



A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellbeing Team 13

Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable):

Team Lead: Alex Andel

Team Members: Melissa Strickland, Luka deKelaita, Clea Grimm, Katie Finlayson, Derrick Millard, John Coluni, Chelsea Connolly

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Workplace wellbeing has become a business necessity post COVID-19. An employer facilitates workplace wellbeing to prioritize their employee's overall health, happiness, and prosperity within their office environment and beyond its walls. Organizations that already prioritized wellbeing will continue their investment, but for others this change demands greater significance, difficult budget decisions, and cultural changes. It's important to note that during this unprecedented time, employees will keep a watchful eye on organizational culture, active behaviors, and how a business has and will respond to this pandemic.

As real estate and workplace design experts, we understand that the new office environment post-COVID-19, will play a key role in employee wellbeing and rebuilding a corporate community. A focus on mental, emotional, social, and environmental health should be given priority to new protocols, new uses of space, new budgets, and new portfolio strategies as employees return to the workplace in the coming months. Wellbeing programs, amenities, and

benefits will be expected by current employees and perceived as critical attraction and retention differentiators by candidates. In order to trust their office environment, people will need to perceive that they feel safe and cared for.

We are reminded of Maslow's hierarchy of needs to recreate the optimal workplaces that we once had, while having a fresh start to improve upon it. The immediate focus should be on establishing a strong foundation that solves for our physiological needs, safety needs, and love/belonging needs, which we will refer to as feeling valued by an employer and feeling connected to an organization's people and culture.

As businesses begin to return to the workplace, increased health and safety will be paramount. While the trajectory of the virus is largely unknown, new protocols must be put into place to protect employee's health while continuing to drive business. Solutions will vary widely based on industry, region, company size, budget, culture, and demographics.

We're recommending enhanced health and safety protocols like:

- 1) Consider improving the environmental quality with UV air treatment systems and water sanitizing systems.
- 2) Consider a phased approach. While we understand every business is different, we recommend a 20%-40%-60%-80%-100% re-opening approach with the first phase for the most critical employees to occupy the office and the last phase for least critical employees. Note that employees should have the option to opt-out of their given timeline.
- 3) Consider who should and shouldn't return to work and when these employees can return in a phased approach.

- Employers may wish to encourage certain demographics to continue working from home including those who are/have:

- a. Elderly adults.
- b. Pregnant women.
- c. Underlying health conditions or compromised immunities.
- d. Been in close contact with demographics described above.
- e. Been in close contact with someone diagnosed with COVID-19 in the last 14 days.

- f. Been sick within the last 14 days.
- g. Returned from international travel in the last 14 days.
- h. Must commute on dense public transportation.
- i. Who are not feeling well in general.

-Employers may consider what roles are critical that need to return to the office. Be cognizant of entire teams. If one person gets sick, the whole project may be compromised. Decide what percentage of what teams will return to work and in which shifts.

-Employers may wish to encourage employees who are unsuccessful working from home to return to the office.

- a. Home environment does not enable productivity
- b. Low wifi strength or poor server connection
- c. No access to necessary tools, technology, or resources

4) Create a seating plan based off the phased approach.

5) Communicate to all employees the new expectations, protocols, changes, etc. 1-2 weeks before the first re-opening date and continue to communicate until at 100% office capacity.

6) Test employees as they enter the building or in lobby areas through some form of safety measure, like temperature checks and/or a daily questionnaire. Provide visual cues, like green stickers, to ensure people can trust other building occupants and their coworker's health status.

7) Provide signage of healthy hygiene tips throughout the office.

8) Provide guest, community and/or personal cleaning and sanitization products. Consider touch-free hand sanitization stations and pop-up style paper towel boxes with touch-free trash receptacles.

9) Increase cleaning protocols and sanitization services.

10) Maintain social distancing through furniture and layouts.

- If fixed furniture, consider employees to sit at every other desk.
- If flexible furniture, reconfigure desks to be six feet apart.
- If no or low panels, consider use of tall plexiglass screens or to increase panel or storage heights as further protection and division.

11) Consider the continuation of virtual meetings even within the office.

12) Consider having employees bring their own food, drinks, and dining ware. If food sharing continues, each meal should be individually packaged.

To lower stress and anxiety levels, we suggest incorporating more biophilia in the office, placing a plant on every other desk when maintaining social distancing at workstations, having a variety of quiet restorative spaces inside and outside the building for employees to work in, rearranging desks to be closer to natural light rather than having collaborative spaces by the windows, considering low dimmed lighting levels during early morning hours with a gradual increase throughout the day, and playing natural soothing sounds over audio systems for employees to feel more calm.

As companies focus on the transition back into the workplace, it's important to be mindful to employee's emotions and needs. Addressing questions and providing clear communication is key for a smooth, anxiety-free transition back. Surveys sent by leadership and HR enable companies to understand each employee's unique personal and 'working from home' situation, how their employees are feeling, and what new protocols and tactics people are comfortable with or not. Companies can then develop and implement a flexible strategy where employees can choose how they want to work, which can support their personal home and family situations. As a response, employees will feel more valued by their employer and a greater sense of connection to their organization.

While some employees will initially feel more safe at home, there are a majority of workers who desire to return to the office for its personal, professional, and social value. We're recommending satisfying our immediate human need for social interaction in the workplace by maintaining a safe six feet of social distancing and to:

- 1) Reduce capacity in meeting rooms and open breakout spaces.
- 2) Display signage of cleaning tracking sheets in common areas.
- 3) Consider approach to amenities (coffee machines, beer taps, printers, etc):
 - Concierge intermediary services
 - Required precautions from employees
 - Temporarily disabled
- 4) Consider swapping soft seating to tables and easily cleanable chairs with anti-microbial textiles, like in healthcare environments.
- 5) With hoteling desks, consider providing disposable desk mats and remove any shared equipment besides monitor screens.

So far we've addressed the importance to focus on enhanced health and safety protocols, tips for wellbeing and mindfulness, and how to maintain social distancing as employees crave social interaction in the office. Returning to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, once a strong foundation has been established to meet our physiological, safety, and love/belonging needs, businesses can implement long-term strategies that focus on esteem and self-actualization needs to reach the "new normal" of returning to work post-pandemic and to integrate workplace wellbeing as a company mindset and culture. New wellness building-rating certifications like WELL and fitwel will continue to play a significant role as the importance of wellbeing becomes more of a must-have in businesses.

As everyone looks for certainty during these uncertain times, we're seeking answers to our potential future. However, our goal should be preparation and readiness for the next pandemic's attempt to turn our worlds upside down. In catastrophes, there are those who are proactive and those who are reactive. Unfortunately, this global pandemic has forced most businesses into an emergency reaction-mode.

With experts warning of a potential COVID-19 recurrence, we must plan for a second wave of coronavirus cases. To prepare, leaders should review what did and did not work at the onset of the current pandemic. Perform a retrospective and solicit feedback from not only those who were involved in operationalizing the plans, but from employees as well. Apply the lessons learned, iterate and document your revisions. Make sure to align your strategies with local, state and federal health departments and regulations. If your organization reopened in a phased approach, reverse engineer your return to work strategy. Identify data-driven factors that would cause you to roll back to a more restrictive phase. Understand and communicate in advance what the virus triggers are and what will be re-implemented if a COVID-19 recurrence should develop.

We hope this report has been insightful to approaching workplace wellbeing and helps you plan for a better tomorrow.