

**WHITE PAPER:**

# Thriving in a Pandemic Workplace: Managing the Socially Distant Workplace

The COVID-19 pandemic has simultaneously changed the rules and created a new opportunity to adapt the way we do things. Technology, process, and workplace must adapt to a new set of norms and people must change their behaviors while exploring new opportunities for growth. In one sense, this is an exciting time that will define the future ways of doing what we do. Yet, the uncertainty and risks evident in today's world pose challenges that we have never experienced before. Now is the time to develop SPECIAL solutions that will bridge today's reality with an exciting new future.

## Managing The Socially Distant Workplace

**The Center for Disease Control (CDC)** recommends six feet of distance between people and the use of face masks to help prevent the spread of disease from person to person. In a modern workplace, specific application of social distancing practices will drive occupancy levels for workplaces large and small. I anticipate that real estate brokers and interior designers will suggest higher square footage per person and define what is owned and shared quite differently.

This new approach to workplace design also requires a different understanding of work process, working courtesy, and how we approach routine tasks. The positive outcome of this is increased productivity with a more intentional approach that optimizes the work process of individuals and teams. It also forces an emphasis on team outcomes in a new way of doing things.

Here are some workplace guidelines to consider:



- **Apply purpose to each workspace.** A COVID-prepared workplace offers a range of choices in the type, size, and privacy applied to each work setting. The purpose of each space drives how your team will utilize the space efficiently.
- **Develop scheduling and sharing practices.** This ensures appropriate distancing and helps the end user to choose the work environment that works best for them.
- **Revise or create workplace capacity requirements.** Workers should know when the work environment is “full” and when to seek alternative locations in case of peak usage.

## Engagement Is Key

There is a sort of honeymoon period after moving to an alternative working arrangement. It is great to be so close to your home life while working. You feel a complete sense of independence, you find new ways to perform routine tasks...for (perhaps) the first time, you can engage with your colleagues and supervisors in whatever way you choose. They are not hovering over your work and pay more attention to your outcome quality instead of process efficiency. At some point, this breaking-in period starts to lose its luster.

Leading this kind of change requires a renewed approach to employee relations while increasing the focus on work engagement, satisfaction and communication. Below are some ideas to consider:

- **Everything great should be celebrated.** Provide an outlet to share best practices in an informal setting. Help everyone on your team know and feel that we are working through this time together and that it is important to celebrate success. This may require a casual Microsoft Teams or Slack channel that enables open communication between groups of people. By the way, do not be surprised if these channels don't include the boss at first. Keep up to date without being involved directly...over time, sharing will increase.



- **Use video connections when possible.** The decision to turn on your video while meeting online is a small idea; however, the face-to-face contact is very important. When you see faces and body language, you create and sustain your memory of the conversation. This “social capital” helps create new ideas and benefits future innovation within your firm.
- **Protect and educate end users.** Unfortunately, in times of crisis, there are unscrupulous individuals who look to take advantage of unprepared companies and individuals. The number of cyberattacks in the immediate aftermath of the pandemic increased and focused almost exclusively on the COVID-19 crisis. These crimes take advantage of the fears and vulnerability of people and unprotected home systems. It is important to educate everyone to a level of understanding and protection from harm. This might include phishing simulations, customized training and education, online learning, or some combination over time. Getting this right, especially in today's world, is extremely important.
- **Find each team members' currency.** Employee recognition is vitally important in these kinds of work arrangements. It is easy to fall into a trap of not knowing if you are doing what is expected since you do not have the same level of daily connections in an office. Each team member has a different preference for recognition—financial, professional certifications and training, public recognition, and private reinforcement. There are other ways to recognize as well—the important point here is to find the way that works for each individual and be generous in providing what each part of your team really needs.

## Conclusion

In the future, we will coalesce into a new order of work in life post-COVID. Those who demonstrate strategic and servant leadership—while making the best use of people, process and technology—will prevail. Do not lose sight of the power that comes with integration of these three cornerstones of business and, above all, remember these three important concepts:

1. Engagement with your clients and team will lead to productivity in the future.
2. Workplace and technology are support tools dependent upon your unique business design.
3. Focus more on outcomes and less on process, especially while physically distant.

While it is true that we are “all in this together,” it is not true that we all have the same “this.” Pay close attention to the integration of people, process and technology and your business will **THRIVE!**

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