CoreNet Global Hackathon — A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Space Utilization & Metrics – Team 5

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Summary:
Currently due to the CV19 pandemic, the majority of employees worldwide are taking part in an enforced working from home (WFH) experiment! The effectiveness of this has been a surprise for many organizations, particularly in some global regions where WFH was previously unheard of.

It is expected that as restrictions are starting to lighten, many companies will go through a process of identifying who needs to go into the office. We expect companies to treat early days return fairly conservatively with restrictions on number of employees in the office, social distancing and use of common facilities.

> Pre vaccination world – Immediately. Social distancing measures in place. Heightened caution. Lack of confidence.
> Post vaccination world – More confident in socialization. Denser occupancy than a pre-vaccination world. Home working part of the solution. As a vaccine develops, expect further relaxation in restrictions.

This report examines space utilization in the near term, long term, as well as a modified set of metrics.

Return to work:

How do companies choose which parts of the business can return to the office? Does this change from week to week? Will employees come back in waves? Will they rotate in shifts?

- Must rely on business leaders to put forward their views
- Certain teams come in on different days; establish a rotation
- Allow each business lead flexibility to make changes but in collaboration with other leads
- Allow time for prioritising which facilities to reopen, preparedness of social distancing and related health & safety, strengthening of the supply chain and overcommunication of expectations.

Coordination around circulation will be critical. In office environments, lifts and lavatories there is a potential for bottle necks. One-way circulation needed in cafes. Some removing food facilities completely as well as consumables.

There is little obligation from companies to their staff to come back to the office immediately. Employee safety as well as potential legal liability are concerns.

Transport modes to the office must be taken into account. Commute method, time and regulations will play a role in returning to work. Social distancing on trains and buses will reduce capacity and increase commute times.

Social Distancing:

Expected in the short term to be a metric of interest. Measured either through low tech means (individual acting as floor monitor) or, potentially, more technologically savvy methods with a variety of options from buzzing wrist bands to optical counting tech, smart wearables, apps on phones, etc.

This will help companies analyse areas of the office environment where things can or need to be changed. With a potential readjustment on the maximum capacity in the office environment, this technology can help monitor attendance. Companies can review peak and average occupancy rates on a daily basis and amend working patterns as needed.

Depending on measures and tech used, once people come back in to the office, these can help indicate areas where staff gravitate that could become dangerous bottlenecks.

Technology:

We believe it is critical to leverage technology in order to make data driven decisions and monitor space utilization as organizations re-enter the workspace. Technology can help organizations understand actual utilization and occupancy data within a real estate portfolio.

Examples:
- Ensure compliance with occupancy limits - set maximum occupancy per room, space, floor, building
- Count people and measure social distancing
- Identify locations where safe/unsafe social distancing is taking place
- Daily occupancy reports – helping to provide transparency and visibility
- Alerts – notifications when rooms, floors have exceeded allowed occupancy

- Optimize cleaning based on real time usage
- Maximize collaborative space usage through reservation systems, IWMS, BMS, etc.
- Give greater visibility of why employees are in the office and what spaces they use
- Reduce operating cost by leveraging smart building technology in conjunction with usage data

How many people to bring back to the workplace will evolve and change. It will be necessary to monitor these metrics over time. Also, leveraging technology to showcase which spaces are occupied or not, informs employee choices on where they decide to work within the building. WFH team members can use technology to reserve space prior to their commute.

Cleanliness:
Cleanliness will be top of mind and visibility of cleaning is critical to provide confidence for the space occupier.

Technology will provide a data driven approach to optimizing cleaning schedules:
- Focus on spaces which are used the most. This can then be adjusted based on real usage of space.
- Identify unused spaces and cleaning can be focused elsewhere. Spend money in the right area.
- Increase in number of cleans per hour.
- Use visible indicator in rooms and on workstations to identify that a space has been freshly cleaned.

Some companies may choose to make face masks mandatory, over and above government guidelines, possibly for additional staff reassurance.

Agility:
In areas where confidentiality and security were previously cited as prohibitive issues to WFH, these hurdles have been overcome and teams are now working effectively from home. This could have a significant effect on WFH numbers in the future, even in regions such as India which will have a consequential impact on the office footprint. The impact could also mean same amount of space, de-densify tight space and make it available for more flexible use in the longer term.

It is expected in the short term that some meeting rooms and collaborative areas may be closed. There is the possibility of increasing the desk sharing ratio.

The long-term prediction is the work environment will be in three segments (1) office environment, (2) WFH, (3) Work near home (business center; provides collaboration without long commute)

Flexibility:
Flexibility in several areas will be key and a measure for many organizations moving forward. Flexibility will need to feature in:
- Leases – Early termination options, rent abatement, pandemic triggered force majeure.
- Real estate portfolio. More flexibility in the portfolio itself allows bolder decision making on space in stress situations.
- Space and the way space is used – this will need to evolve as time goes on. Dramatic changes would be premature, as we do not know how things will change.
- This could mean the end of large HQ's/campus locations.

Hub and spoke model has merit. For example, in the UK the impact of losing the commute for this period, the beneficial environmental impact, saving money, etc., could drive the preference for a hub and spoke model and make going to a local hub more attractive.

Ultimately, residential space could be redesigned to include WFH requirements and ergonomic considerations. Businesses could choose to invest in WFH amenities (task chair, wifi, etc.), which would form part of the benefit package. In addition, gyms have now started incorporating work space into their environment, similar to a small business center. Providing access to these facilities could be a part of the wellness benefit from companies.

Employee development:
Cultivation of new talent often relies on face-to-face interactions, working in teams, information sharing, collaboration and mentoring from colleagues and senior leaders.   There may be a negative impact on learning and self-development with a WFH model. Reliance on technology to bridge this gap will be key.

Design:
Will the fear of infection and social distancing shift the design of office space? On the whole, we believe discussions around moving to a cubicle or segregated office layout is a reactionary and fear-based approach. Open plan is an accepted working environment and going forward teams will seek reassurance related to thoroughness and frequency of cleaning.

Wellbeing:
The WFH 'experiment' has dispelled the myth around a negative impact on wellbeing. Studies monitoring those working from home have shown improved sleep, less anxiety and no detrimental effect on productivity.[1]   The impact on office accommodation and real estate as a product, could result in less demand.

Metrics:
Anticipating the future state being a hybrid environment where certain employees work primarily from the office and others primarily from home, requires a new set of metrics. It is anticipated that future metrics will be partially space-centric, but with a far greater human-centric element.

Real estate strategies which only incorporate data related to the physical space will be insufficient, given the many factors associated with supporting a significant WFH population.

Predicted metrics are:
Cost
- Measured by FTE, rather than square meter/square foot, spreading costs over far more people
- Measure total cost impact, (ex: savings associated with potential reduced footprint or lower utility usage, offset by increased cleaning spend)
- The consensus is that with less demand and less costs, real estate pricing will adjust

Space
- Utilization targets set by role/employee profile
- Calculate work station utilization for those designated as office employees

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[1] https://arthealthsolutions.com/working-from-home-data-driven-wellbeing-insights/

- Track the number of users utilizing conference rooms, collaborative spaces and work stations, particularly focusing on turn over times per day

Productivity
- Revenue - What impact does a hybrid office/WFH model have on revenue generation
- Impact on cross-team collaboration

Well-being
- Measure and track employee engagement, satisfaction and overall well-being
- Measure employee development and retention
- Well-being metrics will rely heavily on self-reporting