Team Topic and Number: Workplace Wellbeing

Team sponsor/chapter (if applicable): New England

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Input your submission below. Please remember that you have 1500 words to share your insights.
While each Workplace Wellness team was tasked with the same problem, the proverbial “rabbit hole” of discussion, solutions, and still-remaining questions could fill a volume of work well beyond a 1,500-word count. Our team chose to start at the beginning: How would an employee’s day look as he or she left home and returned to the office? The thesis of our Day In the Life hinges on a first - and very important - question you must ask yourself: *Am I well enough to go into my office?* Once that determination is made, how does your interaction with the air, surfaces, and people throughout your day impact your overall wellbeing and ultimately your health?

Join us as we journey through the MindMap of this new experience - there are so many aspects to consider within the following six (6) areas:

- The Commute
- Common Spaces
- Offices, Workstations, & Conference Rooms
- Kitchens, Bathrooms, Hallways and Thoroughfares
- Visitors & Deliveries
- My Personal Responsibility

The Mindmap is complicated - as it should be. Given both the employee and employer (as well as other stakeholders from the landlord to government leaders) find themselves in a new set of circumstances, the questions and considerations that appear at every turn are endless. We posit that there should be a shared responsibility between both
employee and the employer to make good choices and provide as safe a workplace as possible.

How can we minimize the risks and increase the confidence of employees as they come back to work? Beyond just safety and wellbeing, how can we maintain or increase productivity, innovation, collaboration, and creativity within these new confines of anxiety and disinfectant?

*The way to combat the anxiety related to an invisible foe is with transparency. Transparency builds confidence and confidence will reduce the fear and anxiety that we may face upon the return to the new normal.*

Technology and innovation will enable us to work differently by both providing us new ways to combat the viruses but also allowing us to return to this new normal. This new technology will leverage data & data visualization, voice, visual, touch-free, locational awareness, information gathering and sharing.
One of the most important ways we can leverage the existing human sensor networks in buildings is leveraging the cleaning crews who are tasked with delivering this nearly invisible service to the employees in the workplace. CrowdComfort, in an attempt to be helpful, has been transforming their tech to deliver heatmapping. Technologies from companies like Robin and other IWMS tech allows organizations to begin to create schedules with distancing in mind. Other tech firms, like VergeSense, can track whether people maintain distancing in the workplace.

Propinquity exists at the core of every team, every intimate relationship, every social bond that we create. Propinquity is why your physical workplace matters as much as it does.

THE RULE OF PROXIMITY: The closer you are to someone the more likely you are to bond.

How Propinquity Can Save Your Team Culture
The Commute.

As soon as employees leave the safety of their home, they enter an area of uncertainty. For those who rely on public transit, they are likely to feel unsure with no control over the situation. Usually simple innocuous questions such as where to sit, who sits next to them, are the adjacent commuters infected, and when was the area last disinfected, are now the first thoughts to their minds. On top of these questions, additional measures will make the commute duration less predictable requiring additional time to be allocated to commuting.

“It will be a very long time, if it ever happens,” Danny Pearlstein, a spokesman for the Riders Alliance, an advocacy group, said, “before New Yorkers feel sanguine about packing trains during rush hour like they used to.”

Throughout the United States, only approximately 5% of commuters take public transit as their primary method of transportation, however in urban centers such as Boston this increases to over 13%. (source) These riders also may not have the option to switch to vehicles if they live in the city and either do not own, or are unable to own a vehicle.

Recommended steps to be taken:

- increased frequency of service
- dedicate additional street space for walking/biking
- marking seats and floors
- Increased hand sanitizer
- requirements for PPE
- temperature checks for all riders
- increased disinfecting in view of the riders
Technology can also play a major role enabling commuters to feel comfortable. Apps can be updated to be more accurate for scheduling and incorporated to include how crowded each train is. Vehicles can also be fitted with QR codes, for riders to scan, allowing commuters to perform contract tracing and the ability to know if they were in close proximity to someone who has been infected.

To make sure the transit workers are safe, to make sure the riding public is safe, the best thing you can do is disinfect the whole inside of the car, as massive a challenge as that is,” Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo said at his daily briefing on Saturday.
My corporate workplace:

Common Spaces.
Our common areas - the places that usually bring people together - should be treated in a way that lessens the anxiety to enter them, but still continues their use to build relationships, enhance culture, collaboration, and socialization. Frequent sanitation and disinfecting obviously play big roles in this, but so too does thoughtful programming and outfitting, and changing behaviors.

- Automate pre-sanitization ahead of gatherings
- Limited occupancy/ attendance
- No more open salad bars
- Pre-packaged food offerings.
- Automated coffee cup dispensers

What if the office of the future is no longer a place to work, but rather a place to escape work? A place to go where we share common values and goals. A place where we can socialize professionally, where people intentionally take time out of their workday, to purposefully come together to learn, inspire, and be inspired. A place to build meaningful relationships so we feel valued and supported, and connected. A place where we can openly converse, freely share ideas to stir up the creativity we crave so that when we return to work, wherever that may be, we feel fully energized and satiated which keeps us engaged and fuels our productivity.”.. Sandra Panara, Relogix
Offices, Workstations, and Conference Rooms.
Experts and lay people overwhelmingly agree that the unassigned, open office set-up many employees exited from in March will be sustainable going forward. In addition to the technological innovations from companies like CrowdComfort for heat-mapping and virtual meeting tools such as Teams and Zoom, additional considerations should include the following:

- **BYOD+P**: Bring Your Own Device (laptop AND phone) PLUS peripherals such as keyboard and mouse
- Use electronics and furniture made from materials that are easier to clean and/or have antimicrobial properties (see current healthcare standards, as well as evidence on cooper)
- Staggered schedules and dividers between further spaced workstations
- Enforce new social distancing protocols for desk assignment, proximity during one-on-one and group meetings
- Update and encourage new work from home policies as well as sick leave or paid time off

Kitchens, Bathrooms, Hallways and Thoroughfares.
In a recent survey by Margulies Perruzzi, a Boston based architect, their findings cited that 80% of those returning to their offices were most concerned about safety within common spaces such as lobbies, kitchens, bathroom, etc. Some ways that fears can be calmed include:

- One-way walking paths and signposts to avoid any collisions
- Markings on the floors to reinforce social distancing while waiting to use shared machines (like coffee, water, fridge)
- Corridors that once had doors to secure areas can utilize sensors and/or apps to activate the unlocking of secure doors.
- Shared spaces like the pantry should have signage designating max capacity based on square footage and social distancing practices.
- Restroom doors with foot-pulls, swing outward and all sinks, toilets, urinals, dispensers (paper towels, soap, etc.) as handsfree.
- Toilets with lids.
- Smaller restrooms denote when all stalls are full, so additional employees don’t enter.

Visitors & Deliveries.
Receptionists and employees can trust their coworkers are following office procedures, but how are they to trust a visitor to the office? All employees should be encouraged to hold meetings remotely to limit the in-person visitors. When in-person visitors cannot be avoided, employees should email the office safe practice procedures to the visitor. In addition to emails, highly visible posters describing office protocol at office entries should be installed. Additionally, a touchless check in and microphone system can be set up to provide a safe screening and check-in process. Although lunch provided by an outside vendor is a nice perk, employees should provide their own lunch during this crisis. Additionally, packages should be sanitized by spray or left to sit for 24 hours to enable the virus to be deactivated.
The delivery operator should use a different entrance and leave the package at the office entrance to avoid coming into contact with other employees. If in a high rise, the delivery should be left just outside the freight elevator and office staff sanitize the delivery at the freight elevator.

**My Personal Responsibility.**

Are we overthinking this? We have all been living through an unprecedented experience, like a world war but with an invisible foe that is not a conscious being. Just a thing that happens to be very contagious and dangerous to all of us. So no, we’re not overthinking it.

Maybe Covid-19 is just a natural thing that we unlocked by expanding our human population. An expansion we’ve had to a point of extinction of some many other species on our planet. Humans are a not so invisible foe to those other species. Is this just nature’s way of trying to level the playing field? Who knows? The question is, do we want to win or lose the battle with this enemy?

Our actions, our interactions, are our way of playing defense against a foe that doesn’t care. We are all soldiers in the battle for our own lives and those of our families, friends.

It’s imperative that we think through all of this and have a plan to move forward. In the end it’s simple if we want to win, we get back to a new normal and adapt to the threat now and going forward. Our part is simple: We must all wear masks (until we have adequate treatment and/or a vaccine), use hand sanitizers constantly, and keep some distance from each other. This is our role.