

# The future of workspace

Information gathered from Aust Gov, Facilities Management insights, Steelcase Australia, Office App

## Consideration

There are some key elements that need to be factored in when considering your future operations and your work environment.

- **Belonging** - one of the most important elements, and one that won't change, is the need for people to connect to an organisation's purpose and to feel a sense of belonging. This may have been strained while working remotely. From surveys taken approx 80% employees are keen to return to the office either immediately or when they feel it's safe to do so. They miss the buzz, the culture the social connections, and the ease of working. Many don't have the space to adequately work from home and be productive. Hours of work blend with home time and are interrupted by home activities. The office provides all the tools to do their work properly.
- **Productivity** - true productivity of knowledge workers relating to creativity, innovation and transformation are difficult to measure and hard to accomplish virtually. Studies show collaboration time is down, and innovation is down due to working from home. Many employees working remotely is not engaged as they would at the office.
- **Retainment** - of employees may be challenged. An organisation's approach to working from home and provisions may impact retainment.
- **Social capital** - too much remote work hurts social capital and slows innovation. Working together in person builds trust and is the foundation for innovation. Often the negative impact is hidden and not seen for many months.
- **Safety & Security** - the home office can expose and increase risk to the employer's safety protocol, and corporate security.
- **Protocols & Behaviour** - Employees need certainty that returning to the office will be a safe place, and employers need to provide this certainty in the workplace. New protocols and expected employee behaviour need to be clear in the workplace.
- **Cleaning protocol** – more touchless devices should be considered/introduced, determine the areas requiring deeper cleaning and more regularly, eg high traffic area.
- **Communication** - ensure very clear instruction and expectations. Keeping employees informed on evolving situations and change. Provide systems that accommodate the increased communication. Employees will be more engaged and willing.
- **Social distancing** – space needs to be well thought out to provide the safe distancing without wasting space. Mobility is important so that furniture can be repositioned to retain the safe distancing and be functional for a task and for collaboration. However, with mobility there is still a need for overall structure to be maintained.

## The Future

Global studies have shown that people can reach a point of diminishing returns when working from home. The workplace is essential to drive growth, build successful culture, and fuel innovation that drives the business and the economy.

The office environment is needed, however a new approach to the workplace is required, one that is **compelling and safe** for employees and **smart for the business**. Business is rethinking the role of the workplace, not to eliminate it, but how to make it an even stronger competitive advantage. Leading innovative companies are expanding their thinking to create a variety of places to work, with more flexible opportunities include the workplace, working from home and satellite spaces. The outcome is to ensure employee experience is consistently positive, compelling and safe, and the employer benefits from a resilient strategy for the people to work.

### Strategies to build the new compelling + safe office environment

1. **Choices** - People's sense of what makes them feel safe will be different. Providing choices of work place and therefore more control can alleviate these concerns. By providing choices of places to work, the work place, home, and potentially satellite spaces, people can choose and have a sense of control and safety. People will be more satisfied and more engaged.

To attract and retain personnel, a diversified workplace strategy is needed to satisfy the diverse needs and how people want to work, types of work, and ways of working - focus, collaboration, socialisation, learning, rejuvenation.

2. **Fluid** - No one knows what the future holds. Businesses need spaces that can adjust and adapt easily and quickly to facilitate tasks and employees. Rather than provide fixed elements, if the spaces are more fluid then the employee could adjust to suit the task, whilst supporting the current requirements eg social distancing. This also empowers employees to adapt spaces to the type of work required and level of privacy, thereby having control.
3. **Balance** – the work place will need to accommodate teamwork whilst accommodating the needs of the individual worker. During the pandemic we have been starved of truly effective collaboration. The workplace will need to facilitate collaborative work even more so than before but will also need to facilitate individual focus spaces that are not impacted by the collaborative spaces. Being able to switch from one to the other with ease will be essential. With travel restrictions likely to continue for some time, and people having the choice to work from home or the office, video calls will be actively used and will need spaces that don't disrupt coworkers.
4. **High Performing Space** – real estate, even more so than before, needs to be high performing: effective in use, adaptable, cost effective. Collaborative space, open and enclosed, will need to facilitate a range of tasks, quick high energy discussions, lengthy deep focused meetings, and connect with remote teammates. The café style relaxed vibe open plan and traditional enclosed meeting rooms solutions need to be re thought for higher performance and operational value. Too much open plan can be counter productive, and inspiring spaces can sit empty, as employees move to spaces they can get work done and without interruption.
5. **Digital Support** - With the increase of video over physical connection it is important to have adequate digital devices and support. Larger scale devices create a more inclusive experience whether in the same room or working remotely. Easy access and use of data is a fundamental part of moving forward.