



# HACKATHON



CONNECT



PRESENT



A **COVID-19** Virtual Ideation Experience

**Team Topic and Number:** Distributed Work

**Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable):** CoreNet Midwest Chapter

**Team Lead:** Jennifer Sommers

**Team Members:**

Jennifer Somers - Haworth

Melissa Jancourt- TAC Design

Dan Williamson - HDR

Dan Herman – Fluid Interiors

Danielle Hermann – OPN Architects

Phil Kluesner – Avison Young

Tim Venne – All State Insurance

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

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**Distributed Work:**

We are conducting a worldwide experiment in remote working with all organizations facing the need to simultaneously address the concerns of various workers while ensuring productivity. What shape will the office take in the future and how can this support the wellbeing of the individual and the corporation? Will this new experiment transform workplace strategy? Will

companies embrace work from home as a viable option and will it result in companies using less traditional real estate?

The following principles are meant to be a guide in shaping a course of action that balances the long and short-term interests of all stakeholder's real estate needs:

- **Engagement begins with empathy:** This is a defining moment for leaders who must inspire a remote workforce to live the values and culture of the organization in a time of uncertainty. Optimizing human potential begins with a focus on their wellbeing.
- **Embrace continuous change, empower experimentation, and learn from failure:** Make decisions based upon a continually changing environment that will require agility and innovation by all stakeholders.
- **People are at the core of problem solving, innovation and performance:** Focus on alignment of financial responsibility, the wellbeing workers and their impact on organizational performance.

#### **What do you think this experiment in widespread remote working will reveal?**

This experiment will accelerate current real estate trends around choice, control, space utilization and innovation while making resiliency a core part of our planning criteria. Companies must consider what the work experience will look like when the pandemic is over from a 'day 1' and a long-term perspective. Right now, we are exploring the opportunities and limitations of technology. The unmet needs are already becoming evident as companies and individuals explore various social interaction ideas in order to build culture around video engagement. As the pace of innovation quickens along with trends formed around a 'work anywhere theory', we will become more aware of the diverse and changing needs of the workforce. We are currently witnessing this through the many ways work can be accomplished and has empowered people to have choices on when and where to work based on what works best for them. It will take time to understand the role space plays in organizational health making evolution more viable than revolution. This said technology will not take the place of building workplace cultures. Face to face communication will always be needed and wanted.

#### **Will this experiment transform workplace strategy?**

Yes – keeping in mind we are in the first inning of a nine-inning game, workplace strategy will be transformed but, not in the same way. Organizations are experiencing this time differently while at the same time dealing with the disruption from technology and automation. It is more important than ever that workplace strategy come from a deep understanding of culture and business drivers to ensure the new environment supports activities that need to take place in the physical space. More clarity around the behaviors we want to promote in

the office will increase. Informal social contracts will become more prevalent allowing the users themselves to dictate how and when to use space. This transformation is a “forever” change with workers asking the question – Why do I need to come into the office and how will being there benefit me and my work?

**Will companies that have never embraced remote work now see it as a viable option?**

Companies who are mistrustful of their workers and questioning the productivity of their remote workers will continue to resist distributed work as a practice, but this will be the exception. For the most part companies will determine what business units/departments can successfully work remotely giving-back unused real estate. Leadership styles will become more transparent and future leaders will require additional training to seamlessly lead regardless of location. We may see work-from-home “packages” offered by companies to existing and new employees allowing them to differentiate themselves from their competitors and continue to attract top talent. More companies are learning that they can adapt to remote workers with an increase in satellite offices and more people in flexible space - moving away from traditional long-term leases. The ongoing success of this strategy will hinge on the property owner’s ability to reinforce a sense of safety and cleanliness. We may see self-catering coffee bars or other shared amenities replaced with integrated technologies to support touch free experiences or even an on-site host.

**Do you think employees will be eager to return to the office to engage with colleagues?**

Generational differences, life circumstances, underlying health concerns, work production, geographical location, etc. will influence a person’s willingness to come back to the office. People will look for more autonomy and your career path will influence re-entry choices. Younger generations appear to be pushing harder to get back into the office assuming safety measures are in place. Those with grade school children and two full-time workers at home are struggling to juggle time. Appreciating the intersection of the individual and company needs will be challenging for leaders who once again will take a front seat to worker re-entry. Those who understand and support the direct link between worker well-being and productivity and innovation will experience a quicker recovery. Significant attention will be paid to mental health as we anticipate many in the workforce will struggle with anxiety, stress, and PTSD. Surveying of workers will increase to wellbeing and the rate of adaptation during re-entry. All systems and protocols will be reviewed prior to allowing individuals to enter their buildings. From increased air-filtering requirements (demanded by tenants) to new entry and access points in common areas. Elevator protocols will be in place. Owners will work to demonstrate a superior pandemic free approach from that of their competition. LEED certification may change to “Pandemic Certified Buildings.” Less doors, daytime cleaning, and amenity usage guidelines will be part of the norm.

### **Do you think employees will view the physical workplace as necessary?**

Yes – we see the physical space as necessary. People need people and want face to face interaction and collaboration in order to foster a sense of connection and belonging. Environments that focus on choice, control, and promote the expansion of social networks will have the advantage. How leaders balance and shape this could dictate how well companies come out of this experiment. Once people begin making their way back to their offices, flexible space options will be valuable. The physical workplace will serve a different role and will need to be able to continually, and quickly, adapt and evolve for changing conditions in the future.

### **Do you think the employer will see value in one model over the other? (Remote vs. Office)**

Until a vaccine is available workers will be empowered to decide for themselves whether to work remotely or in the office. One size will not fit all. The blend of remote working and office space will develop through time starting with 'Day 1' of this experiment. As restrictions lift, some of those choices may include satellite offices and co-working options available to all workers. The expanded use of distributed work has reminded many that an employer's access to talent or an employee's access to opportunity need not be limited to geography. A heightened awareness of the positive impacts of increased distributed work on the environment may result in distributed work becoming a core component in reinforcing organizational values. Over time, each organization will evaluate their learnings to align the work experience with the business strategy and culture. For some, limited physical interaction may result in a compromise to innovation capacity in the long term. This will improve somewhat as collaborative technologies advance to make interactions feel increasingly natural. Ultimately, a place to gather to build stronger personal connections, expand social networks, to personalize are all important parts to creating cultures of learning and innovation.

### **Will corporations use less traditional real estate? How will the real estate they do have be used?**

These questions become a balancing act between the need to have everyone back with distancing measures in place driving for more space on "Day 1" to that of more remote workers driving for less space long term. Large companies are indeed looking at their portfolio and deciding how to operate and, in most cases, seeing less space within their portfolio. Remaining unused space may consist of a mix of larger open spaces for meeting or individual spaces with flexibility and reconfigurability. Again, the announcement of a vaccine may change this course. Technology has been accelerated, increasing productivity for remote workers. This technology advancement will continue to increase efficiency allowing remote workers to learn better ways to communicate. VR and AR will advance rapidly in terms of capability, cost and more user-

friendly equipment offering a multiplayer experience where workers experiencing a more natural, inclusive virtual engagement.