Team 26 - Workplace Wellbeing

Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellbeing 26

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1. The Invisible Enemy

Covid-19, an infectious disease first discovered in 2019, has reached nearly 4 million cases world-wide with a death toll passing 250,000. While many areas around the world are responding to their first wave of this disease, reoccurring waves are expected.

Based on information from the medical community the virus is known to spread through respiratory droplets from sneezing or coughing, transmission from surfaces to a person through touching the face, eyes, nose or mouth. While there is no cure so far, various health organizations have suggested a variety of safety protocols to help prevent the spread of the disease. Additionally, the government has taken additional actions by issuing varying levels of stay at home orders. Scientists have a variety of theories about the virus and are exploring if the virus is seasonal, if the body creates long-term antibodies, and others. Mass efforts for a vaccine and treatment have begun and expect to take at least 12-18 months.

The virus is impacting our lives in more ways than one including a decline in mental health, social distancing fatigue, fear, anxiety, suspicion, anger, economic decline and more. As society continues to respond to this pandemic, continued fears about the long-term economic and societal effects are increasing.

2. Workplace Wellbeing Defined

"Workplace" can be defined by any location where work is done. In a pre COVID-19 world, these locations included: corporate office, home office or a third space like a coffee shop. In a post COVID-19 world we anticipate this definition will be broadened to be a location at which a person conducts business as well as a digital platform of collaborative technology tools. By broadening this definition it will allow for continuous engagement for employees/teams and flexibility for an increasingly agile workforce.

Workplace Wellbeing prior to the COVID-19 pandemic primarily focused on employee physical health. However, some progressive employers explored a more holistic approach to impact the physical, mental and society needs based on Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (see image below). We believe companies will now be emphasizing psychological, physiological and safety needs by increased protective measures in the physical workplace. Workplace Wellbeing will now respect employee work-life balance, support flexibility and encourage people to explore the ways in which they work best. Gone are the days of hard boundaries of being required in the office from 9AM-5PM, 5 days a week. As these cultural and behavioral shifts occur, so will the stigmas surrounding self-care like exercise, healthy meals, family time and mental health time. While there are many positives to these changes, it presents organizations with the challenge of implementing in an efficient and effective way that supports the business rather than deterring from it.

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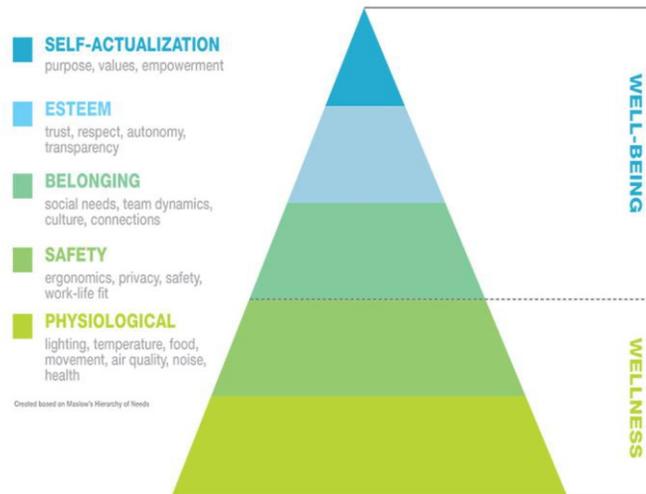
3. Guiding Principles for Implementing New Strategies

As companies look to implement these new strategies and policies, CRE experts will focus on the following key areas as a means for reinventing workplace wellbeing:

- Health & Safety of Human Capital
- Intentional Sustainability
- Resiliency of People, Process and the Physical Environment
- Human Behavior and Operational Adaptability
- Stakeholder Alliance
- Change Management
- Profitability and Operational Viability

As employers are redefining their definition and purpose of workplace wellbeing, effective deployment and adoption of these policies will be vital to their long term success. By utilizing change management and business resiliency methods, companies can ensure stakeholder buy-in in a cross-functional manner. These main stakeholders can include but are not limited to CRE, Security, HR, IT, Legal, Finance and internal COVID-19 response teams. By creating an overarching program and empowering small teams to make decisions a company can achieve a quicker deployment and adoption of new policies.

CRE will play a pivotal role creating and implementing workplace wellbeing strategies that best leverage the real estate portfolio. CRE professionals will be focusing on a variety of areas including but not limited to:

- Adapting Existing Space
- Creating Revised Workplace Standards
- Assessment of Space Need and Disposal of Excess Space
- Analysis of Flexible Working Options on RE Portfolio
- Revision of Furniture Layouts and Standards

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4. **Workplace Wellbeing Policies for Phased Re-entry**

Companies can expect new guidelines for workplace wellbeing to be issued by CDC, WHO, OSHA, state and local public health offices, landlords, and labor unions. At this point, the workplace will likely see a phased re-introduction of workplace that considers a variety of aspects including state/government mandates (i.e 50% workforce limitations), how essential the role is, vulnerable populations, desire to return vs. desire to work from home, commute restrictions and others. This phased re-entry model is already being implemented in many places around the world. Additionally, we can anticipate the following changes on workplace wellbeing:

- **Revised or New Work from Home Policies**
  - Creating flexibility for parents and caregivers
  - Providing appropriate technology and FFE solutions to home offices

- **Cleaning & Health Protocols:**
  - Enhanced cleaning protocols for high touch areas
  - Clean desk policy
  - Providing products like hand sanitizer and anti-bacterial wipes
  - Modifications to "hoteling" workstations to dedicated workstations
  - Employee temperature & symptom screening
  - Increased fresh air intake in HVAC systems
  - AHU retrofits with UV lights
  - PPE (masks & gloves)
  - Elimination of food pantry systems & enhanced cleaning in break areas

- **Guest and Visitor Policies:**
  - Limiting access to certain categories of site visitors – vendors & service providers
  - Restricting general public's access to the workplace
  - Creating visitor zones as a barrier to general employee areas

- **Revised Travel Policies:**
  - Limiting work travel to very specific and critical needs or eliminating it all together for the foreseeable future

- **Technology Investment:**
  - Identifying various technologies to support a distanced workforce (i.e. licensing for video conferencing, upgrades to Wi-Fi access, increased security measures etc.)
  - Healthier buildings

- **Behavioral Adjustments:**
  - Social Distancing
  - Hand washing for 20 seconds
  - Improved Personal Hygiene

- **Physical Space Adjustments:**
  - Decreased density
  - Modifications to work stations
  - Adjusted Elevator Capacity
  - Capacity limit for conference rooms/common spaces/reception areas
  - Shipping & receiving area protocols
  - "Health Signage"

- **Business Continuity Policies:**
  - Backfilling with temp/contract workers
  - Clearly defining actions, roles, responsibilities for communication in response to pandemics.
  - Updating communication and escalation protocols for decision making
  - Creating database of emergency services, protocols, training and materials from local, regional and national organizations.

- **Supply Management Policies**
  The pandemic has tested employee illness reporting practices and the confidentially of that information.

  Reporting requirements and methods will be re-evaluated. Additionally, if an organization instituted temporary protocols for reporting, they may need to communicate the reinstatement of earlier practices or protocols upon return to work.

It will be important for all stakeholders to align on the varying guidelines and protocols moving forward to ensure consistent implementation and enforcement for all parties involved.

5. Practice and Program Enhancements

While we have identified several short-term solutions that will allow for companies to get up and running, the true question lies in the long-term implications and solutions. In addition to the items described above, several additional enhancements will be evaluated including:

- Innovation in HVAC products and protocols including air filtration, air purification, sterilization systems, increased exhaust and outdoor air for restrooms.
- Addition of Smart Building Technology and Automation (i.e. occupancy sensors, controlled HVAC, elevator dispatch, access controls, etc.)
- Incorporation of self-cleaning or medical grade materials into the office environment.
- Redesign of hospital materials to have a more residential/corporate office esthetic.
- Renewed commitment to contingency plans and crisis management from both building owners and tenants.
- Revised protocols on amenity usage – gyms, cafes, common areas etc.
- Behavioral changes in accessing pathways, elevators and circulation throughout space
- Increased budgets for cleaning & sanitation, no hand-shaking
- Reconfiguration of building exits/entrances, circulation paths and wayfinding

- Increased investment in tools to further connections & collaboration for physically separated teams
- Sustainability - shift to "responsibly disposable" materials

6. Future-Proofing for Workplace Wellbeing

Who pays for these investments? Tenants and landlords can expect shifts in their budgets to fund these new strategies and programs as everyone begins to see workplace wellbeing in a new light. Tenants will be expecting landlords to make improvements in public areas and building infrastructure along with increased sanitation, while landlords will try to shift the cost and liability to tenants. These issues will be addressed in re/new leases, insurance policies and P&S agreements.

Wellbeing through a healthier workplace pays off with higher employee retention and performance as proven through studies by Harvard SPH. Its studies show that productivity can increase $7,500/employee annually by increasing ventilation. Workplaces with enhanced wellbeing practices and systems will be a marketing advantage to owners and employers.

It will take the whole community to support these renewed wellbeing programs along with transparent conversations on their impact to each respective business. However, there is no such thing as zero risk. It can be minimized by using a hierarchy of controls to combat Covid-19 in a building as illustrated below.
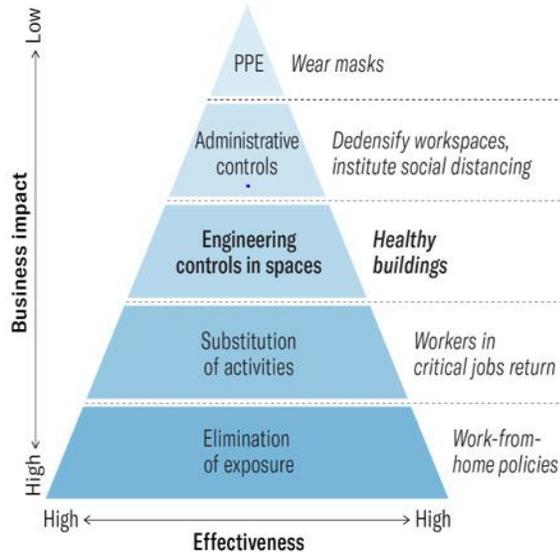
Note: "PPE" stands for personal protective equipment.
Source: Joseph Allen and John Macomber