A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellness

Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable): CoreNet Tennessee Chapter

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

The transition back to the traditional work environment following the COVID-19 pandemic will not be business as usual. Each organization will have to take care to map out a thoughtful approach to the return to the workplace. As we all look to return to the work environment, a heightened awareness around workplace wellness is more important than ever.   In exploring workplace wellness, the CoreNet Tennessee chapter looked to examine a day in the life of a typical employee in their corporate work environment.

There are three main elements to well-being in the workplace – physical space, technology, and flexibility. We must take care to examine what this means for both employees and for management.

1. **Physical Space**

    a. For Employees – The ability to find and reserve available desks in spaces that are designated as safe and clean for employees. The employee must have trust and confidence that the space is sanitary.

    b. For Management – Management must identify spaces requiring sanitation as well as adapt the workplace to maintain and enforce safe social-distancing guidelines.

2. **Technology**

    a. For Employees – Digital communications must be used to keep employees aware of wellness resources like clinics, sanitation stations, flexible work from home policies, and staggered shifts/work hours.

    b. For Management – continue to foster and promote employee health, safety, and productivity.

3. **Flexibility**

    a. For Employees – A return to the work environment means a return to a newly fluid and dynamic environment and workforce.

    b. For Management – Management must drive optimized space and portfolio management through space analytics while also giving employees the space that makes them most able to safely do their work.

A Day in the Life:

1. **Returning to the Office –** For spaces and workstations that were not previously dedicated or assigned to a single individual, make use of a workplace App to facilitate desk booking. Support social distancing by disabling a specific desks for reservation and hiding them from the search. Reserving desks in advance, for the entire day (or for the time required to be on campus), will also ensure cleaning schedule compliance. Additionally, the App will give employees' the ability to locate their colleague's workstations for the day, reducing unnecessary foot traffic throughout the workspace.

2. **Trusting Your Space –** To maintain well-being in the workplace, employers must ensure that employee's have trust in their space. This can be achieved several ways.

    a. Develop people focused policies and procedures

        i. Establish flexible work strategies such as remote work options, alternate shifts of A/B team schedules, and phase employees' return to work in stages. Utilize employee surveys, productivity data or other measures to guide planning for which teams to prioritize bringing back in the early stages.

        ii. Allocate spaces and tools to discourage shared usage through assigned seats and dedicated electronics, equipment, and meeting spaces.

    b. Maintain employee safety and well-being

        i. Maintain a healthy physical environment - specify fabric and finishes with bleach-cleanable surfaces.

        ii. Add sensors and no-touch technology for hands-free operation in meeting/conference areas, restrooms, and elevators where possible.

        iii. Support employee health and wellness through temperature checks, sponsoring programs for physical and mental well-being, and encourage employees to stay home when not feeling well.

          iv. Ensure access to well-lit spaces with daylight and nature views. Add plants where possible.

          v. Consider making PPE (masks, gloves) available to employees and visitors.

          vi. Limit or restrict non-essential visitors to the office

    c. Create spaces that allow people to be "alone together"

          i. Adapt and retrofit to more spacious layouts that allow users to maintain 6' minimum distances.

          ii. Reduce the number of people allowed in meeting spaces.

          iii. Create enclosures or delineate space through incorporating architectural solutions and/or adding screens, panels, dividers, and storage units to define existing workstations.

          iv. Incorporate soft architectural solutions – wall systems, drapery, screens – around open collaboration areas.

    d. Upgrade HVAC Systems to Enhance Filtration and Increase Office Cleanliness

          i. Upgrade HVAC Systems to enhance filtration – consider hospital grade filters.

          ii. Assure ventilation keeps clean air flowing in and helps direct air down.

          iii. Borrow practices and ideas from healthcare/hospital design.

          iv. Bring in outside air when possible.

          v. Investigate potential of UV technologies to enhance overall indoor air quality.

          vi. Add a robust and regular cleaning protocol, including daily day – and nighttime cleanings and scheduled deep cleanings, like electro-static cleaning.

          vii. Establish a clean desk/clean meeting space policy to enable a cleaning crew to thoroughly clean all desk and spaces.

    e. Adapt existing floorplan to support distancing.

          i. Add enclosures or delineate space at workstations by adding height to panels, adding screens to workstations, or re-orienting within the open plan to ensure that employees are not face-to-face.

          ii. Reduce seats in meeting rooms, cafes, and other shared spaces and post signage with the maximum occupancy allowed.

          iii. Reduce the number of workstation seats in the open office.

          iv. Create traffic patterns that support distancing and encourage a directional flow through the office.

          v. Implement social distancing requirements in high-traffic areas such as elevators, lobbies, and break areas

          vi. Repurpose formerly shared meeting areas as areas dedicated to specific, small teams.

3. **Real Time Communication –** Employers must develop a plan of action well in advance of advertised employee return dates. Change management and communication is KEY.

    a. Communication Planning

          i. Planning must be regional and site specific. A "one size fits all" approach will not be successful.

      ii. Obtain collective buy in from multiple stakeholders and recruit "change champions" to model ideal behaviors, set expectations and foster a team spirit.

      iii. Create a contingency plan for how to manage a diagnosed COVID-19 case on campus.

      iv. Continually take the pulse of the organization by gathering input from employees through surveys and focus groups to understand their readiness and willingness to re-enter the traditional work environment.

      v. Provide training updates as policies and procedures change.

b. Varied Communication Channels

      i. Employ a layered approach to reach employees through multiple channels including digital signage, intranet communications, workplace applications with searchable wellness features, and signage and stickers in high traffic areas.

c. Real or Near Real Time Information

      i. Update employees as local and State regulations change

      ii. Keep the status of office amenities – clinics, gyms, cafes, and shared common areas up to date.

      iii. Clearly indicate that a space has been cleaned and sanitized after usage.

      iv. Post visible protocol reminders - draw attention to sanitization stations to encourage employee use.

      v. Continually monitor progress on how employees are adapting and adjusting to the new work environment through surveys or forums.

4. **Meeting Distancing Goals**

a. Use analytics to track occupancy

      i. Identify high density areas with sensors or WiFi based reporting

      ii. Determine where additional reserved desks should be added to reduce density in areas that were formerly shared.

      iii. Determine which floor should be open or closed based on occupancy and traffic patterns

      iv. Review data to ensure that desks and spaces are not being used outside of specified hours or assigned shifts to allow for proper cleaning.

      v. Identify areas which may benefit from additional cleaning periods based on employee usage and demand.

5. **Flexibility to Work from Home**

a. Extend and Broaden Work from Home (WFH) Policies

      i. Follow the lead of Tech organization that are extending the WFH into the fall.

      ii. Mandate that employees stay home when feeling any kind of illness

      iii. Reduce the number of employees in the office at any one time.

b. Create a Home Office Ergonomics Program

      i. Consider providing a stipend to employees for furniture to help work from home ergonomically and safely (i.e. – monitor arms, task chairs, task lighting, desks or height adjustable tables)

ii. Educate employees on successful WFH and remote work practices and habits. Train employees on proper ergonomic practices while working from home.
iii. Educate managers on how to successfully manage a remote team.

The safety, health and wellbeing of Team Members/office workers is the highest priorities. This unprecedented historic event will require a gradual strategy to reopen corporate offices with a high degree of flexibility to ensure safety and well-being. Preparing for what the future of work will look like across corporate offices will require new initiative ways to operate, house and gather office occupants as well as workspace flexibility (work from home /shift work). The CRE professional will be called upon to provide the new workplace in ways never seen in modern times.