A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Team 7 Workplace Wellbeing

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.

WELLBEING

At present, there are no universal guidelines on the return to the workplace. Most governments are independently revising their policies, and the management of an international business will need to be prepared to comply with local regulations, which are being constantly reviewed.

As we wait for governments globally to advise a phased approach for returning to work, organisations need to think about the impact of what a return to work will have on employees considering both their health and wellbeing.

Wellbeing is multi-faceted and needs to be looked at considering the current circumstances. Beyond physical health and ergonomic factors that dominate the dialogue, supporting social and mental

wellbeing is as relevant in defining the cornerstones of a "new normal". At a time where nothing appears certain, instilling trust and community amongst employees will be integral to supporting wellbeing. It is also important to recognise that wellbeing is a subjective experience. Offering an environment that empowers choice, control and individual agency will play to the need for people to individualise their work experience and find the right level of comfort in face of the fear and uncertainty arising from the pandemic.

A sense of autonomy has proven benefits to wellbeing, with positive impacts on both psychological and physical health (McKinsey, 2018). Benefits include an increase in happiness and sense of value amongst employees, increased motivation and engagement and improved work-life balance (CIPHR, 2019). Employees need to feel they have ownership and flexibility in creating work experiences that optimises their wellbeing, considering personal preferences, enablement to work away from the office, and their level of comfort working in or commuting to the office.

To achieve a culture of wellbeing at the organisational level, we need to understand what a culture of wellbeing means at the team level. Whilst a certain amount of oversight from an organisational level will be required to set boundaries and maintain a level of management, developing governance to account for individual needs is impersonal and likely will result in a 'vanilla' approach unlikely to serve everyone. As teams are diverse and will have personal definitions of wellbeing, a one size fits all approach from the top is likely to be ineffective.

By developing a framework for creating a wellbeing culture at team level, we ultimately foster wellbeing at the organisational level. A key ingredient is fostering a culture of psychological safety where open discussion can be had about individual needs, preferences, concerns and ideas that account for the individual but also can be agreed at team level (Strategyzer, 2019). For this to work, leadership needs to trust employees to engage in a respectful and honest dialogue. The culture that individual teams develop to approach their "new normal" will ultimately act as an influencer to shape the wellbeing culture of the organisation.

https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/the-overlooked-essentials-of-employee-well-being

https://www.ciphr.com/advice/employee-autonomy/

https://www.strategyzer.com/blog/psychological-safety-in-the-workplace-a-prerequisite-for-high-performing-teams

MINDFULNESS

Mindfulness means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment, through a gentle, non-judgmental lens.
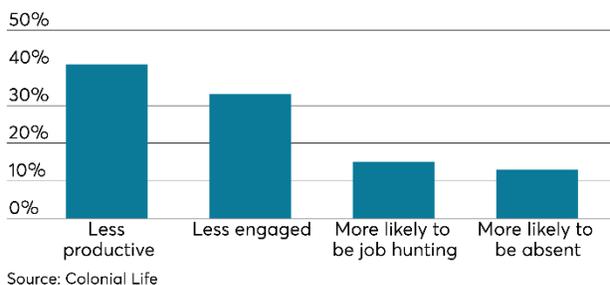
Mindfulness has been proven to assist with stress reduction, increase focus longevity, quality and depth of interpersonal relationships & increase their overall sense of wellbeing. There is clear scientific and economic based evidence on its positive impact alongside 1000's of years of philosophical study and practice.

These benefits in turn will help any workforce increase their over-arching productivity, assist to elevate the working experience and overall improve culture & employee interactions.

In an increasingly knowledge-based economy, economic value relies on skills and motivations of individual – ''human capital'.

The impact of stress on the workforce

50%	
40%	
30%	
20%	
10%	
0%	

Less productive | Less engaged | More likely to be job hunting | More likely to be absent

Source: Colonial Life

Recently, 'busy-ness' has often been wrongly attributed as a sign of worth – rather than valuable productivity. Employee engagement levels were already low pre-COVID19 world with currently 'only 15% of employees are engaged worldwide'.

The current COVID-19 pandemic adds to this, with the additional layers of fear, uncertainty, and wholesale change alongside the monumental shift in working environments & remote working that the global workforce population is facing.

https://www.gallup.com/workplace/290573/engaged-workplaces-world-put-people-first.aspx

The challenges in the workplace with stress and happiness/mental health are having even more impact and have far reaching consequences both for people, business and communities alike.

The workplace (post COVID) means more than a physical location in which employees physically attend and utilise. It is becoming more of an ambiguous term – and can reference wherever the employee is located and able to connect virtually to the team.

Mindfulness in the workplace can also be impacted by the commute component of an employee's day, a factor which business leaders are able to have an impact (locating workplaces near central public transport hubs, allowing flexible work times etc.).

Employee engagement could be influenced by introducing mindfulness techniques daily – with the physical & digital workplace supporting/giving employees the space to reflect this. This could be achieved with a multitude of solutions, from a dedicated 'meditation/relaxation area', curated mindfulness events, behavioural 'nudges' within the workspace, internal processes and/or digital applications.

The most important factor would be an encouraging positive culture where management understand and encourage mindfulness.

Main Causes of Stress

20% JUGGLING WORK/ PERSONAL LIVES
6% LACK OF JOB SECURITY
28% PEOPLE ISSUES
46% WORKLOAD

Source: EAP provider ComPsych's first half of 2006 StressPulse Survey.

It is important to be pragmatic to what mindfulness can achieve and eventually help change the culture (if needed). Due to the inherent nature of mindfulness, there will be a strong element of individualisation of mindfulness techniques (one size does NOT fit all) & therefore these different requirements will need to be considered.

The importance of mental health and the ability to achieve mental clarity is evident and mindfulness has been proven to be an effective and simple tool to assist with this.

Mindfulness is more than a 'productivity tool', it is a different quality of relating to the world. Whilst it may well enhance performance and improve resilience, it hopefully also allows practitioners to be more aware of just the task at hand and allow for a calmer, more creative and happier workforce.

Health and safety:

All parties—owners, building managers, occupiers—should ascertain responsibilities and capabilities and then work collectively to create a safe environment. This advice will require conversations with supply chains to ensure availability of equipment and expertise and should begin imminently.

Consider the following:

Technical:

Buildings are not designed to remain in hibernation- they will suffer internal deterioration if not operational. Before employees return to work you will need to ensure;

All life systems are inspected and passed (fire alarms, sprinklers, emergency lighting, etc.) – Emergency generators and Uninterruptable Power Supplies (UPS) operating effectively (if applicable) – Fire suppression systems inspected and all fire extinguishers in date – Gas safety compliance reviewed. Chilled water systems and cooling towers inspected and compliant. All other Statutory compliance
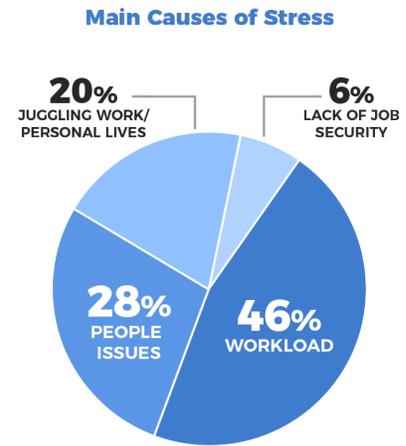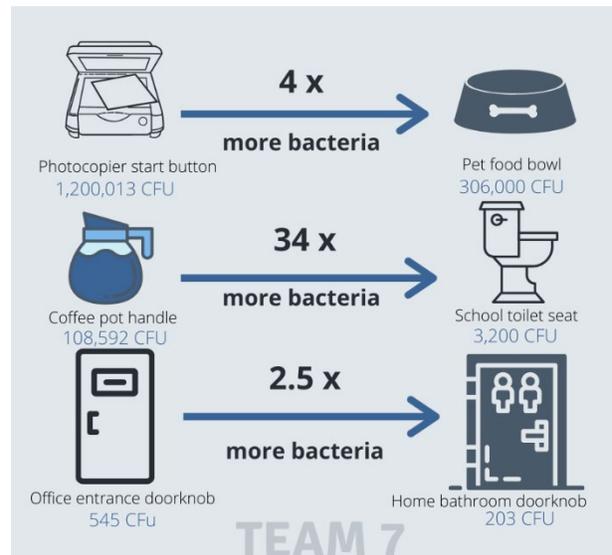
status assessed and plans in place to address any outstanding maintenance or remedial work that was either halted – or subsequently discovered in your inspections.

Additionally – make sure all lift maintenance requirements have been reviewed and are in place. All required Legionella procedures followed before the building reopens – it is likely you will need to increase the frequency of flushing during reduced occupancy.

Notify insurance companies!

Cleaning:

This includes identification and reduction of key touchpoints (doors, desks, elevators and common areas, as well as staff amenities like coffee machines). A full daily disinfection may not be necessary, but the virus can live on surfaces for up to three days; and proper, increased cleaning will help lower exposure. Higher frequency of cleaning and the visibility of these services particularly in common areas will help address staff concerns as well as protecting against the risk of infection.

Photocopier start button
1,200,013 CFU

4 x more bacteria

Pet food bowl
306,000 CFU

Coffee pot handle
108,592 CFU

34 x more bacteria

School toilet seat
3,200 CFU

Office entrance doorknob
545 CFu

2.5 x more bacteria

Home bathroom doorknob
203 CFU

TEAM 7

Regarding personal hygiene, it is expected that the frequency of handwashing and sanitising will remain at heightened levels and tenants will expect these products to be readily available, driving on-going increased demand.

General:

It is very likely that for the foreseeable that complete WFH will be the norm for some employees, a mix of WFH and office based for the bulk of employees, and only a small minority will be completely back in the office full time.

In order to sustain social distancing requirements, it may be advisable to split the workforce into groups. Whilst one group is WFH the other is in the office. Then after 2 weeks (or any timeframe) a full deep clean is undertaken and the other group returns - preventing teams from cross-contaminating while business remains open and operational. These arrangements will need to be communicated effectively and should be as voluntary as possible – giving employees agency over their decisions and ensuring their wellbeing.

Workplaces will need reconfiguration to allow 2m distances – including the potential to utilise smaller meeting rooms as offices where necessary. All attempts at automation or contactless services should be considered throughout. For less high-tech solutions, doors should remain open where possible. In the initial RTO it's advisable to stop the provision of self-serve tea and coffee facilities, encouraging staff to

purchase these individually. Offices that provide onsite catering should consider limited menus and remove buffet style provisions.
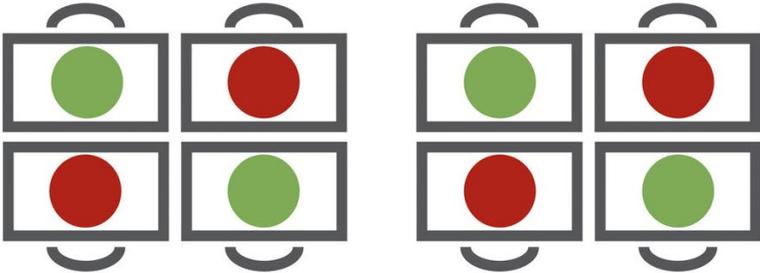
Businesses are advised to create guidelines to prevent the spread including screening and reporting, introduction of confinement areas and communication plans for new cases. Staff must be informed of what's expected if they begin to feel unwell. Employees must also be inducted on any new QHSE arrangements (fire/first aid).