



# The New Office Environment Is All About Customer Experience

There's no doubt that corporate office environments have been forever changed by the pandemic. But the question is: how? We're in the midst of historic disruption, and it's hard to predict the long-term impacts of remote work and new standards for building wellness. In the short-term, facility managers must find ways to make the office an attractive alternative – or complement – to working remotely. And with building occupants more aware of safety and wellness, facility managers must respond to their concerns in a visible, consistent manner.



At the same time, the disruption is creating an opportunity to rethink the office environment and develop spaces that support employee wellness and productivity. To achieve both short- and long-term objectives, facility managers need to make the customer experience the central focus of their operations plan.

## 1

### What Office Workers Want

In the wake of the pandemic, employees have grown more discerning about the environments they work in, and they feel empowered to voice their concerns and expectations. To attract and retain high-performing workers, employers need to demonstrate that they're listening.

Remote work is top of mind for most employees and working from home is here to stay - at least for the foreseeable future. It's hard to say how much workers will continue to work remotely, as executives and employees aren't exactly on the same page. While 56% of employees say they want to work from home three days a week, 68% of executives say they believe workers should be in the office three days each week. Despite the gap between the two groups, one commonality is clear: most office environments are shifting to hybrid workplaces.<sup>1</sup>

Employees are also concerned about the health of the office. An overwhelming majority of office workers – 73% – worry about contracting COVID-19. This is 10 percentage points higher than the general population.<sup>2</sup> They are looking for more visible, consistent cleaning, better access to hand hygiene products, and social distancing between themselves and their colleagues.

## 2

### Operating a More Flexible Facility

Embedding flexibility into your operations is key to creating effective hybrid environments that also support building wellness. There's no blueprint for the future workplace, and it's important to be able to adapt your plans as time unfolds and long-term trends become clearer. For example, there are concerns about the very popular open office environments and the propensity for germs to spread more widely. It is important that all the facts are evaluated. Open office floor plans may

need to be modified by implementing a proactive scheduling system to manage density, installing occupancy sensors to track usage, and aligning smart cleaning technology to trigger the proper service levels. Facility managers and company leaders will need to have increased awareness as to the planning, scheduling, and logistics of workers returning to the office. Furthermore, as this hybrid model needs to be refined over time, it's important to monitor how well employees are responding to these changes to determine any long-term adaptations required for the space.

Cleaning protocols also need to become more flexible. However, fewer employees in the office or variable occupancy doesn't necessarily mean you need to reduce cleaning frequency. Cost is one factor as facility managers assess implementing consistent, highly visible cleaning protocols, especially as it relates to labor and supplies. But commercial owners and facility managers must also balance safety of their occupants and the total cost of risk. Perception is more critical than ever and high-touch spaces require servicing even with fewer employees in the office.

To support this need for a flexible, high-visibility, and consistent cleaning model, many facility managers are embracing a demand-based maintenance model as it relates to day cleaning staff. Demand-based cleaning is based on occupancy and allows you to use labor, equipment, and supplies more efficiently while meeting employee expectations for cleanliness. Day cleaning personnel are alerted to perform tasks based on utilization of the space and service level thresholds. This strategy allows the day cleaning staff to focus their time on when and where servicing is required based on real-time usage of the space. It also means that they can work more visibly. For instance, sensors can alert them to disinfect a conference room immediately after it's been used. When employees can see that spaces are being cleaned between uses, they feel more comfortable coming into the office.



### 3

## Flexibility Depends on Technology

Implementing the flexible practices needed to create healthy hybrid workplaces requires data, automation, and a technology-enabled maintenance team. Facility managers can leverage IoT (Internet of Things) technology at higher levels of sophistication to gather real-time occupancy data, automate cleaning task generation, and provide assurances of work completion. Specifically:

- Sensors can be used to measure occupancy levels for variable use spaces in the facility.
- When coupled with task management systems, the occupancy data can be used to trigger service requirements for Smart Routing in real-time to drive efficiency and better alignment with facility needs.
- A mobile-enablement strategy prioritizes tasks and outcomes leveraging both QR codes and GPS tracking.

Leveraging these types of resources – along with other streams of data from robotics and additional sensors like IAQ – will contribute to improved data and analytics around monitoring occupancy levels, tracking trends, improving



response times, and addressing employee wellness concerns. These resources will also make it easier to plan and operate your hybrid workplace. In the long-run, the data captured from various sensors, equipment, and mobile devices can be analyzed to inform future decision-making.

## 4 Looking Ahead

The pandemic is unpredictable and ever changing. It's important for facility managers and corporate leaders to proactively prepare in order to attract occupants to return to work and make them feel safe and comfortable. Combining technology with facility expertise allows for implementation of strategies that meet the challenges of increasing the occupancy rates and adapting to the demands of tomorrow.



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