PREPARING FOR THE NEW MINDSET

PEOPLE, PLACE, AND PROCESS
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Few times in history have there been enormous changes on a global scale like we see today. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed each of us in ways not yet fully understood, and the psychological effects will unfold over time as we begin to return to our daily personal and professional lives. Though we still have much to learn, placing the wellness of people at the heart of any return-to-the-office response will be critical to business success.

Thus far, the pandemic response has focused on health and safety, essential services, and virtual work and learning. Human behavior has had to adjust dramatically over the last few months resulting in new societal and cultural norms formed out of a willingness to iterate and experiment. As companies prepare to reintegrate their employees with the physical office, these pressures and new mindsets will need to be carefully considered.

Confidence and clarity will be crucial to a safe and effective return to work experience. Employees will expect a human-centered approach that intensely focuses on wellness. They will also expect the workplace to either have been or be modified with appropriate safety and security measures that will carry beyond the current crisis. To rebuild trust, organizations can bring order to uncertainty with a clear and customized set of expectations and processes that support all constituents, thereby preparing the future office to perform as a catalyst for productivity, collaboration, and wellbeing.

Critical Areas of Focus

A workplace that offers comfort and wellbeing to employees, customers, partners, suppliers, stakeholders, and society at large takes thoughtfulness and preparation across all aspects of the business. Consider people, place, and process to deliver the best outcome.

**People**

Employees are the linchpin and foundation for every business. Organizations that put their peoples’ health, safety, and overall needs front and center will emerge faster, stronger, and more resilient.

**Place**

When employees, customers, and beyond re-enter the workplace, they will undoubtedly expect it to have changed to ensure heightened safety. However, they will also desire for it to return to a place of community, connectivity, and shared purpose.

**Process**

Employers that engage their people, communicate often, and streamline internal processes and procedures can deliver a workplace experience that allows their employees to do their jobs with confidence and excellence.
PEOPLE

PLANNING FOR THE UNKNOWN

There is no asset more valuable to an organization than its people. Now more than ever, employers must be acutely aware of what their employees individually need and be willing to meet them where they are. Furthermore, providing a holistic sense of wellbeing will become the new must-have standard for workplace environments.

The issues at hand are complex and will require thoughtful consideration around employees’ physical, emotional, and psychological wellbeing.

The workplace, wherever it may be, must also feature solutions that enhance the organization’s culture as well as boost overall productivity, respond to the evolution of work, and empower each individual in these uncertain times.

Physical
Beyond critical health + safety factors like the addition of touchless features, reduced spatial densities, increased air quality/ventilation, and improved cleaning + disinfecting protocols, it will be crucial to implement several other workplace criteria that center around the welfare of the individual.

Emotional
The great pause has allowed people to slow down and find parts of themselves that were perhaps forgotten, often through increased meditative or flow-inducing activities such as gardening, baking, painting, and forms of exercise. The health benefits found from these stimulating cognitive activities are extensive and will need to be both encouraged and supported by employers.

Psychological
The psychological impacts of a global pandemic are hard to predict; the story will continue to unfold as workers venture back out into the physical world of work. Each person will have experienced the pandemic differently and will bring that viewpoint back to the office.
To that end, employers will need to take special care to understand the mental wellbeing of each employee and offer a positive, clear, and confident workplace re-entry experience.

Cultural
When employees positively experience, engage, and connect with a thriving workforce and company culture, they often feel a greater sense of individual purpose and community appreciation. Employers will need to create opportunities and places that build solidarity, reinforce and redefine evolving culture-based expectations, and be mindful of embracing flexibility when needed and provide workplace choices.

WORKPLACE CONSIDERATIONS

Keeping people at the forefront of workplace decision-making comes with a number of challenges and accommodations to consider. Both employers and employees are having to ideate, innovate, and experiment together with a common goal of finding a new normal in an abnormal world. It will be essential to adjust the lens in which we see the world and consider alternate realities and concepts. To implement a successful human-centric plan, it would be critical to examine the following:

✓ Diversity and inclusion of the workforce
✓ Requirements to do one’s job, regardless of place
✓ Changing attitudes and expectations on wellness
✓ Employees’ need for safety, happiness, and camaraderie
✓ Changing real estate footprints to support health, safety, and wellbeing
✓ Ability to offer a variety of space types, added flexibility, and user choice in the workplace
✓ Evolution of in-office and remote focus ME spaces
✓ Evolution of shared community WE + US spaces
✓ De-densification and shift-work planning for the short-term and long-term
✓ Use traffic flow strategies to support physical distancing
✓ Indoor air quality and HVAC upgrades
✓ Use of outdoor spaces to support work and wellness
✓ Shared food and beverage protocols
✓ Sanitation cadence and visual cues signaling cleanliness
✓ Temperature check and PPE protocols
✓ Communication of wayfinding, safety, and cleanliness protocols

PLAN PREVENTATIVE PROTOCOLS

As an added focus on employee wellbeing at work, organizations should also consider implementing a robust preventative protocol plan.

Promote good hygiene and socially responsible behavior to prevent virus transmission
Boost employee immunity system as the first line of defense against infectious disease
Upgrade and manage indoor air quality
Incorporate health into the built environment
Implement active stress management techniques

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NOW, NEAR, AND NEXT

The way the world is thinking about work has changed. Companies will need to roll up their sleeves to embrace the unknown, empower the human spirit, and reimagine their future. Now more than ever, they will need to retrofit and redefine places of work and craft the now, near, and next.

Like the economy, returning to the workplace will almost certainly happen in waves. Organizations should prudently rely on guidance from governmental agencies, orders, and rules regarding best practices and initial workplace safety measures. Both employers and employees should expect some stress and unfamiliarity during each step of the re-entry process. Clear communication of expectations during each phase will help manage the transition for all stakeholders.

Now
To help ensure immediate success, employers will want to establish a re-entry task force and proactively assess workplace risks for the good of their employees. It will be essential to plan controlled entry points, temperature check stations, traffic flow patterns, density goals, furniture retrofits, and enhanced cleaning protocols to demonstrate the care and concern employees are looking for. Employers will want to expeditiously make any modifications necessary to ensure employees feel safe and secure when they first arrive back to the office.

Near
With time, most people will have returned to the office, and employees will continue to gain comfort and confidence in near-term processes and procedures. It will be necessary for employers to consistently reexamine work functions, flexibility expectations, and employee wellbeing measures to continuously provide an optimum experience. Workplaces may need to redesign their space to offer the right mix of longer-term wellness programs, flexible workplace settings, technological enhancements, and safety expectations.

Next
Through the course of this crisis, the human spirit has had to adapt and overcome hardship by radically developing new success strategies time and again. This innovative spirit will also catalyze the future of work and a need to reimagine where and how work happens. As paradigms shift from real estate costs and densities to the performance of people and their safety and wellness, we will likely see an accelerated shift toward a more flexible, remote-friendly, and impact-focused workplace.

Retrofit, Redesign, and Reimagine

As employees prepare to head back to office environments across the globe, companies are actively redefining their workplaces to provide a critical sense of safety to their employees.

With a focus on employee wellness, social distancing, and enhanced sanitation, they are quickly retrofitting their physical offices as well as providing virtual solutions that support work, wherever it happens.

Moving forward, successful organizations will need to focus on reimaging work and nurture the notion of place beyond the “office”. STRATEGIES FOR SUCCESS

Voice of the People
Engage with and survey employees to gain a clear understanding of work and workplace wants, needs, and desires.

First Impressions
As the saying goes, “You get one chance to make a first impression”. Consider what the first experience may feel like from the moment employees and guests approach the building to the time they exit.

User Flow
Determine the most natural one-way traffic routes to common workplace destinations like workstations, restrooms, cafeterias, and conference rooms. Be aware of and mitigate circulation pinch points.

Power of Biophilia
Humans have an innate attraction to nature and natural processes. Consider incorporating biophilic elements through access to natural light, environmental features, materials and textiles, and added greenery.

Adequate Distance
Deploy workforce phasing, spatial separation, and environmental graphic strategies to achieve 6’ physical distancing between employees to help mitigate the spread of pathogens.

Sense of Separation
Use screens, storage units, and dividers to increase barriers and provide a greater understanding of safety through the separation of people in the open plan.

Celebrate Culture
Utilize workplace signage, return to work protocols, employee etiquette guidelines, and communication interactions to tangibly demonstrate company culture.
As a critical first step to successfully plan for employee re-entry, employers should proactively study, assess, and identify key workplace risks, including the following considerations:

- **Entry and Exit Points**
  How many entrances/exits are necessary to accommodate your workforce. Will a phased approach be required to support start-time efficiencies?

- **Temperature Screening**
  What are your at-home and in-office temperature checking protocols?

- **UV Sanitation Stations**
  Are you providing additional sanitation stations for shoes, phones, personal caddies, etc.?

- **PPE and/or Hand Hygiene Stations**
  What are your employee protocols for PPE and hygiene? How will you communicate, remind, and reinforce these?

- **Personal Screens and Space Dividers**
  Do you need additional screens and dividers to help achieve separation and physical distancing throughout ME, WE, and US spaces?

- **Six Foot Physical Distancing**
  How will you ensure physical distances are kept throughout each phase of re-entry? Will you need to adjust the furniture?

- **Circulation Paths**
  What paths will users take throughout the workplace? Are there opportunities to highlight biophilic elements?

- **Circulation Pinch Points**
  Where are the small spaces, narrow corridors, elevators, or staircases? How can you mitigate risk in each area?

- **Restrooms**
  Do restrooms pose a proximity challenge? Are they adequately equipped with touchless doors and sanitation hardware?
**Furniture Considerations**

**ME SPACES**
- Whether working alone or working alone together, individual workspaces help employees focus. Consider adding dividers and screens to provide additional separation and help alleviate employee anxiety in both the open plan and private offices.
- Offering a variety of secluded areas of respite can help promote employee wellness and mindfulness.

**WE SPACES**
- Coming together as a team to solve problems is still a foundational element of the office. Remove seating to accommodate physical distancing requirements while promoting team-centric space.

**US SPACES**
- In the beginning phases of employee return, consider repurposing a community gathering space for temporary product storage.
Considerations to Retrofit and Redesign

- UV Sanitation Station
- PPE and/or Hand Hygiene Station
- Personal Screens and Space Dividers
- Six Foot Physical Distancing
- Circulation Path

Furniture Considerations

US SPACES

- Cafés provide a space for both bodily nourishment and social interaction.
- Add separation and distance markers between spaces to allow full utilization by employees.
- Consider incorporating biophilic design interventions such as plants and access to natural light throughout the workplace to add a layer of wellness and connection to nature.

- Providing a specific wellness destination is critical to delivering health protection for a business’s most valuable asset, its people.
- Furniture that is warm and comfortable can ease employee stress and uncertainty while gaining employer trust.
Considerations to Retrofit and Redesign

- Temperature Screening Kiosk
- UV Sanitation Station
- PPE and/or Hand Hygiene Station
- Personal Screens and Space Dividers
- Six Foot Physical Distancing
- Circulation Path

Furniture Considerations

US SPACES

- Reception and lobby areas provide a space for fellowship, creating a welcoming sense of community. These areas can be retrofitted and rearranged to allow for both physical distancing and communal engagement.
- Controlled entry points not only help set the tone for first impressions but can also serve as initial safety points for temperature screening, UV sanitation, and PPE distribution.

Furniture Considerations

US SPACES

- With camaraderie and connection noted as the most missed aspects of daily office life, providing safe yet friendly social spaces to rebuild a sense of community will be critical for workers returning to the workplace.
PLAN AND PREPARE

COVID-19 has forced all stakeholders to reestablish the ways we work, reimagine how we interact, and realign our priorities. Companies must embrace new working models and safety guidelines while providing a place of comfort and community. Perhaps not as obvious but still vitally important, employers must place humans at the center of every workplace process they modify or create. Beyond that, it’s crucial to communicate the changes effectively and why following them are mission-critical. Employers should consider the following:

**PROCESS**

**Update/Expand Crisis Management and Business Continuity Plans**

Companies that develop a crisis management plan can identify potential threats before they become problematic. By taking the time to attempt to prevent or reduce loss, businesses are more apt to recover in a crisis. Taking it a step further and planning for business continuity, companies can build confidence among their employees, business partners, and customers.

**Appoint a Designated Crisis Team and Re-entry Task Force**

Assembling a COVID-19 crisis team and task force helps employers proactively combat workplace-related issues while remaining in compliance with federal, state, and local employment laws. It can also provide support for employment-related problems while boosting morale and engagement among workers.

**Create An Effective Communication and Change Management Plan**

During this time of uncertainty, employers should expect their employees to have questions about everything from remote work protocols to what to plan for lunch on their first day back to the office. During this transition period, employers should provide timely, useful advice, and frequently communicate, setting the tone from the top. This critical plan can alleviate concerns, build trust, and help employees gain the confidence to return to more standard business operations.

**Implement Remote Work Protocols and Resources**

From the onset of this pandemic, employers and employees have had to quickly shift to remote work, where possible. With this sudden and necessary move, in-office operations were abandoned, and new expectations and efficiencies were gained. Now, as businesses resume activities in the general office setting, employees have a myriad of questions and concerns that employers will need to answer and clarify. The demand for remote and flexible work has been consistently building for decades. Employees have been making it work for the past two months, and they are likely going to expect their leadership to give significant consideration toward this subject going forward. As there is still no one-size-fits-all approach, each company will need to craft their remote work guidelines and protocols to be both operationally supporting and, more importantly, employee-centric.

**Determine Cleaning, Safety, and Hygiene Protocols**

This pandemic has brought a newly heightened awareness to cleanliness, sanitation, and hygiene. As employers prepare to return to the office, their wellness, health, and safety must continue to be the driving factor and focus. Companies will want to consider new daily and nightly cleaning protocols while also reviewing how their staff will positively experience these added thorough measures. Employers may need to implement temperature check stations as well as further sanitation and hygiene measures within the office.

**Create a Respectful Atmosphere and Promote Company Culture with Business Etiquette**

Business etiquette can serve to improve communication and create a mutually respectful atmosphere while promoting the company culture. As employees return to the office, it will be essential to help each individual understand what to expect as they and their peers move about the space. For example, companies will want to communicate PPE expectations, shared space protocols, visitor regulations, physical distancing expectations, and personal hygiene guidelines. Companies with an etiquette guide already in place will want to consider communicating an addendum that focuses on the changes put in place.
Workplace signage can play a lead role in the employee return to workplace experience. When approached with a storytelling mentality, signage helps create a beneficial relationship between people and place.

With clear, concise, and friendly visual reminders, workplace signage helps employees understand what is expected of themselves and their peers as they move throughout the space. It can also help calm fears and deliver an additional layer of confidence and trust in the employer.

Employers have a unique opportunity to implement a signage solution that motivates their people, enhances their workplace, and celebrates their culture while crafting the now, near, and next.

**Six-foot Distance**

Please help us practice Social Distancing by maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from others.

**Elevator**

Single Occupancy

Please help us maintain 6-foot Social Distancing by observing our temporary single-occupancy elevator guidelines.

**Maximum Occupancy in This Area**

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Please help us maintain 6-foot Social Distancing by observing our temporary limited-occupancy guidelines in this area.

**Temperature Check Station**

Please help us practice Social Distancing by maintaining a distance of at least 6 feet from others.

**Wash Your Hands**

Please follow best hand-washing practices by washing your hands thoroughly and often for at least 20 seconds.

**Wearing a Mask**

Please properly wear a mask covering your mouth and nose anytime you are unable to maintain 6 feet of physical distance.
BUSINESS CONTINUITY PREPARATION

Events such as COVID-19 have brought forward the importance of a business continuity plan and keeping these fresh and ready for implementation. These small but critical steps can be an opportunity for employers to build both business resiliency and employee loyalty.

Planning methodologies captured in the continuity plan should center on physical upgrades, such as technology tools, work from home furniture, and stock of PPE and other safety equipment. Regarding people-centric strategies, employers should consider onboarding and coaching, virtual wellness programs, and virtual cultural enhancements.

With a business continuity plan in place, employers can demonstrate the ability to continuously adapt, respond to new information and challenges, and ultimately provide for the emotional, psychological, and physical health of their employees.

CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REVISITING YOUR BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN

CREATE AN OPPORTUNITY TO BUILD RESILIENCY AND EMPLOYEE LOYALTY

What steps should be taken in the event of a future crisis?

- Work from Home Support
  - Technology (cloud, wi-fi, virtual platforms)
  - Scheduling: flexible working hours
  - Communications
  - Work environment

- Business Continuity Plan
  - Health and safety prevention measures
  - Mobilized response team
  - Robust wellness program
  - Stocked hand sanitizer, masks, disinfectant wipes

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THE WAY THE WORLD IS THINKING ABOUT WORK HAS CHANGED,
AND WE’RE ROLLING UP OUR SLEEVES TO REDESIGN THE FUTURE.

We’re redefining the places we work—the office, health, education and now more than ever, the home. We will retrofit your existing products, redesign your spaces, and reimagine what’s next. As changemakers, we have a history of reinventing ourselves. We embrace the unknown and empower the human spirit through integrity, determination, and an eye toward what lies ahead. Together, we’ll craft the now, the near, and the next.