Q4

How is social distancing (or physical distancing as we prefer to call it) going to work in a workplace which is designed to support Activity Based Working?

Recently there has been a lot of doubt voiced on media about whether we can continue to share desks and work in open environments on returning to the workplace after COVID-19.

Every employee has the right to safe and clean individual and collaborative work points that support the activity that they need to do. It is not feasible to walk around the office with our own door handle and our own taps. We commonly aren't assigned a personal toilet. We don't each have a meeting room with perfect spacing and individual tables for all. It is important to remember that we do not have to operate forever in ways that are required during a crisis. Governments have set reasonable and clear guidelines around physical distancing in internal spaces.

Organisations should follow these guidelines and strive to ensure the safety and well-being of their people when they are in the office.

The solution for the long term is not to stop work points sharing but to thoughtfully create processes, practices, and policies that provide a safe and clean working environment and work-points supporting the activities that employees need and want to do when they come to the workplace.

Cleaning frequency and thoroughness can be increased to meet emerging expectations and facilitate safer working environments. In the same way that we shared trolleys in super- markets during the crisis by first wiping down the touchpoints and sanitising our hands as we enter and exit; so can we approach office hygiene. Ease of access to, and the obligatory use of simple hygiene methods to improve safety standards, is the recommended strategy for re-entering the office.

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Organisations may also opt to allocate personal keyboards and mouse, and limit phone usage to individual mobile devices or personal headsets. Some organisations may feel more comfortable granting gradual access to shared workspaces including assigning teams to specific areas, neighbourhoods, or floors. Another strategy could be to have teams agree to come in on different days to enable tracking of who is in the building at any one time.

In Summary:

Going about our daily lives in open spaces will not be a foreign experience for us post-pandemic. People will continue to share space on public transportation, at supermarkets, restaurants, and a variety of other settings. The post-crisis approach for organisations will be to make small and simple adjustments for big impact.

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