the workplace experience.



That means comprehensive literature reviews, expert interviews, high-level workshop discussions and a full analysis of trends and disruptions.

**Our aim here is not to predict a specific future, rather to challenge present thinking in a constructive, creative way.**

The reinvented workplace must be designed with a deeper commitment to the wellbeing of people, recognising that their environmental, psychological, physical and social states are inherently linked to their safety.

This commitment requires a phased approach, with organisations considering their plans for medium and long-term changes, even as they adapt in the short term.

## Short-term measures

### Support for employees working from home during Covid-19



Much of the research into home working points to positive benefits, including improved work-life balance, greater job satisfaction and increased productivity.

However, such evidence typically comes from studies of individuals who have chosen to work from home. They will often have collaborated with their employer to ensure this arrangement is effective for both parties.

But many people have now been forced to work from home, with little time to consider any adjustments that might be necessary to overcome the various pitfalls and challenges.

**64% of people working from home during the UK lockdown have lost sleep due to worry. 50% are not happy with their work-life balance.**

Institute for Employment Studies

**Wx has developed a home working strategy and survey for employees. These tools help organisations provide appropriate support and ensure comprehensive insight into how the workforce has been affected.**

### Using data to implement physical distancing in the workplace

Over the past few years, we have been researching behaviour within workplaces - how people use spaces and what makes them more productive.

We use this data to empower organisations to better utilise their buildings, increase collaboration, and improve wellbeing. Anonymised sensor technology can provide unprecedented insight into how many employees are using a space, where people meet each other, and whether they keep a physical distance.

Analysis of this data can help build a complete picture of how effective a workplace is, and its ability to mitigate and slow the spread of Covid-19 through physical distancing.

**The Wx space analytics and predictive modelling tools help organisations monitor physical distancing in the workplace. Organisations can turn uncertainty into an opportunity to build workplaces that are responsive, flexible, resilient, and - most importantly - people-centred.**



## Mid-term measures

### Repurposing the workplace

Organisations across the world are planning to implement new ways of working that balance business continuity with employee safety.

There is no one-size-fits-all approach, so it is important to have bespoke tools and methodologies underpinning a data-driven, people-centred approach. Sources of data will include insight from the users of different spaces, real-time sensor readings and simulations of long-term effects of certain design choices.

These details will shape design briefs and lead to an evolution in workplace design. Space

planning, access to amenities, indoor air quality and lighting levels will all be considered, along with psychological aspects including adjacency, proximity, movement, and productivity.

**Wx helps organisations reconsider the requirements for their future workplace. Artificial intelligence is integrated into the design process as ambitious targets are met by optimising the safe use of space whilst reducing the overall cost of occupancy.**

### A deeper understanding of the post-pandemic employee journey

As the response to Covid-19 moves from short-term reaction to a long-term shift in how and where people work, organisations that support new ways of working can thrive.

The employee experience discussion has progressed from attracting and retaining talent to enabling and supporting a fully remote workforce with critical capabilities and technologies.

Organisations can adapt to this new reality more effectively by developing personas to understand how different employees want to work, as well as journey maps that highlight critical business touch points throughout the employee experience.

**Wx conducts comprehensive and systematic diagnostic assessments to help organisations better understand their people, wherever they work. Employee journey mapping helps organisations identify tactics to keep their people connected, engaged and productive.**

## Long-term measures

### Designing a workplace that boosts sustainability and wellbeing

Safety and wellbeing are intrinsically linked. As workplaces reopen, the health and wellbeing of employees must be the priority.

But there are trade-offs between safety and sustainability due to the increasing use of personal transportation, disposable personal protective



equipment, chemical disinfectants and single-use plastic packaging.

These aspects are already reflected in a range of industry benchmarking and certification tools. Standards such as LEED and BREEAM focus on energy and environmental performance, while new tools including the WELL Building Standard, RESET and Fitwel set targets for human health and wellbeing.

Such systems and certifications are designed to become more specific over time, adapting to changing sustainable behaviour and public health concerns.

**The Wx team of experienced, accredited professionals provide a consultancy service for organisations to achieve various benchmarks and certifications, including WELL, RESET, Fitwel, LEED and BREEAM. We help create a sustainable and resilient workplace by embedding the principles behind the standards in both culture and processes.**

### Accommodating a truly liquid workplace strategy

The liquid workforce is rapidly becoming the new normal for many businesses. A blend of employed and self-employed workers that creates a diverse, robust team.

Workplace trends also point towards greater flexibility, autonomy, mobility and digitalisation. Organisations are not yet taking full advantage of digital workspace, but as transformation progresses they will need to define an optimum mix between home working and physical presence.

Activity-based working (ABW) is becoming the preferred alternative to open-plan working, as employees are given freedom to choose where in the office they complete particular tasks. The design of spaces includes formal and informal areas, taking into account the continued need for collaboration, flexibility and creativity.

**Wx helps organisations accommodate a liquid workplace strategy based on ABW principles. We collaborate with various business functions, including HR, Finance and IT, to create unique cultures and environments where people have the space to thrive.**

74% of business leaders  
are accelerating digital  
transformation projects.

Eden McCallum



# The {Wx} approach

The longer this crisis persists, the more likely we are to see transformative and lasting changes in behaviour.

Yannick Villar, CEO  
and Co-Founder of Wx

Wx is a consulting studio. A fully-owned subsidiary of Sodexo that helps companies optimise their workplace experience through ethnography, IoT and data science.

**B**orn from a vision of people-powered environments, the Wx methodology leverages empirical insights from data analysis to quantify and improve the employee experience. This insight is now more important than ever, as the wants and needs of employees have shifted dramatically.

**Wx [Studio]**, the first pillar of Wx, ensures that the human is at the heart of analyses. This is essential to creating a functional and sustainable working environment.

The second pillar, **Wx [Solutions]**, utilises various technologies for workplace analytics. From wireless sensors that measure occupancy to a machine learning algorithm and a space analytics platform, these tools ultimately lead to better decision making and an enhanced employee experience.

Wx also collaborates with expert start-ups to build an effective IoT ecosystem. These partnerships lead to the development of brand new solutions through crowdsourcing and open innovation.

## Workplace design begins with the employee

The first step of our consultancy work is to create a user journey. This maps out the day and the week using ethnographic research, which scientifically describes the culture of the people in a particular work environment.

It involves engagement with people for an extended period of time: watching, listening, asking questions and collecting data. Through this exercise, we define employee personas.



**Personas are fictional user archetypes - composite models we create from the data we have gathered by talking to real people.**

They account for demographics, skills, goals, environments, relationships and more. Such findings help our team understand the pain points of the workplace as well as the needs and behaviours of its people. They allow us to make useful recommendations for an organisation's future design and management.

#### **Intelligent workplace design is based on data**

Workplace design should be empirical. Measurement, observation and use of an integrated data dashboard can help identify solutions and inform decisions.

This data gives us insight into the existing employee experience and the knowledge to create the best workplace possible. **Wx [Solutions]** measures the usage and capacity of each type of space, which allows a workplace strategist to optimise supply according to demand.

But space optimisation is about much more than choosing the right number of desks for your organisation. We need to answer a simple question: **"Is the space enabling the business to perform at its best?"**

Through **Wx [Studio]** and a range of consultancy methods - from ethnography studies to algorithm-based optimisation processes - we can fully define the optimal built environment for a business.

#### **Better insights, better decisions, better outcomes**

Analytics is all about collaborative, data-driven decision-making.

Our engine models the interaction of people, places, and processes within a visual platform. This enables evaluation of options that can enhance the quality of the environment, economic performance of the assets, and human productivity and wellbeing.

**We turn this data into insights, and insights into solutions.** Building information modelling (BIM), digital twins and IoT can all be deployed to create smarter, more effective environments.

We help organisations develop their own digital capabilities and an intuitive, visual interface caters for both technical and non-technical stakeholders.

#### **Building employee resilience through wellbeing**

Support for employee health and wellbeing is not only likely to attract and retain talent, it will also lead to improved productivity and greater profit.

We take a holistic approach to building performance, considering issues such as energy, carbon, health and asset value. Our bespoke tools then assess the impact of all of this work on wellbeing.

Wellbeing is a comprehensive term that encapsulates a range of needs from the physiological to the psychological. For Wx, the key has always been to understand the effects of the workplace experience, and improve it to benefit as many people as possible.

# Our ongoing {commitment}

By recognising the challenges of Covid-19, we can be better equipped to make meaningful contributions in the future.

**W**e have started our journey towards the 'new normal' by asking thought-provoking questions of ourselves, focusing on the key challenges and uncertainties.

This has helped us anticipate potential measures to undertake in the short, mid and long term, and adapt our own plans and ways of working to ensure we can support organisations making the transition through these phases.

**But this is just the beginning. Helping companies through challenges and uncertainty is key to our commitment to shaping a better world of work by humanising the workplace strategy.**

We will communicate with global leaders, our partners and our customers as we continue to consider the future of the workplace. And we will share our insights to help you create and execute a plan that reflects your needs.

In the meantime, please get in touch if you would like to learn more about assessing the impact on your workplace. Whether you need to develop a holistic workplace strategy or discuss any other challenges you are facing during this unprecedented time, we are here to help you adapt.

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### **About Sodexo**

Founded in Marseille in 1966 by Pierre Bellon, Sodexo is the global leader in services that improve Quality of Life, an essential factor in individual and organisational performance.

Operating in 67 countries, Sodexo serves 100 million consumers each day through its unique combination of On-site Services, Benefits & Rewards Services and Personal & Home Services.

Sodexo provides clients an integrated offering developed over more than 50 years of experience: from food services, reception, maintenance and cleaning, to facilities and equipment management; from services and programmes fostering employees' engagement to solutions that simplify and optimise their mobility and expenses management, to in-home assistance, child care centres and concierge services.

Sodexo's success and performance are founded on its independence, its sustainable business model and its ability to continuously develop and engage its 470,000 employees throughout the world. Sodexo is included in the CAC 40, FTSE 4 Good and DJSI indices.

