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A **COVID-19** Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Distributed Work

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

The world is living the biggest remote work experiment. We are also pondering how the workplace will evolve as we continue living a distributed work model. According to SHRM, Society of HR Managers, 67 % of employers were considering a work at home policy (March 2020). Many occupancy studies revealed most organizations use only 40 % of their spaces. Since the government issued shelter in place order, many employees and leaders adopted different ways of working. They amplified use of technology, specifically teleconferencing. Many expanded necessary internet bandwidths for successful teleconferencing. We are now more comfortable and more familiar with these tools. Video conference is proving to be effective. It will impact air travel industry and the need to be physically present which CFOs support as it will reduce companies spend. Leaders have adjusted to show compassion while employees manage family and home distractions as well as compete for internet/broadband access. On the other hand, this experiment has humanized work and allowed us to know our colleagues through different lenses, such as family members and pets and décor.

Most concur that distributed work will become a prevalent way of working. Whether working from home or working in a hybrid of office where social distancing is promoted, employees will have choices on how and where to work to achieve results. Many working families may need to extend working from home and supervise children's elearning if schools remain close. Regardless, organizations will increasingly rely on technology to ensure future resilience. We anticipate budgets will shift from real estate to technology such as voice activated, apps or sensors technology, while the need for square footage for office space will dramatically decrease.

As we contemplate return to the workplace, there is a consensus that most organizations will follow health officials' guidance. Most are planning gradual reentry as well as staggered work schedules to ensure social distancing.

In 2018, IWG, International workplace group found that 70 percent of professionals work remotely at least one day a week, while 53 percent work remotely for at least half of the week. On April 13, 2020 Gartner published a survey which involved 317 CFOs. According to Gartner, about 25 percent of those surveyed expect 10 percent of their employees will remain remote, 17 percent expect 20 percent will remain remote, 4 percent expect 50 percent will remain remote, and 2 percent expect over 50 percent of employees now working from home to permanently work from home even after the pandemic subsides.

A Joint survey from CNBC and the Change research for the swing states as well as Colliers International shows that 42% of respondents are working from home. Also 60 to 78% of the respondent's report being either as productive or even more productive than they were at the office. Corporate Real Estate Professionals will face the challenge to create the right conditions for a return to the workplace. This will become the new normal as 24% confirm they would like to entirely or more frequently work from home while. 55% of the respondents plan to head back to the office when the officials allow businesses to reopen. This will impact occupancy, space design, and all related fields who build and operate workplaces.

The Colliers International survey revealed that 70 % of the surveyed employees would like to work from home at least 1 day per week. Also 80 % of surveyed managers confirm they can effectively manage remotely. These insights confirm that distributed work will be part of the next Normal.

HR and Legal departments will work together to update policies and identify the work at home candidates based on their job design/ function. Office space will be available but fewer employees will need to come to the office. Many employees as well as their leaders have learned to work and manage remotely and thereby reduce the need for office space.

Within the office space, all organizations are planning to section off areas to ensure 6' social distancing protocols. Most will remove half of the seating in conference room, and block access to every other workstation. There will be abundant signage to reinforce CDC recommendations.

Wellbeing is a priority for all organizations as they evaluate cleaning and maintenance protocols. Cleaning crews will apply stringent and frequent cleaning schedules. ASHREA is recommending increase air ventilation and filtration and maintain relative humidity between 40 – 60 %. If possible, ASHRE recommends we allow fresh air by opening windows, which will be a challenge in the current controlled environments. Green living walls can also contribute to healthier environment and become respite zones. The workplace will adopt healthcare materiality such as antimicrobial material or solid surfaces in common areas as well as moisture barrier in seating pads in case of spills. All will eliminate keyboard sharing. We should also offer hands free locking mechanism for lockers and storage and provide disposable desk pads at work points or in meetings. In addition, contactless doors, faucets, urinals, and water closets will be a part of Real Estate capital expenditure.

Technology will play an important role to ensure safe reentry in the workplace. Occupancy and Utilization sensors will dictate schedules to approach the elevators, the lobby, the cafeterias, and gyms. Temperature sensing and or personnel taking employees temperature at entry point would prevent a potential infected employee from entering and contaminating the office or building. Temperature and occupancy sensors will also inform if anyone was exposed to a sick person. Censoring will raise privacy issues, but most will accept lesser privacy in exchange for health and safety. Landlords will update their facility with sensor operated doors or even minimize/eliminate doors if possible.

Most organizations are planning to use sensor-based occupancy data which will inform future real estate strategies. Many suspects it will reveal low utilization. This will represent a real estate cost saving and the opportunity to terminate leases or negotiate smaller footprints.

Other technology such as voice activated access or phone apps will become prevalent. Directional signage on flooring will serve as pathways. PPE, Personal protective equipment, will be prevalent everywhere along with posters promoting frequent hand washing. Most organizations are planning for at least a 2-month minimum inventory but will face limited supply and pricing challenges.

Other considerations:

Most organizations are not allowing visitors or family in the workplace. Rituals such as handshakes and hugs will no longer be a common practice. With so much anxieties, we should consider areas for mindfulness to destress. Ongoing and up to date communication is essential. Successful organizations will demonstrate trust, compassion, stability, and hope. Distributed work may be a great way to attract talent and engage employees. However, organizations will need to develop a robust onboarding

program to mitigate the learning curve for the new employee. Part of the onboarding should include a work at home setting, such as an ergonomic chair and adequate desk, dual monitor, laptop, printer, or other support tools. Until we release a vaccine, many organizations and employees will experience various levels of anxieties. In fact, many employees will avoid the workplace until health officials release a cure or vaccine. In the interim, we need to promote employees' trust that companies are doing the right things to protect their employees' health and their loved ones. This will require employers giving choice, technology, and insuring transparency where consistent and truthful communication will be paramount.

Conclusion:

Distributed work is now more acceptable and accepted than it was pre COVID-19. Many firms were already practicing the remote work model, but many were caught off guard. Other industries were practicing a form of remote working but did not have the technology to support at scale. Despite the short notice, people are managing well and leveraging technology. Employees are grateful for gaining two hours of commute per day, and for spending time with family. All employees appreciate the fact they are still working when so many others have been displaced. Leaders are learning to manage outcomes versus presence. We're all learning to humanize work during these difficult times, and we hope the COVID-19 cure or vaccine will arrive quickly. Work is a social activity. Most people crave connection with peers over lunch or casual coffee. We currently compensate with video conferencing. People are expressing their concerns and commenting about over zooming.

This great experiment has sped up the transformation of workplaces from individual/focused to a more collaborative/social hubs. So, why would people return to a physical workplace? The vast majority justify with two main reasons: to collaborate and participate in meetings, and to socialize with colleagues. Most agree that work at home is best suited for focus work. We have an opportunity to rethink office designs, services and support systems that will attract employees and provide the appropriate environment to encourage a return to the workplace. So, until the COVID-19 vaccine arrives, distributed work will be the only manner we can complete our tasks and responsibilities, while dealing with the anxieties of the pandemic.