CORENET GLOBAL
VIRTUAL POP UP
A pop in community for **corporate real estate professionals**

Pop-Up Webinar: Key Takeaways

23 April 2020

Does anyone have a date for returning to the office?

- We do not have a date specifically, but we just started two separate working groups on this topic in New Jersey. We have started the planning process and we are looking at the end of June.

- We need a minimum of three weeks to prepare the workplace following the lift of Shelter in Place orders.

- With the latest guidance from Harris County that all people must wear masks until the end of May, that will impact plans on how people go back to work in our community.

What about the proportion of employees to bring back initially?

- We anticipate about 10 percent returning in each wave.

- We will have about 10 to 15 percent initially, and we are targeting mid- to late June.

- Only essential workers will return in the first wave, and then we will have people on an every-other-week schedule.

- People working from home cannot come into the office until their assigned wave comes up.

- Has anyone seen that study proposing a 14-day cycle in which people are divided into two sets and, on alternating weeks, go to work for four days and then are locked down for 10 days?

- The advantage in coming back to the office is to collaborate more directly. If we divide up into teams with assigned dates, we are creating a hurdle for collaboration. Some of our managers

are saying that their teams will continue working from home until we are 100 percent ready to return to the office.

- One of the challenges is meeting rooms. You will not want to have too many people in meeting rooms in order to provide social distancing. It probably will be easier to do those meetings remotely vs. in person for now. Our view is that we will be at about 10 percent when we go back. Our company is not eager to be on the leading edge of this. We will take whatever time is needed, and we have not set a date yet for returning.

- We ae looking at floor plans already and talking about doing a blue team and a green team, with each occupying certain space as a first step, then providing lists of names for who sits on which one. And then providing that to managers: does this work for you? One of the models coming back is Monday-Tuesday for the blue team and Wednesday-Thursday for the green team, with no one in the office on Friday. If new cases emerge, this setup will be better than previously when we were thinking of a different schedule. We will be met with the reality that with schools closed and so on, not everyone will be able to show up on their assigned dates anyway.

Do people feel they are working more hours now that they are working from home? Is working from home proving to be effective?

- Yes, people get up and start working. I work more from home than I do at the office. There is no travel time involved.

- In areas with long commute times, you get more done working from home.

- I am finding working from home more distracting and less productive.

- I find working from home less productive. My team wants to be back in the office. One day per week to catch up working from home would be fine.

- But there might be no childcare for a while yet.

- Childcare and summer camps will be a challenge if both parents are working.

- Our team has been able to maintain productivity so far because we are typically working via video most of the time anyway with our global partners.

- We have two camps in our company. Our supply chain people and engineers are saying 'why do want to come back to the office if I am going to be less productive there? Why do I want to be in a conference room as one of three people when the other seven are remote?' People can roll out of bed and start working. I think the workday gets expanded. If you have older kids like I do, they are just on autopilot with all this distributed learning. On the other hand, people with younger children cannot just switch on their laptops and say, 'see you in six hours.' We have had

some parents say, 'I can take that call, but let's do it early or late.' We are seeing a broadening of the day to accommodate people's individual situations.

- Most of our engineers are doing a pretty good job working from home, but anybody who has a younger child is disadvantaged. I have 2 ½ year-old twins. I am working more hours, but I am working harder, not smarter.

- Now that I am in week 6 of quarantine, I am finding ways to be more efficient and going back to trying harder to step away from my computer to focus on family at the end of the workday. It felt like the harder, not smarter, was taking over the first couple of weeks.

- Work-life boundaries are challenged by constantly working from home.

- Honestly, I am not self-disciplined enough to continually work from home. Our office is close by anyway.

- My company just sent out a Leesman Working at Home Assessment Tool. We just completed that and will get the results back soon. Mainly it asks about your workspace at home to determine who can work efficiently from home.

- It is not just the nature of your workplace or your home, but also your job, whether it is collaborative, and your personality. All these factors influence whether you can work well remotely.

- And it might be that your job functions could be done from home, but your technology is not adequate.

- Our engineers need to be in the technology labs to work with equipment directly.

- We have incorporated periodic stress and exercise calls with our corporate health and safety vendor.

What about ergonomic accommodations while working from home?

- We have an ergonomic program. Everyone is working on kitchen tables, but most people do not have an appropriate office that has the right ergonomics. If we were to mandate that half our firm can work from home, we will have to think about the capital expenditures that will be necessary to outfit them.

- Some smaller organizations have done something minimal, purchasing wireless keyboards and mice and maybe laptop stands.

- We have outfitted everybody with the technology they need – almost 3,000 people. If they did not have something, we gave it to them. We also hosted a great ergonomics session. We had

over 100 participants, and only two people asked for an accommodation. We are not giving any stipends for home offices, and we are not letting people take their task chairs home. It opens too many questions about how they will transport them and so on.

- My concern with allowing furniture removal is this: how will they be brought back? There is the cost to disinfect, and the potential for bed bugs is real in NYC.

- One of our offices is going to set a clean room when they bring furniture back to disinfect it.

- I have seen so many commercials on CNN and CNBC for ergonomic chairs delivered for $150 or $200. I am working from a kitchen island.

- I am with a moving company in San Francisco. We are going out and bringing people chairs and sit-stand desks for no-touch home delivery. There are companies that have requested us to bring out 200 chairs for delivery in the parking lot, and then the employees come and pick them up.

- We provided a $250 stipend for work at home.

- We did the same, a $250 stipend to all employees.

- We are providing up to $400 in our company.

- We gave a $150 stipend for this.

- We are providing $50/month for internet.

- We have a budget for purchasing items to expense.

- Our IT department is trying to determine how to distribute existing equipment if this lasts much longer. Allowing people to come in just to grab their desktop equipment such as monitors, keyboards, etc.

- There is a potential liability if someone gets hurt using company furniture at home. We have used a stipend for home-based employees for years.

- Our company was insanely generous with $1,000 for each employee for equipment, improved internet, and/or donations to charitable organizations. We limited what people could take from the office (besides their laptop) because it would be such a pain to recover, and monitors were often tethered to the desk.

- Our organization gave $1,000 to each employee for home office setup and allowed employees to take chairs home if needed. We have approximately 10,000 employees.

For the companies that provided a stipend over $500, how did your company handle the tax implications? Did you gross up so that taxes could be covered as well?

- $1,000 was taxed; net to the employee was lower.

Is anyone's company changing their work-from-home policy based on this, to allow more employees to work from home permanently?

- Yes. At our company, the percentage is estimated to be between 10 percent and 15 percent.

- Based on conversations with our clients, the percentage of employees who will be moving to remote working permanently ranges between 10 percent and 30 percent.

- I do believe that working from home is going to blossom.

How will all this change the real estate footprint?

- I have had those questions from my senior management. Some of them say, 'if all these people stay home, we have too much square footage.' I think it will be the opposite. If we need to do social distancing, we need more square footage to accommodate the same number of people. Even if only 75 percent come back to the office, if we are doing checkerboard style layouts with no one next to you and no one opposite you, we will not have excess space.

- I do not believe checkerboard desking is a permanent solution. It will go away over time.

- We have done some studies on our real estate footprint and how to get people back in a socially distanced way that is acceptable per the CDC. It depends on whether the space is a call center or an activity-based workplace. It is staggering to see how much space is going to be lost as unoccupied due to CDC requirements and people's perceptions as to how much distancing they need and want. You have the whole single-directional aspect, and some of those are dead-end rows. They are only 15 to 20 feet long, and you cannot have multiple people going down them at the same time. I think architecturally the way we use the workplace is going to change. What would be the reasons people would come to the office? Perhaps to get social connections, at a distance? If so, what does the workplace need to be to accommodate that need? We are just starting to run some numbers.

- We are assuming there will be more staff utilizing remote work going forward to allow for activity-based space with less density.

- We are shutting down all our four-person conference rooms.

- We are being requested by clients to look at their CAD files to come up with solutions to create privacy and safety using personal screens, white board, etc. where each employee has their own

set of markers. There's disinfectant for white boards, but the concern is that with all the fabric panels out there, employees will perceive it to be a barrier that is not as cleanable.

- I have a couple of friends who are looking at the leases for their companies. They think this is a fundamental change in how they work. I personally think square footage will go down over time because there were a lot of people in a distributed mode already, and now even more are doing it. Some will want to go back to the office, but I would throw a dart at the wall and say maybe one-third of the people who are tossed into this will say, 'my lease is coming due in six months, and this experiment forced upon me has been working pretty well. I won't renew.' I think it will shrink, but it is too early to tell. Maybe by the end of the summer people will start trickling back to the office. Will we be in crowded spaces again a year from now? For many people, it is a wait-and-see thing. I cannot see space growing to accommodate all these buffers. If companies do not provide buffers, employees will opt for the distributed model. We are not going to carry space just so 10 people want to be in the office and get 250 square feet each. I may be way off, but that is how I see it.

- In terms of long-term implications for density and workspace, we are adjusting office floor plans to permit social distancing; staggering arrival/departure schedules to avoid peak times for mass transit and building lobby/elevator areas; de-densifying by alternating in-office and work-from-home days; providing staff training in new safety practices and behaviors; providing new protective equipment; and instituting new cleaning requirements.

- With the exception of some who will try to save money, I think companies will keep the space they have. Here in New York, I think all the software companies with young employees crowded into spaces will need even more space. These workers live in very small homes and apartments in Brooklyn and Manhattan, and they just cannot live and work in the same spaces. Working from home will not be tolerable for these big tech companies.

- The six-foot office will likely affect everyone's office footprint.

- We have been providing floorplan adjustments showing how the clients can use their existing furniture but change the orientation to provide the space. But you do lose numbers. Have any of you gotten feedback about using the WHO-recommended 3 feet of separation instead of the CDC-recommended 6 feet?

- I think we should be careful about even six feet of separation. Droplets could travel much farther than that in certain conditions after a cough or sneeze.

- Yes, droplets travel 5-6 feet, and with HVAC airflow they can travel even farther. Everyone wearing face coverings is key for the long term in urban areas where social distancing cannot be maintained.

- If people can work remotely 90 percent of the time, maybe they do not need office space. But I do not know that my firm is going to do that. We have a lot of people who are firmly entrenched in the camp of having a culture with everyone together in the office.

- We have voluntary temperature sensors in our reception areas.

- We are considering bagging the excess chairs in place to prevent use and re-stating capacity in each meeting room to align with social distancing.

What are people seeing as far as the landlord's responsibility in all this?

- Once we get to our space, it is our responsibility. But what are landlords doing to make sure they are covering from the minute they enter the building to the minute they get up to our space? And then you have the entire realm of simply getting to the building with public transport.

- Some landlords are providing day porters who are cleaning if the business is open.

- I have been talking with our landlord about return to work. We have a large lobby. What we have found is that we can only fit 30 people in our lobby at one time and maintain appropriate distancing. What is going to happen when we must get 5,000 people in our building? Everyone must be on board as to what that process looks like. It is a serious issue if you are a tenant with 1,000 employees and your lobby can only hold 30 people. You will have lines around the block. That would force people to do staggered shifts.

- This is a big question affecting urbanization. I wonder if we will see more suburban locations over the next 10 years.

- I agree that urban locations will become less desirable as a result of this. How do we balance that with transportation sustainability?

- In Chicago, the "L" has a stop into our building, carrying something like 25,000 people a day. How do you control elevator access with such huge numbers of people? I have been bugging our landlord as to what they are going to do.

- Our landlord will not do temperature checks.

- Landlord temperature checks are common in the Asia-Pacific region.

- A very large landlord sent all their occupants a survey on what they expect as a tenant coming back to work. Responses included sensors on high-touch items, masks on service employees, no-touch food pick up, etc.

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