



Post COVID Workspace Strategy Thought Starters for Executives

The ongoing lockdown as a result of COVID-19 has precipitated a massive change in the way the world is working. No one can be sure how much of what we are doing today will survive the end of the lockdown, but we are certain that the reality we are currently dealing with will cause business leaders to re-evaluate their office environments and workplace strategy moving forward.

Below are some thought starters for executives to consider before transitioning back to the office and making long term decisions about workplace strategy and office space design:

1. Remote working may be serving you well under

quarantine but consider testing this strategy over a longer period of time, under normal conditions, before making transformative decisions with respect to your workspace.

Over the past several weeks, senior executives at many of our client-companies have expressed surprise at how well distributed work is serving them. COVID-19 has been a precipitating event that has forced many businesses to adapt to remote working very quickly, and thus far, the feedback as to employee productivity and satisfaction has been largely positive. However, before transitioning a significant portion of your workforce into remote working on a more permanent basis, consider the following:

- Not all home-environments are created equal. Our initial impression is that working from home should be an option available to employees, rather than a policy. Children, personal lives, living space, etc. will all vary between individuals, and businesses may risk losing highly productive individuals because their personal lives don't permit for highly productive remote working.
- Culture, cohesion, and motivation. We don't know how these pillars of corporate life will hold up in a largely distributed environment over the mid-long term (eg., the benefits of positive casual collisions that occur with people being in the workplace together).
- Terms like "Zoom Fatigue" are being used more and more often. We are not sure how well people will collaborate over long periods of time if their primary interaction with one another is over messaging and video conferences.
- What fundamental changes to the way we manage and communicate with employees will be necessary in a more distributed environment? How will changes to management impact HR policies?

2. How might workspaces have to change, given social distancing now and moving forward?

Over the past several years, the trend in office space design has been to decrease the amount of personal space allotted to employees, while increasing the amount of shared

and collaborative spaces in the office environment. However, COVID-19 is impacting the way we think about personal and shared spaces:

- Reception areas might exclude seating, magazines, corporate swag, and other amenities that could contribute to the spread of the virus.
- Will benching systems, where people sit shoulder to shoulder at 4' desks, be acceptable?
- What is a reasonable density (employees per square foot) for office space design moving forward?
- Will large training rooms, where 50+ people are crowded together for demonstrations be replaced with virtual training?
- Are common coffee stations, water dispensers, and free snacks going to disappear for the foreseeable future? How will we deal with cafeterias and food services spaces?
- Will ancillary or breakout spaces have to be adjusted? At least for the foreseeable future, it seems impractical to share seating and table space with many different people through the course of the average day.

3. What protocols will businesses have to put in-place in order to safely transition back to working from the office, and how will this transition work?

Although most companies are anxious to get back to a new version of normal, there does not seem to be any common consensus as to how this will work. We assume, at a minimum:

- The return to work will be phased, and most offices will not operate at full density until such time as a vaccine or effective medication has been developed.
- Worktimes may be staggered along with lunch and break times to allow for less crowding and ongoing cleaning/sanitization to take place
- Policies around sick days will change – with mandatory work-from-home periods surrounding any COVID-like symptoms
- Businesses will likely want to augment their cleaning and sanitization practices, including potentially hiring full-time day-porters to ensure spaces which see a high volume of use are regularly sanitized.

- Should PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) be made available to employees in the office?
- Are leases going to change to include clauses that would defer rent in the case of a pandemic?
- How will we deal with crowded elevators, congested buses and full trains during rush-hour?
- Will landlords and businesses look for pandemic insurance to hedge against similar events happening in the future?

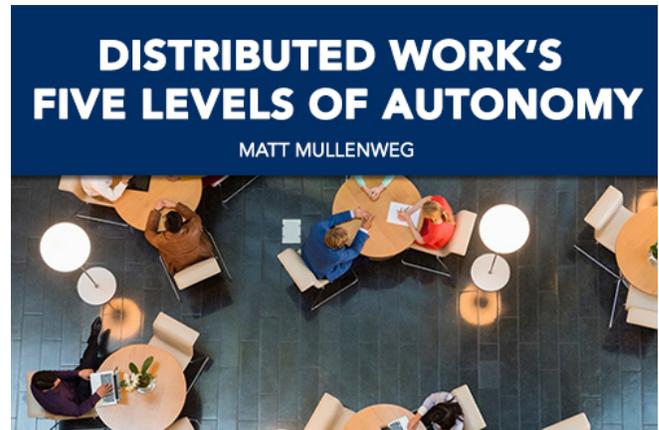
4. How should your landlord participate in creating a safe workspace?

Outside of tenant specific office spaces, what duty will apply to landlords to ensure buildings are safe?

- Will new standards arise for air exchanges and air filters?
- Will completely touchless (including doors) washrooms be mandatory?
- How will landlords manage other areas of their properties that involve touching of fixtures or crowding into elevators?
- How should cleaning and sanitization practices evolve?
- Better quality office properties routinely include large concourse areas with food halls and multiple food vendors. Will these areas be considered an amenity, or liability, in the coming months?

These are early days in this new reality and there do not appear to be common answers to the thought starters listed above as of this moment. Fortunately, businesses around the world are communicating about these issues. We expect that this global brain-storming will bring positive improvements to the way people work and collaborate with one another in the future.

For an informative podcast on the benefits of distributed work, and how to manage a distributed workforce, we recommend the following:



Don't hesitate to reach out to us for resources to assist in developing your workplace strategy moving forward.

Stay safe and healthy everyone. We will look forward to working with you in the future.

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