



PRESENT



A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Autonomous Workplace, Team #3

Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable): HOK

Team Lead: Peter Sloan, AIA, IIDA - HOK

Team Members: Luis Rodriguez – CBRE; Tish Kruse – IA Interior Architects; Rhannon Chow – M Moser; John Florek – OnStream LLC, Brad Liebman – HOK; Julie Schoenagel – Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina; Michelle Thurston – American Society of Hematology

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

The Covid19 pandemic is an unprecedented situation in our lifetime and something few could foresee. With no existing playbook to guide us through these circumstances, designers and CRE professionals have been forced to evaluate what it means for the future of the workplace. Will employees ever feel comfortable going back to the office? Will they trust their employers (and themselves) to follow the “new rules” and ways of interacting? And what role will technology play in how and where work occurs in the future?

The critical role and influence of technology in the workplace is broken down into three categories:

1. The Role of Data and the IOT in the Autonomous Workplace
2. Operational Autonomy within the Workplace
3. Design and Tools for the Autonomous Workplace

The Role of Data and the IOT in the Autonomous Workplace

While this challenging crisis has thrown us a significant curveball, there is a silver lining with the creation of opportunities that were either out of our sights or years away, many of which are real estate and workplace related. Our approach to real estate and workplace will be forever changed, with decisions around returning to the workplace requiring the use of real, objective and hard data. So, what are the key considerations for organizations to make the right decisions?

First, we need to think strategically and ask ourselves which data metrics are a short-term reaction and which are here to stay in the long term. A data expert will argue that all data matters, and while true, we also need to differentiate the metrics that are just a health & safety (short-term) reaction from those that will shape the long-term future of the workplace.

Personal Data	Short Term / Long Term
WFH / WFO	Long Term
Commuting to Work	Long Term
How we use the Workplace	Long Term
Time spent at the Office	Long Term
Personal Health Data	Short Term
Personal Productivity Data	Long Term

Workplace Data	Short Term / Long Term
Occupancy Planning	Long Term
BAS	Long Term
HVAC Data	Long Term
Cleaning Data	Long Term
Supply Chain Data	Long Term
Network Data (Sec/Cloud/High Speed)	Long Term
Energy Management	Long Term

We know that data metrics are here to stay, with the only short-term metric that could be up for discussion being personal health metrics. In Asian cultures where personal data privacy is less of a concern, measuring and sharing personal health data will be less challenging. We will have to wait to see how western cultures react to this crisis and if it alters the way we approach privacy.

Operational Autonomy within the Workplace

Using data will be integral to ensuring a safe and healthy work environment in the future. But how do we use that data to implement the appropriate measures, and what will it mean for how people use the workplace moving forward?

By definition, autonomy speaks to individual control and self-governing. At its core it may seem the concept of autonomy directly competes with the idea of collaboration. But research tells us that collaboration has a direct correlation to increased productivity. As we think about the autonomous workplace in a post-Covid world, what should change about how and where employees work both independently and collaboratively? How can employees stay productive with the assurance of safety and comfort in the workplace?

Despite doubts from leadership prior to the Covid pandemic, many organizations have proven that they can “survive” and even be effective with employees working remotely. Before this started, working from home provided an opportunity to eliminate distractions and focus on heads-down work. Today, working from home has become business as abnormal, with a need to stay connected and work collaboratively while juggling personal lives. The whole concept of working from home has been flipped on its head, resulting in the workplace of old to be redefined. For example, maybe the core focus of the physical office becomes collaboration. Employees spend a certain amount of time at the office when collaborative activities are required, with the remainder at another chosen location (home, coffee shop, etc.).

This current crisis has resulted in us experiencing the downside of web-conference fatigue and in-turn recognizing our inherent need to be around others. Thus, employers will need to provide increased choice and flexibility for employees to find a new order of work/life balance. That said, with many people anxious to get “back to normal” in the office, organizations need to establish new short-term operational measures to provide a level of comfort while enhancing effectiveness. A few considerations:

- Before employees return, establish and enhance protocols and communication for all operational requirements, at both an organizational and individual level
- Increase cleaning and availability of sanitation and handwashing throughout the office.
- Ensure ample supply and proper deployment of PPE
- Consider unassigned seating to provide choice and allow employees to establish their boundaries

Leveraging technology and automated systems will also be vital to operational success and establishing employee trust. Some ideas include:

- Voice activation and hands-free controls for restroom and kitchen fixtures
- Eliminate touchpoints by incorporating door-opening sensors or foot-pulls
- VOIP communication and app technology instead of handheld phones
- Card reader access in place of touch pads

Design and Tools for the Autonomous Workplace

With health and safety inherently based in the design of a workspace, a challenge of the post-Covid environment is balancing social distancing policies while fostering an environment that supports human connection. Design considerations have been split out into four main themes:

FOCUS ON OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

- Prepare the workforce for the transition back to the office
 - Re-engagement of the employee (survey employees, set expectations, review new policies and technology enhancements)
- Formalize and communicate the company policy for remote work
- Streamline and customize workflows
- Integrate equipment and technology that support safety
- Highlight **digital** tools that support new policies
 - Office app – “The Receptionist”
 - Video communications – Zoom, Skype, etc.
 - Organizational tools
- Highlight **physical** tools already in place to support new policies and enhancements to these tools
 - Phones; VOIP to replace handheld
 - Laptops with appropriate digital tools
 - Noise cancellation headsets

ENABLE EMPLOYEE PRODUCTIVITY

Collaboration is a key driver of productivity, and technology has made it easier to connect and work together.

- Adopt collaboration technology. Use technology that improves collaboration amongst teams in day-to-day operations.
 - Accessible across different devices
 - Consistent, constant, transparent, fluid flow of information between employees
 - Fun to use!
- Eliminate the need for manual file sharing
 - Secure access to company files
 - Resource monitoring
 - Cloud based technology for collaboration
 - Cyber security, data security
- Highlight **digital** tools that support productivity
 - Focusing tools – HocusFocus, Freedom, Mindful Browsing
 - Ideation – MiroBoard, Microsoft Whiteboard
 - Project management apps
 - Quick Communication Tools– Group chat, Skype, Microsoft Teams, internal message board
 - Minimize email; urgent questions answered immediately
 - File sharing tools – SharePoint, Dropbox, Box

ENSURE TEAM ENGAGEMENT

Strengthen team engagement by seamlessly stitching personnel working from home and in the office:

- Implement new seating arrangements
- Provide a sense of community while being sensitive to social distancing
- Create balance between human connection and integration of technology
- Highlight **digital** tools that support team engagement
 - Overlap in productivity tools for video and quick communication tools – Zoom, Google Meet, Skype, Groupchats
 - Web-based Social check-ins
 - Communication – Teams, Slack
 - Employee engagement tools – pulse surveys, anonymous feedback channels, peer-to-peer recognition

PROMOTE HEALTH & WELLNESS

Keep employees engaged while protecting their wellbeing

- Reinforcement of social distancing
- Installation of protective barriers
- Design awareness to multi-sensory sensitivity
- Temperature checks; thermal scanners (short term)
- Access to PPE (short term)
- Stepped up cleaning
- Hand sanitizer stands
- Limits on the elevators
- Keyless/touchless access to rooms/elevators
- Kinetic furniture (easily movable) seamless furniture with no spaces
- Air-circulation and filtering
- Smooth surfaces that are easier to clean
- Building materials that discourage the spread of germs
- Hands-free bathroom fixtures
- Highlight **digital** tools that support health and wellness in the autonomous workplace
 - App
- Highlight **physical** tools that support health and wellness in the autonomous workplace
 - ergonomic furniture and equipment; i.e., keyboards, extra screens, laptop stand
 - Smart light
 - Safety compliance
 - Fitness watch, Fitbit

In Conclusion

While Covid19 has forced us to take a temporary pause from the norm and reevaluate how we might work and collaborate in the future, the result will not be a technological takeover. Existing and new technologies will support the enhancement of health and safety measures in the office, and compliment a newfound focus on increased communication, policy development and enforcement, and most importantly help reestablish trust both within and outside of the workplace.

In the Autonomous Workplace, whether it be employee, leader, contributor or collaborator, to be productive in their chosen work environment, it will be critical that technology allows each person to intuitively choreograph what works best for them.