Team Topic and Number: The Autonomous Workplace
Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable): UK Chapter
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Team Members:

For many in the global workforce the environment and impact on daily life is an unnatural and involuntary event. As humans we follow well defined routines at work. For many this means we have developed well defined long-standing organisational patterns, rules and etiquette that has been tipped upside down by COVID-19, and threaten to destabilise business as usual principles for work.

A trifecta of events has arrived together to create the need for organisations' to pivot towards an autonomous workplace, where choice balances with productivity and experience that is initiated more by the worker than ever before.

> (1) The role of technology will need a rethink of underlying enterprise architectures to address previously accepted principles of access control and security. Business continuity for example, has suddenly been turned on its head and the CIO office has now a need to urgently revisit previously held platform principles.
> (2) How the human being deals with their new workplace is rewriting the business rules and processes to facilitate a rethinking of how people can work together. The role of the self-organising team for example and the support needed to facilitate such working will increase the opportunity to use collaborative tools i.e. Mural, Trello, Zoom, Teams, Webinar Jam and more.
> (3) The environment (Journey to Work) is now a new factor for planners' and leaders' as they not only look at back to work strategies, but also plan for business as usual. Examples exist already of previously tenuously related industries' like transport and hospitality now looking at ways to create network effects to support each other's' recovery.

The dissipation of a 'normal' workplace is opening up opportunities and threats. Opportunities because history tells us that when in crisis humans are at their most creative at problem solving; and threats, because we know the human being craves human contact, and self-imposed isolation at work is often hard.

The workplace is becoming reconstituted.

The individual worker suddenly has responsibility for levels of decision making that previously was dealt with by their business and environment. Positive and negative outcomes are being identified as workers' cope with having to source their own physical space, facilities, technology, and deal with domestic events.

The organisation especially in tightly meshed metropolitan areas, has now to deal with external forces i.e. public transport constraints, hospitality availability and general health restrictions, which will rewrite a number of strategies.

Therefore, the shift to an autonomous way of working is critical for those organisations, and for many a new 'hybrid' workplace will emerge. There will be situation where the majority of workers will be distant from the 'HQ' and leadership functions, and where communication and business process will be expected to be maintained un-disrupted by where the workers are physically located. Already we see organisations' planning to reduce travel exposure by building communities where localised staff can meet up safely. This will impact the use of space and the downstream impact to all manner of supply chain and financial metrics.

This is an unprecedent business challenge where few have been before and solved.

So based on the trifecta of factors, an **Action for Change** message should include these activities;

(1) Cognitive development
- Review of how learning and development platforms and content is adapted to support hybrid/remote staff
- Review of the use of virtual tools and acknowledgement of skills deficit and neurological considerations and emotional impact
- Development of Keep in Touch channels to support hybrid/ remote staff to ensure inclusivity and to promote positive culture of team membership

(2) Reimaging of enterprise architecture
- Review of access methodology to core systems and to understand the lowest common denominator pots within the network that still provide a level of functional service to the worker. Agility to the cloud will ramp up.
- Review of security and identity management and inherent intrusion detection and analysis and the impact on the 'edge' of buildings and cities. Cyber security will become an even more important factor.
- Review of business continuity plans to address where new points of failure exist that were previously discounted i.e. loss of internet for individual employees, damage to equipment at home, loss and theft of data outside corporate firewalls and so on.

(3) Process Re-engineering

- Review of worker scheduling into not only the physical workplace but also the understanding of the wider team's 'day ahead' to ensure appropriate use of meetings, expectations of process completion. For example, people may be offered a flexible shift working arrangement to support local care scenarios that may not fit into how the business day is planned for others in their team. A way to systematically knit all the systems – HR, timesheets, footfall, cleaning schedules, real time 'presence' data and much more – will provide the input to allowing managers' and workers' to plan.

- Review of physical meeting rooms and equipment to ensure hybrid workforces can collaborate. For example, if 80% of the workforce are at home on video tools and home working conditions, the 20% office based workers must have comparable systems to make autonomous working feasible i.e. video screens, audio equipment, noise cancellation facilities and AI based assistants to help configure hybrid workplace meetings which will increasingly be the norm.
- **Maintenance and facility services will need to go through a reshaping** exercise to ensure that incident management shifts into a proactive loop and create 'datapoints' to inform the worker of safe working areas, incidents underway and a level of confidence of their workplace. The supply chain of service providers into buildings will need to look at new ways to handle the workspace, combine humans and machines (Cobotics)

As a result of these shifts in workspace thinking there will be some interesting areas of development that would be interesting to seek deeper analysis and discussion in the CoreNet community.

Below are Big Ideas thoughts for debate;

1. The Role of AI to augment the worker once and for all

Possible development areas could be;
Creating augmented tools to assist the worker with safe working areas and guidance on condition assessment and notification of 'abnormal' situations, and to use the machine to learn from feedback to develop rules to help the worker understand their workspace better. Such a platform of tools could be any level of UX but importantly is a real 'buddy' for the human to help envisage their day ahead.

2. The Role of Big Data to understand the local environment

Possible development areas could be;
Metropolitan data sharing i.e. post code regions in cities, where collaborative open data sharing of people and traffic flow, transportation issues, weather conditions can be made available to help guide workers and the public through a safe day from home, transit, office and vice versa. Such a platform could traffic light how support services and facility managers' respond with teams' to clean workspaces for example.

3. Build a learning platform for the physical workspace

Possible development areas could be;
Creation of common backbone pipes for extraction of data from instrumentation and sensors to build a digital community to allow all interested parties – building owners, Facility managers, HR, security and so on to build 'UX' to give the worker a 'traffic light' view of their day at work. Likely development of indoor communication platforms to build the networking mesh will accelerate alignment with the telecommunications providers already doing a lot of work in smart building infrastructure. All of this will accelerate the need to understand previously unforeseen events and a collaborative aggregation to inform decision makers.

Clearly this is blue sky thinking and a tip of the iceberg view in need of wider contribution.

The number of moving parts and multifaceted angles on the problem statement for autonomous workplaces, and what is legal and ultimately feasible, is another level of analysis that this brief synopsis does not pretend to resolve. However, as a guide to support wider discussion and create energy in an agile design thinking led collaboration, it is hoped that such ideas can be bought forward for consideration.

In summary, a lot of behavioural psychology is an undercurrent to what is happening. There will be a real emphasis on making sure ideation has an agile loopback approach to avoid too much 'fail fast', because in this COVID-19 situation the stability of the workforce is going to enter a period of uncertainty and there is a human need for assurance and continuity.

As B J Fogg, founder of the Stanford Behaviour Design Lab highlights that to change someone's behaviour three things need to happen simultaneously – they need to have sufficient motivation to change, they need to have the ability to change and have a clear prompt to change. Much will be learned from the contact track and trace application as an example, and this will help inform the concept of a 'workplace buddy' to create a bi-directional touchpoint to make the autonomous workplace a great experience for the future worker.