Team Topic and Number: Distributed Work #3

Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable): N/A

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

Distributed Work
- *With government-issued orders to shelter in place across the globe – and corporations shutting offices – employees have been sent home.*
- *We are now conducting a worldwide experiment in remote working.*
- *What will this experiment reveal?*
- *Will it transform workplace strategy?*
- *Will companies that were reluctant to embrace remote work before now see it as a viable option? Or will employees be eager to return to their workplaces and be in the physical space with their colleagues again?*
- *Will the employer see greater value in one over the other and what may prevail?*
- *And will it result in corporations using less traditional real estate?*

Challenge: Develop key forecasts and recommendations for corporate real estate professionals as they address how the pandemic will impact where we work going forward. After years of talking about a paperless office and flexible remote working and with little or no actual take up of the concepts, the COVID-19 pandemic in a matter of months catapulted the world to a new order and employers, employees, businesses, corporations and governments all had to 'just do it'.

Forecast - Distributed working is here to stay, certainly in the short to medium term, however it won't replace the workplace completely.

People are now interested in flexible working arrangements, to have choice on how best to work productively, blend work/life priorities, supported by right tech tools and leaders/teams/people trained in the management of distributed working. Many people have taken a huge, and sudden, leap of faith to remote working therefore greater organisational transparency will cement stronger trust levels with people.

Remote working has implications on employee productivity, data security, employee loyalty and company culture. It is essential to design and implement a plan/policy to action new virtually teaming routines and protocols.

Populations of employees have now experienced less or no commuter time that has translated into productive work time and family time. Teleconferences have been organised across states and time zones, reducing the previous regarded need of traveling for face to face meetings. Savings will be made in reduced travel for businesses and employees.

Forecast - Corporates will adopt a combination of work from home and at the office.

The main office can now become a brand and culture hub to train, hold large meetings/events and place to bring clients with individual focus work completed remotely at home or in smaller suburban satellite locations so as participants do not have to commute.

Technology will further enable remote working. We witnessed people quickly adapting to increased e-meetings and e-commerce tech experts raced to provide stability and security on popular tech platforms e.g. Meet, Zoom, Teams, WebEx, Livestream

Forecast - Many corporates will adopt a combined real estate strategy of fixed and flexible real estate.

Short term leases in managed workspaces in the suburbs might see a boom which has many ancillary benefits like reduced commute time and ease of accessibility to employees, whilst providing interaction for ideas sharing and socialising.

Forecast - Long term lease agreements will see an inclusion of 'pandemic' force majeure and rent abatement clauses.

Forecast - Workplace maintenance costs could increase by at least 25% due to additional hygiene and air conditioning requirements.

In the short term, and after a period of no income, some small SME's could find such an increase in costs be an unsustainable if passed on by landlords and therefore these costs may have to be absorbed by the landlord for tenant retention.

This worldwide experiment will transform the workplace in how it looks and feels, meeting the new demands of users. Technology will have a large part to play in this. Over time we expect to see more touchless access (mobile, voice control) and touchless interfaces in bathrooms, digital contact tracing in buildings and body temperature monitoring. Apps showing desk availability will be used and notify of building capacity.

Forecast - Space design will include wider corridors and transitional spaces, separate up and down stairways and circulation maps for floors to provide better distancing. Total area occupied or leased will not reduce in proportion to the reduction of full time occupants as employers ensure larger areas per employee. Critical business operations will be identified and by in large those will be the operations that will be accommodated in the workplace with the balance operating on a flexible WFH/ office basis. Safe areas and shutdown/ quarantined areas will be identified for essential workers of businesses for future occurrences of sickness outbreaks.

Forecast - Buildings will be rated on their wellness factor (as well as LEED and strength etc). Buildings with HVAC services that include increased ultraviolet disinfection, improved air filtration systems, air-purification systems to protect collaborative environments and rid the irritants, will be sought after. Anti-microbial materials on surfaces will be in demand. These include stainless steel, copper and brass, which are smooth and easy to clean and hence prevent the spread of germs.

Recommendations

Return to Work
- Corporate real estate, human resources, building managers and owners to all work together to provide safe workplaces for employees to return to.
- Building trust and confidence in employees is critical.
- Establish the safe occupancy of the premises/ building
- Offer assistance to set up better home offices
- Be aware that adding additional costs immediately maybe too much and unsustainable for some businesses – reach a fair balance

Short term
- More fluid workplaces will take shape as businesses understand how to incorporate WFH into BAU.
- Look to continue to improve technology to aid flexible workplaces, and operational tools that enable teams to work together more collaboratively and flexibly.
- Survey patterns of work and data on desk occupancy so more efficiency is achieved, resulting in an audit and re-plan of business unit space allocation, depending on the desires and requirements of business moving forward when they start to return to the office.
- Maintain an increase in cleanliness and physical distancing requirements across workplaces to ensure the wellbeing of people is maximised, and that they feel safe in the workplace.
- Agree to a way forward in terms of increased work from home ratios, and how staff at an organisation would like to continue to work. This could mean having less people requiring fixed office space, where it would be mandated for staff to work from home more than once a week. This will greatly change workplace strategy, and will lead to long term business decisions.
- Consider continued remote working, multi-phased re-openings and shifts for employees to maintain physical distancing requirements.

- Relook at the way businesses operate, and the way in which they manage their work. An increased work from home ratios will require businesses to re-evaluate the systems and operational tools used to manage work and capacity, and the various rituals and ceremonies that take place within teams, particular for those using Agile methodology. This will ultimately inform workplace design as the combination and utilisation of various activities change, whether this is 1:1 private/quiet work, or whole team collaboration.

Long Term
- Increase in number of people on permanent flexible arrangements including on average 1-2 days WFH (dependent on role / business)
- To WFH successfully and make it viable in the long term, connectivity and the right technology was critical along with the right home office environment / setup.
- Provide support and workshops to learn how to use new technology
- Employers may look to contribute to an employee's WFH setup to ensure an employee can be effective and productive in their role when WFH i.e. monitor / keyboard / internet setup / support.
- Building design to adapt to focus on smarter & healthier buildings – improved HVAC design, anti-microbial surfaces, social distancing etc.
- Fit out design to focus on differentiation of spaces and the office as a creative hub with spaces to enable diversity of thinking
- Redesign of space to enable whole groups to come together to collaborate; taking into account reduced office capacity and allocation for teams due to increased work from home ratios
- Traditional management structures to be revised to reflect outcome rather than input/output to factor in success on approach, teamwork etc. as well as consider / monitor the mental health of employees when remote working.
- Establish a clear and constant communication plan to employees
- Develop policy to enable and empower a work culture that continues to build trust and productivity while employees work remotely.
- Leverage on technology to increase the data collected on utilisation
- Review and evaluate current space plan including meeting rooms, fixed desks versus agile desks and common areas. For example, using every other desk to create a buffer for each person similarly every other seat in a meeting room.
- Implement comprehensive service needs such as higher frequency of sanitisation of workplace and secure supply chain of wipes and sanitizer as needed for several months.