

THE POST-PANDEMIC WORKPLACE

The COVID19 pandemic is accelerating major shifts in the way we work. Adoption of smart workplace technologies and creative solutions could help firms persuade their reluctant employees to return to office under the new normal, while also elevating their workplace experience for the future.

THE FUTURE WORKPLACE – A POST PANDEMIC PERSPECTIVE

The sustained global pandemic caused by COVID19 is disrupting the modern workplace, in many cases undoing years of efforts to build office environments that foster a work culture, impress clients, and most importantly ensure comfort and wellness. As lockdowns and shelter-in-place orders are relaxed, the workplaces to which employees and visitors are accustomed are being transformed to follow health guidelines and promote health safety, overriding the trend to optimize office spaces for collaboration and comfort. While some staff may take it in their stride and return, a large contingent of the workforce is more reluctant.

To expedite the return to normalcy, many employers are developing experimental approaches to update their office experience for the short term, while others have considered this an opportunity to make much-needed strategic changes. Such strategic thinking may be the difference in being able to retain and attract talent, as remote work options could become commonplace perks in the post-pandemic marketplace.

We have identified a set of enhancements and solutions that have been implemented very effectively at institutions that have adopted a strategic approach. The solutions detailed below should serve as a guide to strengthening your return-to-work strategy and set course for developing an enhanced workplace for the future.

TOUCHLESS ACCESS

Touch-free access provides peace of mind and reduces risk of transmitting disease. For an office building that could mean evaluating touchless solutions for physical infrastructure, such as doors, turnstiles and elevators. Depending on the size of the office, volume of staff and visitors, as well as prevailing security protocols, there may be merit in exploring solutions such as:

- **Touchless turnstile and door access**
The need for touchless access begins right at the door for many offices. Technologies can be deployed which allow for an RFID access badge to activate and open turnstiles or doors to an office building. In some advanced solutions, employees can even activate building access through biometrics by just waving their hand over the sensor.
- **QR Code based external visitor entry**
Visitors have lined up at a reception desk to be issued badges and sometimes escorted to

their destinations for generations, but now there are visitor management solutions available that can email a QR code to the registered visitor to serve as a limited-time access pass to validate entry. Displaying the QR code at the appropriate access points can activate turnstiles and call elevators as well, which will guide a visitor to the appropriate building floor.

- **Mobile or access card-based elevator**
Smart elevators are in place in many green buildings these days, which can allow the passenger to pick a floor and be guided to a specific elevator based on volume of riders instead of overcrowding into a single elevator. However, for a truly touchless experience, there may be a need for employing QR code readers or RFID scanners as a component of the automated elevator solution to be able reading of visitor passes or employee access cards to call an elevator without need for any buttons to be pressed.

CONTROLLED WORKSPACES

Many firms are employing creative solutions to space utilization challenges in the midst of the pandemic that could enable successful and optimal utilization of the new workspace.

- **Workspace Mapping**
There may be efficiencies in allowing some teams to continue to work from home even after the offices reopen and occasionally visit the office for important meetings or workshops. Flexible workspaces may be identified for these remote employees to use as temporary offices only on days they visit the office. A successful implementation of this approach requires a thorough mapping of each office space on the floor, flexible or otherwise, and developing a detailed floor plan with all office spaces clearly marked by a unique locator ID. Additionally, tagging tech resources available at each workspace will allow employees to search availability by required resources.
- **On-Demand Workspace Scheduler**
The mapped workspaces can be served up on a scheduler via a mobile app or digital signage onsite to display what workspaces are available for a visiting employee to book for the day. Such on-demand scheduling will help ensure that only the booked spaces are activated for employee usage for the day and such selective activation will help ensure efficient application of the pandemic health guidelines.

- **Sanitization Status**
A key guideline for restricting the spread of disease is sanitizing surfaces and objects that may have been in contact with another person, so it is critical to assure employees that their workspaces have been sanitized prior to their arrival. Putting in place a solution that updates the workspace locator to flag workspaces that have been sanitized will encourage employees to better leverage the on-demand workspace.
- **Limit Unwanted Solicitation**
While it is common in offices to walk up to someone's desk and ask for assistance locating someone, or even walk around the floor trying to locate a person, such solicitation and search has been unwelcome under the pandemic climate. This could be resolved with solutions that update a booked or assigned workspace with the employee's name and provide it to a colleague or visitor, perhaps via an app, so that people may easily locate where someone sits and get to their location with the least amount of interaction with others.

ENHANCED COLLABORATION SPACES

In the post-pandemic offices, meeting rooms could become a critical point of concern for employees. While most have figured out ways to collaborate via Zoom, Teams, WebEx, and other platforms, there is certainly value in engaging in-person, especially for critical client deliveries and interactive training sessions.

- **Upgrade Meeting Tech**
At the onset of the pandemic many firms were forced to pick online meeting platforms that enabled their employees to work from home. It is now critical to ensure that the technology in the office meeting rooms can integrate seamlessly with these platforms to accommodate those still working remotely. This may require a review of the AV tech and security protocols to enable this integration.
- **Locating Meeting Rooms**
Mechanisms should also be in place to guide attendees to meeting rooms with minimal interaction with others. This could be achieved by leveraging digital floor maps located around the footprint, or directions automatically included in meeting invites.
- **Meeting Room Digital Signage**
Some firms already utilize digital signage outside the meeting room to display information about the ongoing meeting. This could be integrated with additional technologies such as the meeting room scheduling application, motion sensors in the

room, as well as the room sanitization status to provide real-time information outside meeting rooms.

SELF-SERVE CAFETERIA

Given the increased restrictions around food service and new guidelines for community dining, there is value in re-planning the cafeteria services to, for example, provide pre-packaged food, allow self-service, and limit cashier interactions. A few solutions that should be considered are:

- **Pre-Order Pre-Pay**
This solution allows employees to look up the menu of offerings and pre-order their meals from the café, complete payment, and be alerted when their food is ready for pickup. There are many commercial solutions in the market, used predominantly by restaurants and coffee shops, which are now available for office cafeterias to minimize waiting time and interaction with cashiers.
- **Grab and Go Stations**
This strategy is useful for sections of the cafeteria that sell pre-made and pre-packaged food. These stations could also be equipped with payment systems, similar to vending machines, allowing the food purchaser to pay immediately at the point of sale.
- **Self-Serve Checkout**
Like many grocery stores, these cashier-less checkout counters are being implemented in many office cafeterias and are a great solution for a post-pandemic scenario to ensure safety of the cashiers as well as employees and visitors. These solutions employ technology that allows the food purchaser to scan and weigh food items and make payments without the need for a cashier.

INTEGRATED WORKPLACE APP

All of these technologies and practices can be accessed and managed through an integrated workplace experience portal or app. Some of the benefits of this approach include:

- Ability to provide a singular experience to all employees and visitors worldwide
- Enable employees and visitors to provide health and self-certification prior to entering the building
- Provide location-based information such as directions to meeting rooms, cafeterias, and restrooms, as well as help to locate workspaces
- Provide transparency on the safety features put in place by sharing real time data on workspace sanitization info, restroom hygiene

tracking, indoor air quality metrics, employee temperature tracking information, etc.

- Allow employers to share critical health information or alerts
- Enable facilities staff to moderate or stagger arrival times for employees or visitors to maintain recommended count of people at the lobbies, cafeterias, and elevator banks
- Integrate ability for contactless entry via QR code, as well as locate elevators
- Provide floor maps and workspace availability, as well as ability to locate colleagues on a floor
- Ability to map the appropriate cafeteria for the specific building and present relevant menu to enable pre-order and pre-pay
- Serve as a platform for integrating future solutions that will continue to enhance the workplace.

SUMMARY

Implementation of one or more of these solutions will enable a smoother transition for employees to the office, and also add resiliency to your overall workplace, setting you up for adoption of newer technology and best practices that will continue to evolve as a result of the pandemic. While cities and civic authorities are preparing to reactivate the transportation, logistics and operations outside the

office to enable office goers and commuters to return to work safely, employers must also have their own return to work strategy in place, of which a comprehensive workplace strategy is a key component.

Though we have discussed these workplace enhancements in the backdrop of the pandemic, these solutions provide benefits that go far beyond the narrow application of addressing the new rules of post pandemic social engagement. Each of these solutions drives value for any firm that may be developing a new office or upgrading their existing office space. These solutions cater to evolving employee preferences and are meant to enable a future workplace where employees and visitors have improved control of their work environment, while the employer realizes gains through operational efficiencies from advanced technology and best practices.

Satori has helped multiple clients operationalize the above strategies and solutions to deliver an automated, controlled and efficient future workplace strategy.

For more information please contact our team at: info@satoriconsulting.com

ABOUT SATORI CONSULTING

Satori Consulting is a management consulting firm founded in 2002. We are committed to enabling our clients to address their most pressing issues to create value and maximize impact. For more than 18 years, we have helped clients successfully manage increased competitive, economic, and regulatory pressures.

We deploy small teams of highly experienced consultants practiced in the arts of flexibility, efficiency, and collaboration. Our professionals work to manage programs and complex projects, refine business strategies and optimize processes, organizations, and technologies. Our sensitivity to each client's risk tolerance, corporate culture and situational constraints enables us to deliver results that meet our clients' specific needs and generate lasting value.