

CORENET GLOBAL | HACKATHON



A COVID-19 Virtual Ideation Experience

Team Topic: Workplace Wellbeing

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Input your submission below. Please remember that you have 1500 words to share your insights.

Started in China, COVID-19 spread quickly across all continents and became a new pandemic. However, it is worth noting that among the 215 countries¹ affected till date, certain countries managed to recover faster compared to other countries. In countries like Taiwan with experience from the SARS outbreak in 2003, early response and preparedness was demonstrated successfully to mitigate COVID-19 impact on people's wellbeing. It is understood that this response is three-fold: At the governance level, organisation

level and individual behavioral level. From setting up of an Epidemic Command Centre² to absolute transparent tracking mechanisms, and lockdowns various measures have been applied at the Governance level by countries. Similarly, if organisations show preparedness then effects of future COVID-like outbreak can be minimised; hence, ensuring the wellbeing of the most important asset of any organisation — people.

So, what is wellbeing anyway?

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “wellness is a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” Hence, in context of the Workplace, **Employee wellbeing** extends beyond **health**, into happiness as well as job satisfaction. This concept of “employee well-being” is not a new one, but it has seen a resurgence in interest in the past few years. Workplace wellbeing can be thus described as the methods in which spaces, where people work — individually or collectively, centralised or decentralised, real or virtual — are organised, designed, built and operated for the benefit of their health and happiness.

Covid-19 has pushed us to isolate physically but connect digitally. The “loneliness epidemic” or why we are more virtually connected than ever, but more isolated, as a society has important bearings on the workplace too. According to many researchers, COVID-19 certainly may not be the last pandemic to take place. Therefore, there is a growing need to **Redefine Workplace Wellbeing before bringing back the people to their workplaces.**

Having this in mind, we a team from diverse backgrounds and varied expertise have come together to provide recommendations for improved wellbeing at work in this pandemic era. Taking people’s need of safety, happiness, and camaraderie to the top of company consciousness, we propose a **3Rs-framework**, namely

- 1) **Resistance** 2) **Readiness** and 3) **Resilience** leading to **Recovery** of Workplace Wellbeing.



Exhibit 1: 3 Rs Framework

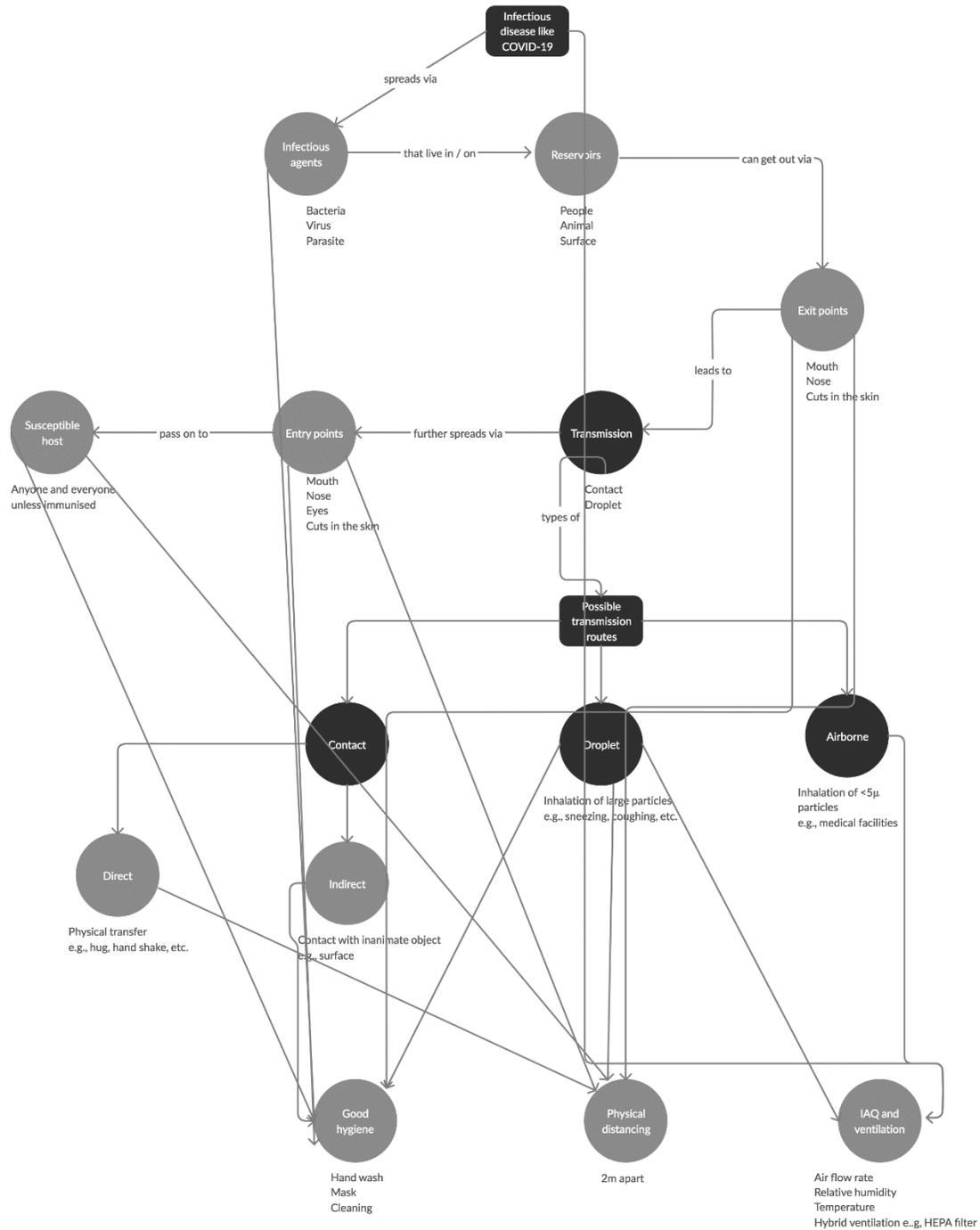


Exhibit 2 : Concept Map – Spread of COVID-19

According to the Ministry of Health New Zealand³, infectious diseases can spread via three possible routes: air, close contact between people, and/ or contaminated objects or surfaces. Therefore, for the purpose of this analysis, in context of a corporate workplace, we have evaluated these key concerns as shown in Exhibit 2. During this unprecedented time of COVID-19, the focus would be to emphasize the impact of

clean air on wellbeing, methods of de-densification for safe distancing, various solutions for common spaces at work to reduce the spread, and changes required through individual behavioural practices and policies to build resilient workplaces. Also, other factors such as medical interventions, sanitisation and hygiene protocols etcetera are essential for workplace wellbeing; however, are beyond the scope of this document.

Let's get transparent about the quality of air we breathe at our workplace!

Generally, we breathe in 11,000-15,000 litres of air on an average every day, making its quality exceedingly paramount. In fact, studies⁴ confirmed the correlation between indoor air quality (IAQ) and cognitive and physical performance of individuals. Poor IAQ, for example, has been tied to symptoms of headache and fatigue. Conversely, studies⁵ showed workers' decision-making performance improved when they were exposed to increased ventilation rates, lower levels of chemicals, and lower levels of CO² in their offices. Designers of mechanical systems should be aware that ventilation is not capable of addressing all aspects of infection control. HVAC systems,⁶ however, do impact the distribution and bio-burden of infectious aerosols. Therefore, it is important to formulate clean air policies and measures to enhance the microclimate of workplaces during the planning stage itself. Resultantly, organisations are required to have guidelines governing acceptable levels of VOCs, indoor air temperature and relative humidity, acceptable levels of deviation and institutionalizing minimum clean air performance parameters of various interior spaces. Moreover, maintenance of such monitoring systems is equally important. For instance, technologies like ultraviolet germicidal irradiation -UVGI can be useful to clean AHUs and ducts. In other note, where a significant risk of transmission of aerosols has been identified by infection control risk assessments, design of Airborne Infection Isolation Rooms (AIIRs) should include anterooms.⁶ In addition, continuous monitoring and feedback of IAQ by at least GRADE B RESET monitors in interior spaces are essential in every workplace.

Less is More! - Ludwig Mies van der Rohe

While most workspaces have been following a certain metric of space allocated to individuals, the area allocated per person seems to be shrinking over time. Individual space occupancy plays a very vital role in defining employee wellbeing. Amidst the disruption created by COVID-19, the new pivotal point in the segment of workspace design is physical distancing.

A rise in the demand of private offices as compared to co-working is highly probable. Given the consciousness towards proximity between people, industry standards are likely to improve. Workspace designs will need to embody a comfortable density of people to maintain appropriate distance and safety.

In addition to physical space planning modifications by introduction of privacy panels and quarantine rooms, disposables will be incorporated for personal space hygiene. Measures for occupancy mapping will no longer be a rarity. Organizations will also have to introduce new policies for movement patterns and presence, at the workplace basis affinity matrices. Furthermore, seating assignment applications, occupancy sensors and technology to better manage the physical distance norms may be deployed as a part of readiness to return to workplaces after long periods of lockdown. Wellbeing being the key here, organizations will need to take different initiatives such as online training sessions, virtual collaboration tools etc. that would help prepare them to be more resilient and balance the workplace and virtual work

culture. Locally available products and technologies at hand should be adopted in tandem by all workplaces to ensure faster recovery.

About 80% of the infections are transmitted by touch⁷

Wellbeing has a direct relation with comfort in common spaces at a workplace. Planning needs to incorporate zoning, segregation, and traceability of common area facilities. In addition to creation of disinfection spaces, dedicated spaces for inward and outward supplies and spaces for temperature record, visitor management at workplaces may require technology advancements for controlled operations. In order to avoid physical touch and ensure safe distancing, tool kits and technology applications for managing lifts, doors, cafeteria booking, arrival and dispersal schedules may need to be provided. Enforcement of policies based on the safe occupancy levels and rules followed in common areas like elevator lobbies and cafeterias will ensure readiness. Products enabling this flow as: starting with Sanitising tunnels, tool kits at the reception, pedestal sanitizer stations in lobbies, virtual meeting equipment, and toilet occupancy indicator need to be acquired. Further, UV cleaning systems in toilets and other common zones may be required depending on occupancy.

The strength of a team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team - Phil Jackson

In other words, individual wellbeing lies in the core of workplace wellbeing. How an organisation prepares and supports individuals to successfully adopt change in these times of crisis, will lead to long-term organisational success. As COVID-19 has pushed us to the extremes of digital engagement, the balance of how to create personal interaction and virtual collaboration⁹ will be a challenge for organisations and individuals alike. Such digital engagement may come at a cost of ergonomic injuries, loss of confidence and cocooning, amounting to implications on personal performance and wellbeing. Following the WELL¹⁰ guidelines for stress support, it is in these unprecedented times, that organisations, more than ever, need to assess causes of stress among employees. Organisations can support employees in managing personal stress through sponsored Employee Assistant Programs. Moreover, organisations can also help by providing ergonomic furniture for working from home and facilitating training and education. During times of such uncertainty, creating smaller, frequent work goals help individuals gain a sense of achievement. For an individual, it is a continuous journey between health and wellness, adopting healthy habits of hygiene, work, exercise, and diet. When individuals understand and agree on their own protocols, and not depend only on those mandated by the organisation the entire process becomes simple and effective paving way to overall recovery -as illustrated in Exhibit 3.

Taking everything into consideration...

This document concludes how resistance can be achieved by careful planning, which later helps build a strong readiness by introducing new policies, which, in turn, boost resilience by product implementation; subsequently, ensure workplace wellbeing.

(Re)set for new!



Exhibit 3- Concept Map – Workplace Wellbeing Redefined.

Reference:

1. WHO- Emergencies data - <https://www.who.int/emergencies/diseases/novel-coronavirus-2019>
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6. ASHRAE position document on infectious Aerosols- April 2020
7. Steelcase -Designing the Post-COVID workplace- April 2020
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9. Haworth-Return to Work(place): Our point of View-April 2020
10. WELL Building standard- International WELL Building Institute.