



CORENET GLOBAL

VIRTUAL POP UP

A pop in community for **corporate real estate professionals**

Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways

26 March 2020

What is the single biggest immediate challenge you are facing in your role right now?

- From my perspective, and in what I do, which is primarily business development with a major service provider for occupier clients, is being able to have dialogue with clients. Most of our clients are focused on prioritizing their employer and employees, so right now they're focused on that operational response to this new world and this new economy vs. what's next for them.
- I work for a furniture manufacturer in a business development role, and in the current ever-changing situation it is difficult to respond to clients, and even internally, as to what our next steps are and when we'll be able to get things to our customers. Human interaction is lacking now, and it's unfortunate that we cannot have that. We are trying to give good feedback to our customers and to other entities in our business, but it is challenging to do so with limited resources.
- We're an architectural and design firm, and we also do construction. As we have seen this pandemic move from Asia to Europe, the biggest challenge we have seen is that decision makers who sit in other regions have been very slow to react. Another challenge is lack of supply chain. Here in London, we have essentially locked down infrastructure, but we have not shut down construction sites. Our challenge is to get workers in there in a safe way and deliver projects for clients.

Did your company have a plan in place to deal with a pandemic?

- We did not. And I would be surprised if others did have such a plan. There are business continuity plans, but we did not have plans for something like this, which is a truly global event. We and many others have been struggling as a result of that. Crisis management calls are happening constantly, and it's an ever-changing thing. Another challenge is the fact that messaging about the crisis is taking place differently in the various regions at different sites. I have gotten to know a lot of people in our business over the past couple of weeks, given all the calls. When we get back to a normal state, we will have a lot of lessons learned from this.
- We've had some pandemic stuff in our plans since perhaps 10 years ago, when swine flu was the hot topic. But it was pretty much shelved at that time and never revisited.

Will this crisis create fundamental change in the workplace? In open plan workplaces?

- I was discussing this very question recently with a friend (over Skype). Will people change the way they work as a result of this? If we were to solve the coronavirus in three months' time, would we go back to the way we were? It might be that all this has come on too quickly to really change people.
- This is a very timely topic. The question about working from home is very situational, and very regional. In the San Francisco Bay area, there was a movement that enabled more work from home, mainly because of the commute times and the traffic, plus just staying competitive in the marketplace in attracting talent. I know that a lot of our counterparts I've talked to in the Bay Area

are already set up that way or are trending that way. I think it will have a long-lasting effect and a net positive effect. People can use their time more efficiently and not spend so much time commuting. An hour and a half, one way, is just an average commute in many cases. But many places are not set up to do this; in some places there is no concept of a work-from-home policy. The technology infrastructure must be there. I think the work-from-home situation will be relatively long lasting and will force us to rethink our need for workspace and how our workplaces are configured. We will see less open plan and more opportunities for single-use space (not offices, just single-use space). The situation we are in has forced us to rethink all this.

- We've been talking about this a lot here in Texas. Agile working is starting to come into the marketplace. There will be some real estate reduction, because that's the way real estate is already going. With these agile workspaces, you don't need as much space as we've always thought. Maybe it's a combination of a bit more closed-off settings as well as these agile settings. Maybe occupancy in the 60 percent range vs. the 75 to 80 percent that's often used.
- We are in the process of delivering our headquarters building in New York. We are starting to get notifications from our furniture suppliers that shipments are being delayed. In parallel, we are in the planning stages of working with our architect for a big campus in Charlotte. We have put 5' benches in New York, and we're already getting questions about whether we need 6' benches instead, or 6 x 6 workstations. We are assuming that six feet of separation will be required. We actually scaled back remote working last year. Our leadership has doubled down on this, and they are insisting on continuing to have people in the office. So, what are the implications for us in terms of cleaning and so on? These are the conversations we are starting to engage with our HR partners about. We are pushing our architectural partners to help us with this.

Are you developing temperature screening protocols for employees who come into an office space?

- We are implementing temperature screenings for people who will be going into our campuses. We are seeking guidance we can give our employees and advice on who can come back to the office and who should continue working remotely.

Anything else? What's ahead?

- I think the UK and the US are just catching up now. They're probably four to five weeks behind the reality that Italy and Spain, and France to some extent, have come into. When the US goes into a complete lockdown, all this talk about workspace could go away in a matter of days.

About CoreNet Global

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