



**WORKPLACE**

# **HOLISTIC APPROACH FOR RETURNING TO THE OFFICE**

**SMITHGROUP**

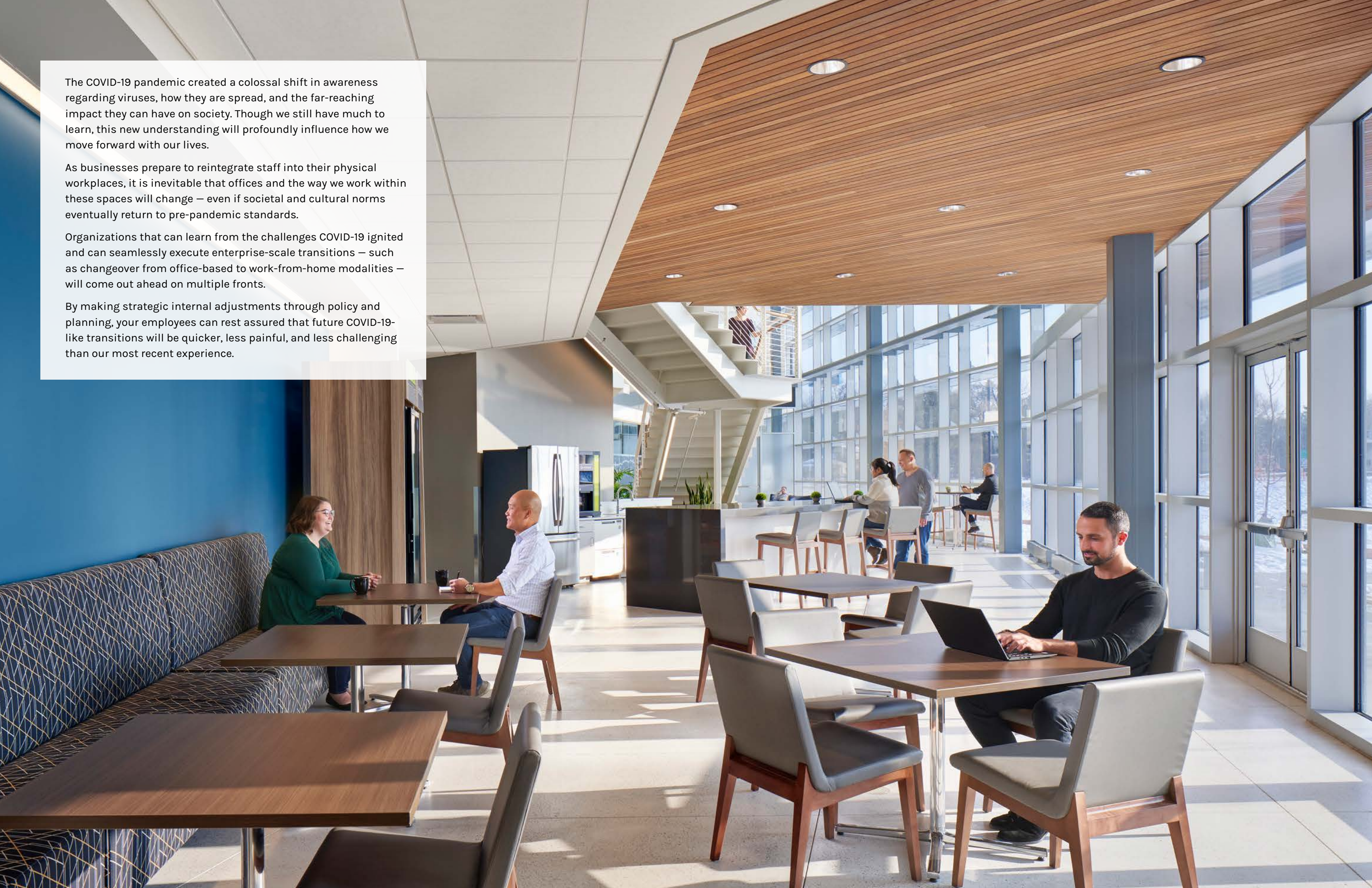


The COVID-19 pandemic created a colossal shift in awareness regarding viruses, how they are spread, and the far-reaching impact they can have on society. Though we still have much to learn, this new understanding will profoundly influence how we move forward with our lives.

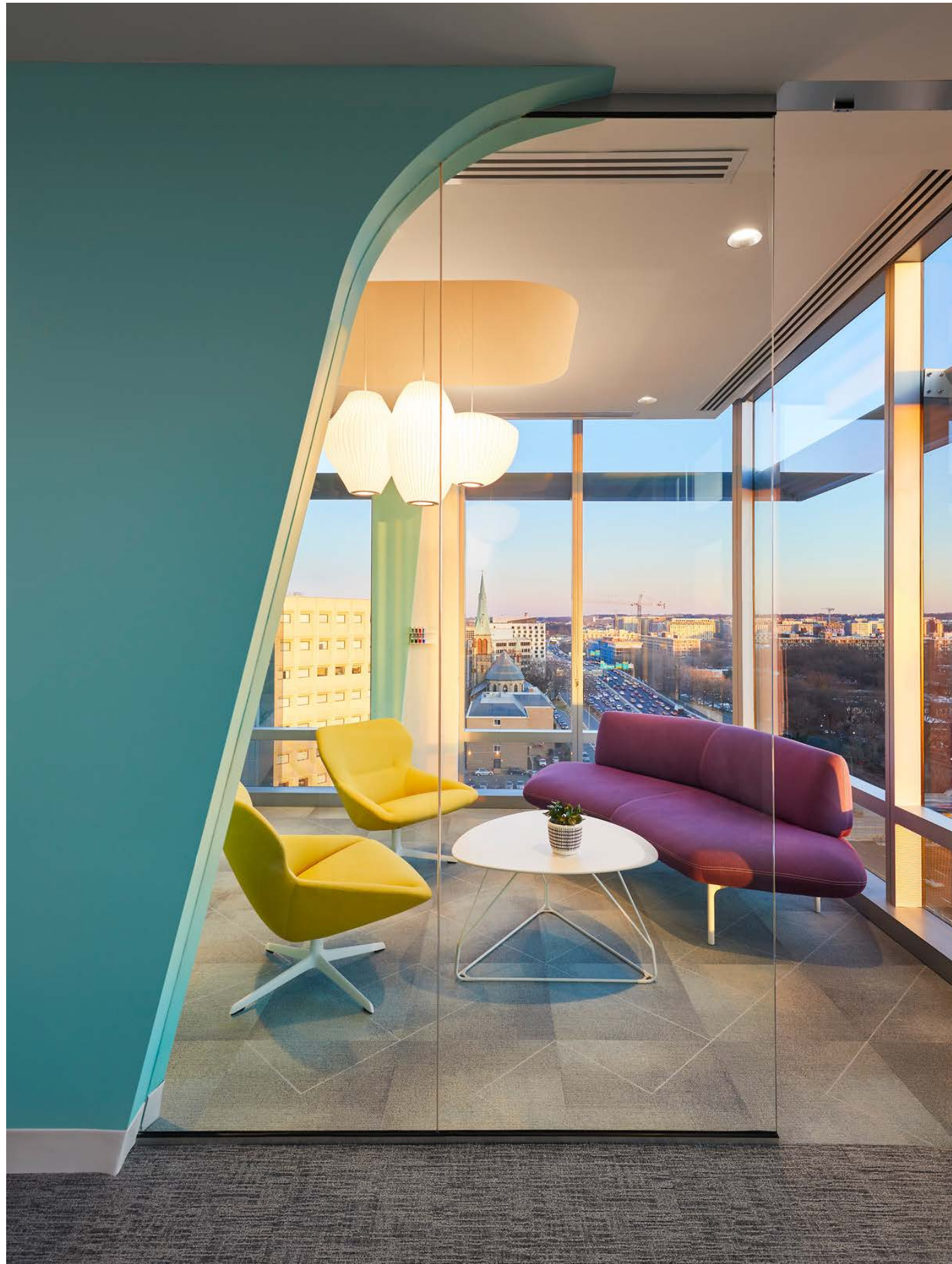
As businesses prepare to reintegrate staff into their physical workplaces, it is inevitable that offices and the way we work within these spaces will change — even if societal and cultural norms eventually return to pre-pandemic standards.

Organizations that can learn from the challenges COVID-19 ignited and can seamlessly execute enterprise-scale transitions — such as changeover from office-based to work-from-home modalities — will come out ahead on multiple fronts.

By making strategic internal adjustments through policy and planning, your employees can rest assured that future COVID-19-like transitions will be quicker, less painful, and less challenging than our most recent experience.







# START WITH THE WHY...

## WHY RETURN TO THE OFFICE?

Though it began as an unplanned experiment tested under highly unusual circumstances, the knowledge-worker world's recent and widespread foray into working from home has demonstrated that it is feasible — and perhaps, even convenient — for employees to be productive while working remotely. Prior to the pandemic, only 4% of Americans worked from home, at least part-time. As of April 1, 2020, 34% of Americans who previously commuted are working from home. With fewer employees in the workplace, organizations could reduce real estate costs. Still, large segments of the population have expressed a deep desire to return to their physical workplaces — and soon. So, if working from home is a viable employment option, and also has the potential to reduce an organization's expenses, what are some of the intangible reasons to return to the office?

### CONNECTIVITY

Human beings have an innate desire to socialize, connect and interact in group settings. Yes, technology has made it possible to remain connected while apart. But face-to-face interaction establishes bonds, fosters trust, builds community, and creates synergies that cannot be easily replicated through digital interaction alone. The desire to return to a shared space that enhances teamwork and nurtures personal connectivity are strong drivers for those who want to shift operations back to the office.

### COLLABORATION

Communication, planning, brainstorming, problem solving, and decision making are critical to the success of any business. And when people of varied backgrounds and perspectives work together in a shared space, the more creative and innovative are the solutions they produce. The frequency of rich, diverse, collaborative interaction that people enjoyed while

at the office has waned during our time apart. This has left some employees feeling disconnected and, at times, unfulfilled while working from home. Energized by the prospect of again being able to partner in person to create dynamic, innovative solutions has many employees eager to return to the workplace.

### CULTURE

A company's office speaks volumes about its corporate culture. An outward expression of the firm's values, beliefs, traditions, attitudes and so much more, the physical workplace is a company's greatest tool for helping employees feel engaged, valued, and empowered to take ownership in their work-related tasks. Spending time within this space allows employees to feel more connected to their organizations and more grounded in the purpose that they bring to the company's mission. Many wish to return to the office to reestablish those cultural connections and refill their souls with the energy that attracted them to their company in the first place.

### SUPPORTING EFFECTIVE WORK

The workplace can have a significant, positive impact on the employee—creating company loyalty, improving personal and professional happiness, increasing efficiency and productivity, and enhancing on-the-job performance. Recognizing these values, leaders are cautiously optimistic that returning to the office will help reestablish everything that impacts effective work.

### TOOLS & TECHNOLOGY

Many employees have grown tired of their makeshift (and often shared) home offices, spotty WiFi connections, and lack of access to resources and supplies that enable them to operate at optimal levels. They want to return to an environment that is equipped with the tools, technologies and equipment that help them work more effectively and efficiently.



**ORGANIZATIONAL DRIVERS FOR RETURNING TO THE OFFICE**

The COVID-19 pandemic may have had catastrophic impacts on revenues across industries and tested the resolve and resiliency of our organizations, but it has not destroyed the fiery spirit that drives us to rebuild and emerge from this crisis stronger than ever. Even when faced with staggering economic and operational challenges, organizations are developing plans that will enable them to resume operations, reestablish a sense of normalcy, and compete with renewed ferocity as soon as shutdown orders are lifted.

Despite measured optimism, leaders are proceeding with caution to avoid a premature return to the office and the potential of having to close the workplace again should the virus reignite. Returning to the office requires businesses to define their ‘why’ and navigate a whole new normal in how and where work-related activities are accomplished. Re-entry plans will vary widely and will require employers to contend with challenges unique to their workforce and geographic location.

"Each organization must determine what this new era of work looks like for their companies, and what adjustments will or will not align with their firm’s mission, vision, brand, culture, and values."

- Lise Newman, SmithGroup Workplace Director





# IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PEOPLE

## THE EMPLOYEE EXPERIENCE

Employees are the cornerstone of every business. As they become more embedded within an organization, each interaction, practice, policy, process and peer has an impact on that individual's journey with the company. So, it is not surprising that a company's workplace has been proven to have a significant impact on an employee's overall experience with that organization.

Observational studies and research conducted by SmithGroup's design experts and workplace strategists before the COVID-19 pandemic determined that, if a workplace is to have a positive impact on staff, it must enable creative ideas to flourish, empower employees to realize their ideas, and promote collaboration. Positive workplace environments also help to drive engagement, improve happiness, and enhance on-the-job performance.

Just as the shutdown created unprecedented challenges for employers, so too will the process of reopening businesses and returning employees to the workplace. Companies will be confronted with a myriad of complicated legal, logistical, and practical issues, and business leaders must be prepared to approach reentry with prudence, flexibility, and patience. They must also accept that life in the office will look and feel quite different once day-to-day activities resume. The implementation of new policies—from staggered and alternating schedules, to health screenings, modified space plans, social distancing, and more—could radically change the way we feel about environments that we'd previously loved.



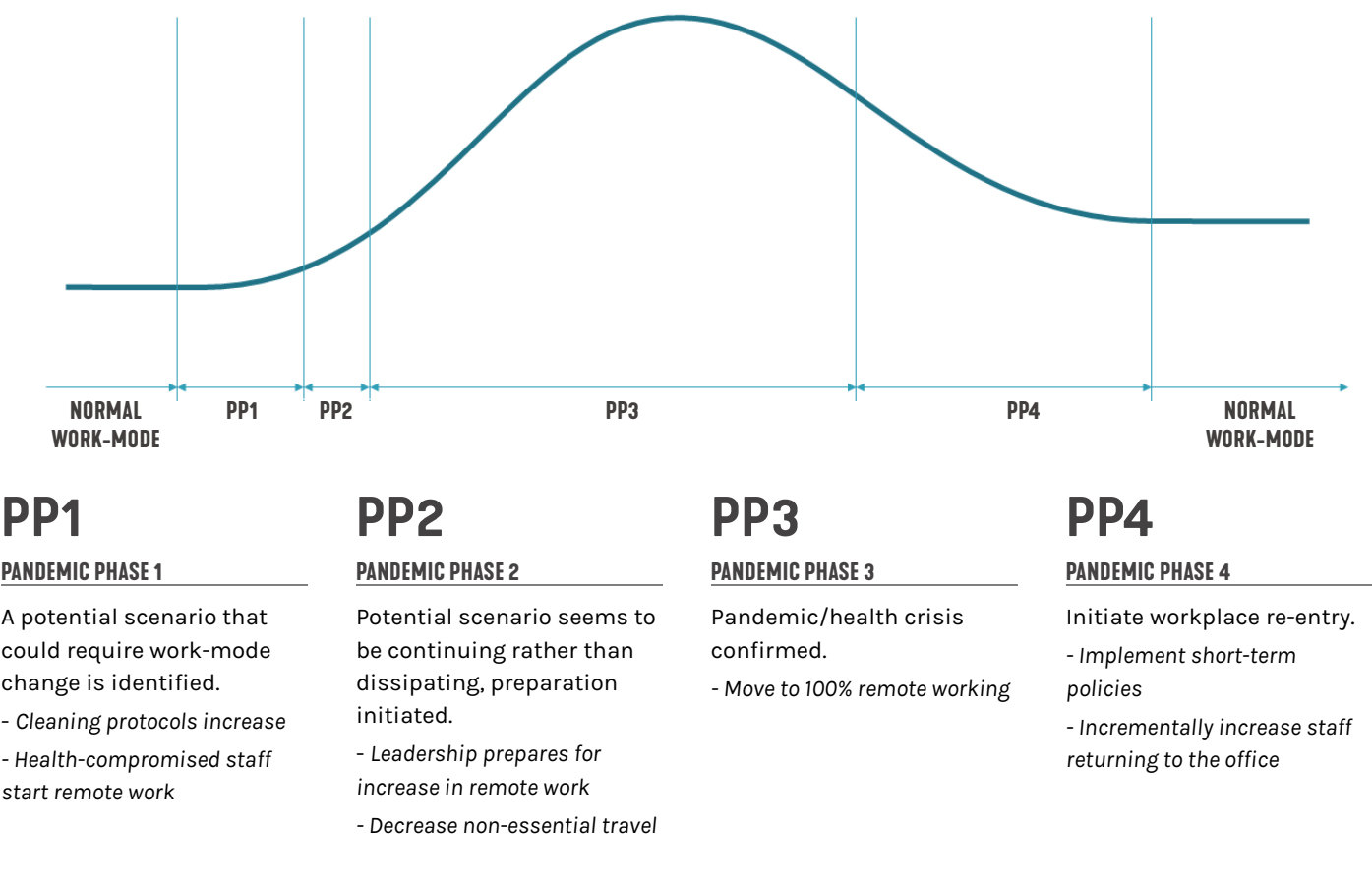
## WHAT ISN'T GOING TO WORK

Having our staff come back anxious, fearful, or frustrated works against the “why” in returning to the office. Companies need to focus on creating the highest-quality user experience possible. Removing furniture rather than using red tape to signify tables and chairs that should not be used is a simple solution.



# FUTURE PLANNING

## PROPOSED SMITHGROUP MODEL A FLUID PROCESS TO SHIFTING WORK-MODES



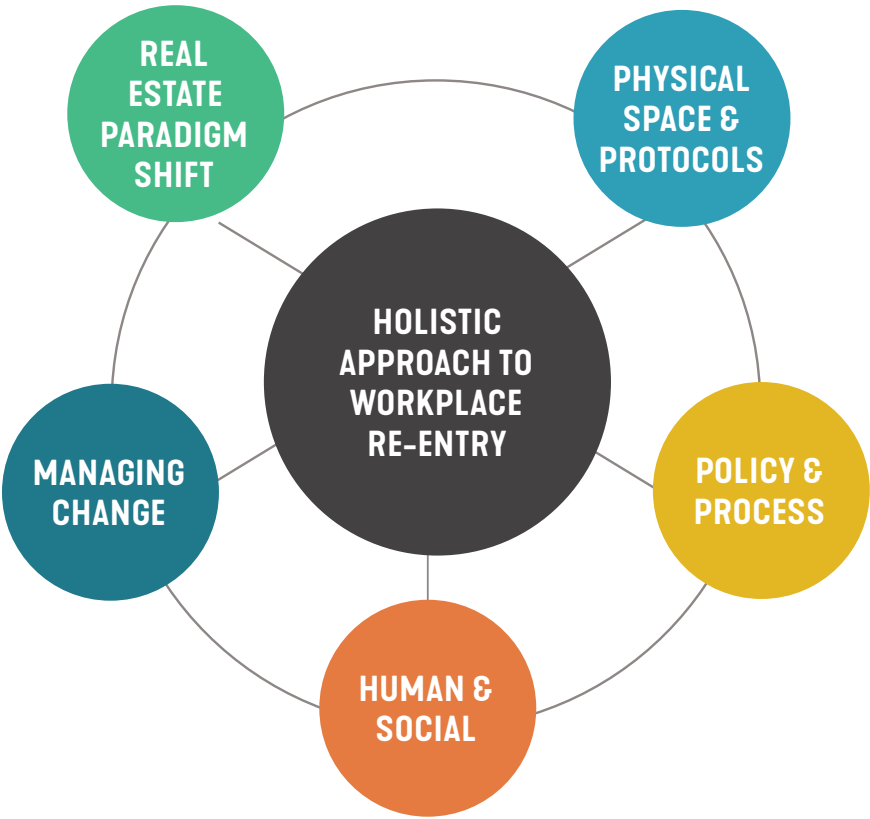
The COVID-19 pandemic has forced a new reality and a new future. Healthcare experts warn us that this is likely not the last pandemic-type situation any of us will face. Heightened tracking tools, pandemic predictors and rapid reactions to similar situations will be the new norm. If confronted again with such a challenge, organizations, individuals and households must be prepared to react swiftly and nimbly to address a variety of needs—including health, safety, well-being, and work/life balance issues associated with disruptions in childcare, eldercare, school closures, and more.

Organizations that learn from the challenges of COVID-19 and make strategic internal adjustments through policy and planning will come out ahead on multiple fronts. Future transitions will be seamless, less painful, and will not have the same impacts on productivity. Also, and perhaps equally importantly, organizations that are able to establish a plan and clearly articulate it will be much more attractive in the war for talent. Individuals will be looking for ways to make the shift to working from home and dealing with childcare/loved ones less challenging than this time around.

# AN HOLISTIC APPROACH

## HOLISTIC APPROACH

The approach to returning to the office should be holistic in nature, not purely based on efficiency. This is a marathon, not a sprint. Supporting all aspects of employees' well-being should be in clear focus, ultimately supporting organization's success. In cases where adjustments significantly hinder employees' abilities to work effectively, be productive, or feel socially connected to teammates and peers, further refinement will be required until operations, productivity, culture, and employee experience return to a desired state of equilibrium.



### PHYSICAL SPACE & TACTICAL PROTOCOLS

Design and planning considerations for the reconfiguration and phased re-entry with minimal disruption and construction; signage; cleaning; maintenance, etc.

### POLICY & PROCESS

Remote work policies, office rotation system, operations, meeting cadence and etiquette, IT/Infrastructure, etc.

### HUMAN & SOCIAL

Why are you coming to the office? How do you reinforce culture, collaboration and building personal connections?

### MANAGING CHANGE

Training, communications, virtual workshops, etc.

### REAL ESTATE PARADIGM SHIFT

If implementing a new work model, consider near-term future decisions about real estate needs.



# A PROCESS FOR RETURNING TO THE OFFICE

Companies are faced with perhaps the greatest challenge in their history – how to reimagine their workplaces in a holistic way – focused on employee experience while ensuring employee safety and wellbeing. As shelter in place and stay-at-home orders are lifted, many companies are scrambling to quickly adapt their existing workplace environments. Our framework offers a process for re-entry that starts and ends with employee experience and will enable those responsible for reopening their offices to plan effectively.



## 1 SET THE STAGE FOR SUCCESS

- Establish team
  - Leadership
  - Human Resources
  - Info Technology
  - Legal
  - Real Estate
  - Design Lead(s)
- Survey employees to understand enablers and inhibitors for returning to the workplace
- Determine timeline

## 2 DEFINE SPACE REQUIREMENTS

- Establish occupancy with SmithGroup calculator
- Determine phasing
- Identify key spatial risk points
- Develop space planning scenarios
  - Workstations/offices
  - Meeting Spaces
  - Amenity Spaces
  - MEP guidelines

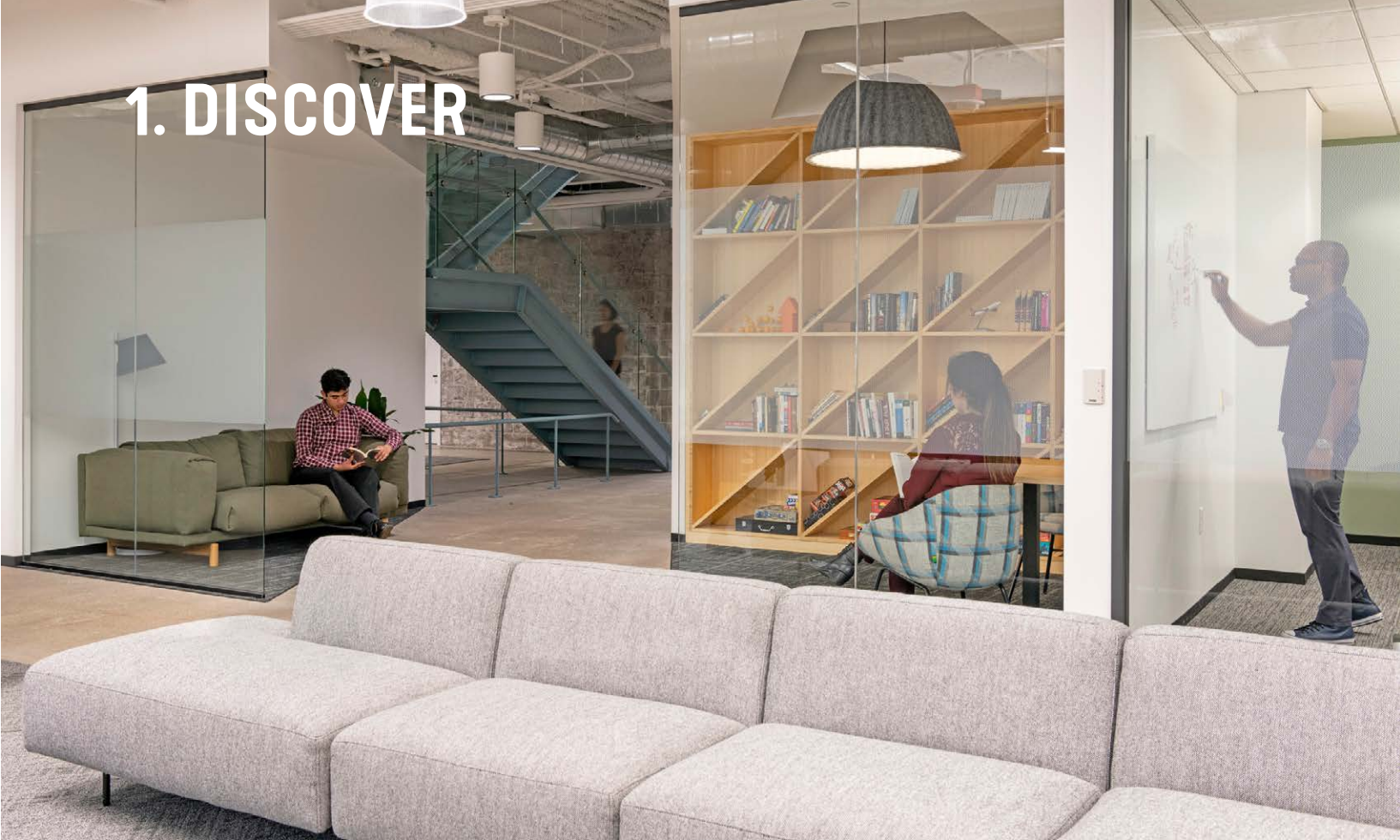
## 3 DEVELOP GUIDELINES

- Establish policies and processes for
  - Remote work
  - Rotation system
  - Seating approach
  - Technology use
  - Legal/HR
  - Hygiene + safety
  - Cleaning protocols
  - Operations team

## 4 MANAGE CHANGE

- Consider human and social factors identified in survey
- Identify advantages gained by returning to the office
- Identify Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) for the organization to return to the workplace
- Develop communication program
- Provide virtual training and opportunities for employees to weigh in

# 1. DISCOVER



## STEP 1 | DISCOVER

Any new workplace design project starts with an in-depth discovery process to define how best to leverage physical space to enhance employee experience. While most companies will be reopening existing workplace environments before diving into any planning modifications, the same discovery process is integral to setting the stage for success. This discovery process should include, at a minimum, convening a re-entry team; deploying a company-wide survey; and establishing a timeline to meet the individual company’s needs and goals.

### ESTABLISH A RE-ENTRY TEAM

Each company should convene a diverse re-entry team with Leadership, Human Resources, Information Technology, Legal and Real Estate/Facilities groups (if applicable), as well as a Professional Design partner. The team will be responsible for creating an holistic approach for returning to the office. Having a central team for data collection, discussion and key decision making is paramount.

### SURVEY EMPLOYEES

- The re-entry team should deploy a company-wide survey to understand:
- What matters most to employees when they return to the office
  - What may inhibit or enable employees return to the workplace
  - How effectively employees have been able to work from home
  - Employee’s view and desires for remote work being an option moving forward

As no two organizations are the same, this information will be invaluable in developing a specific plan for your company’s successful re-entry.





### ESTABLISH YOUR TIMELINE

Once survey responses are collected and analyzed, the results should inform priorities and the timeline for returning for each organization. There is no one size fits all solution. While local shelter in place and stay at home orders legally take precedence, consider the results of your survey, as well as other measures of success that are unique for your organization.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT GUIDELINES		
PHASE 1	PHASE 2	PHASE 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to encourage telework whenever possible and feasible with business operations.</li> <li>■ If possible, return to work in phases.</li> <li>■ Close common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact or enforce strict social distancing protocols.</li> <li>■ Minimize non-essential travel and adhere to CDC guidelines regarding isolation following travel.</li> <li>■ Strongly consider special accommodations for personnel who are members of a vulnerable population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Continue to encourage telework, whenever possible and feasible with business operations.</li> <li>■ Close common areas where personnel are likely to congregate and interact, or enforce moderate social distancing protocols.</li> <li>■ Strongly consider special accommodations for personnel who are members of a vulnerable population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Resume unrestricted staffing of worksites.</li> </ul>

[Source website](#)

### OPTION 1

Re-enter as soon as your State and Local jurisdiction allows and shelter in place orders are lifted.



### OPTION 2

Re-enter at Phase 2 or Phase 3 of Federal Government, State or Local Guidelines.



### OPTION 3

Re-enter when internal company criteria is met.







## 2. PHYSICAL SPACE PLANNING

### STEP 2 | PHYSICAL SPACE PLANNING

Engage your Professional Design Partner, in collaboration with your organization’s Facilities Leader, to develop modifications for the existing workspace that will integrate CDC guidelines for physical distancing and hygiene, while considering factors that will enhance employee experience as returning to the office becomes a reality.

#### PHASING

Determine if a phased approach to re-entry is desired, possibly evolving over time, ranging from a limited return when shelter in place/stay at home orders are initially removed to a full, pre-COVID-19 occupancy.

### ESTABLISH OCCUPANCY USING SMITHGROUP’S POST-COVID-19 OCCUPANCY CALCULATOR

Determining safe occupancy during this time can be complex. The re-entry team, alongside Human Resource Leaders, need to understand how many employees are willing and able to return to work. SmithGroup’s proprietary post-COVID-19 Occupancy Calculator can help companies determine a path forward for those willing and able to return to the office.

SMITHGROUP POST COVID-19 OCCUPANCY CALCULATOR	COMPANY 1	COMPANY 2	COMPANY 3
TOTAL STAFF COUNT	80	150	300
% OF EMPLOYEES IN VULNERABLE POPULATION THAT MUST CONTINUE REMOTE WORK <small>Percentage of staff in vulnerable populations*</small>	10%	12%	14%
% OF EMPLOYEES WITH CHILDREN THAT MUST CONTINUE REMOTE WORK <small>Percentage of staff without access to childcare*</small>	30%	32%	28%
TOTAL STAFF WORKING FROM HOME <small>Vulnerable population plus staff without access to childcare</small>	32	66	126
STAFF WILLING AND ABLE TO COME INTO THE OFFICE <small>Total staff count minus staff working from home</small>	48	84	174
% OF FLEXIBLE WORKFORCE <small>Percentage of staff alternatively working remotely for a certain number of days per week</small>	25%	20%	30%
TOTAL NUMBER OF SEATS REQUIRED	36	67	122

\*Figures based on employee survey and conversations with Human Resources



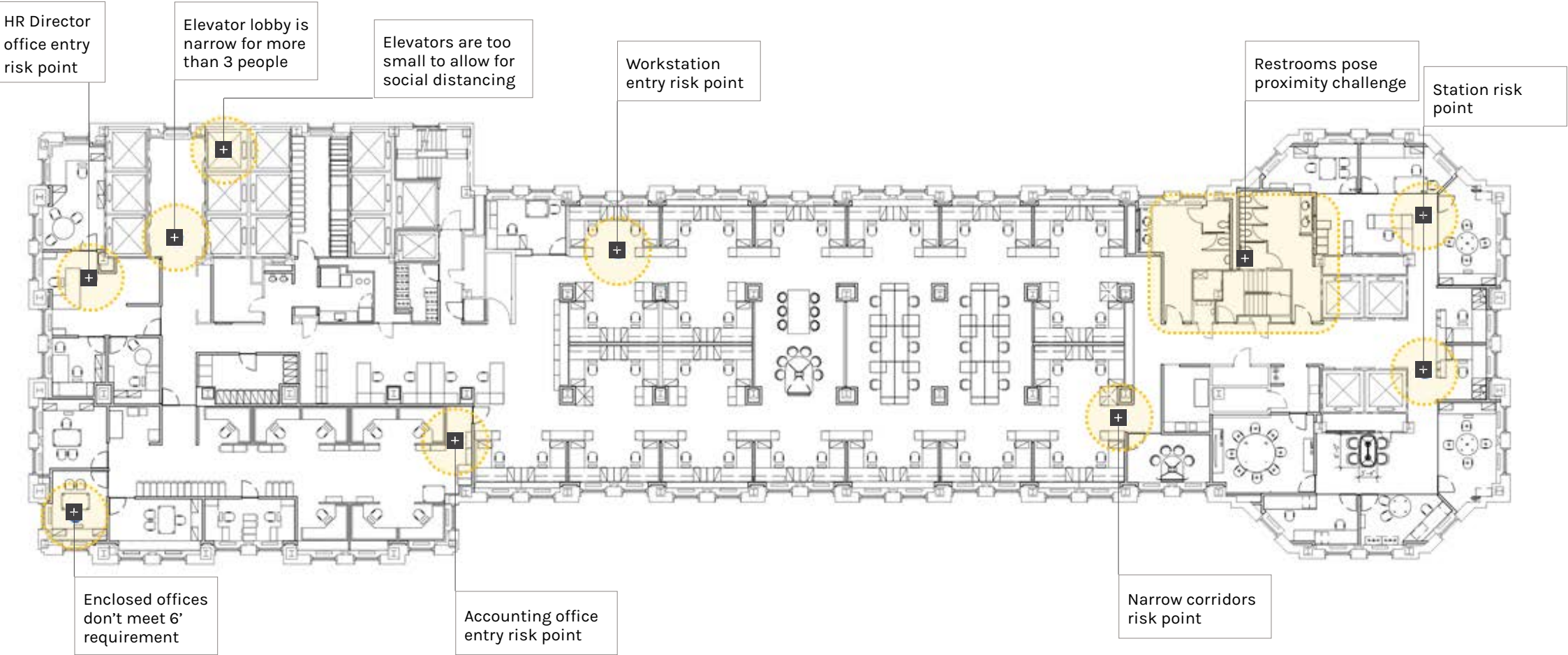
# PHYSICAL SPACE PLANNING

## IDENTIFY KEY SPATIAL RISK POINTS

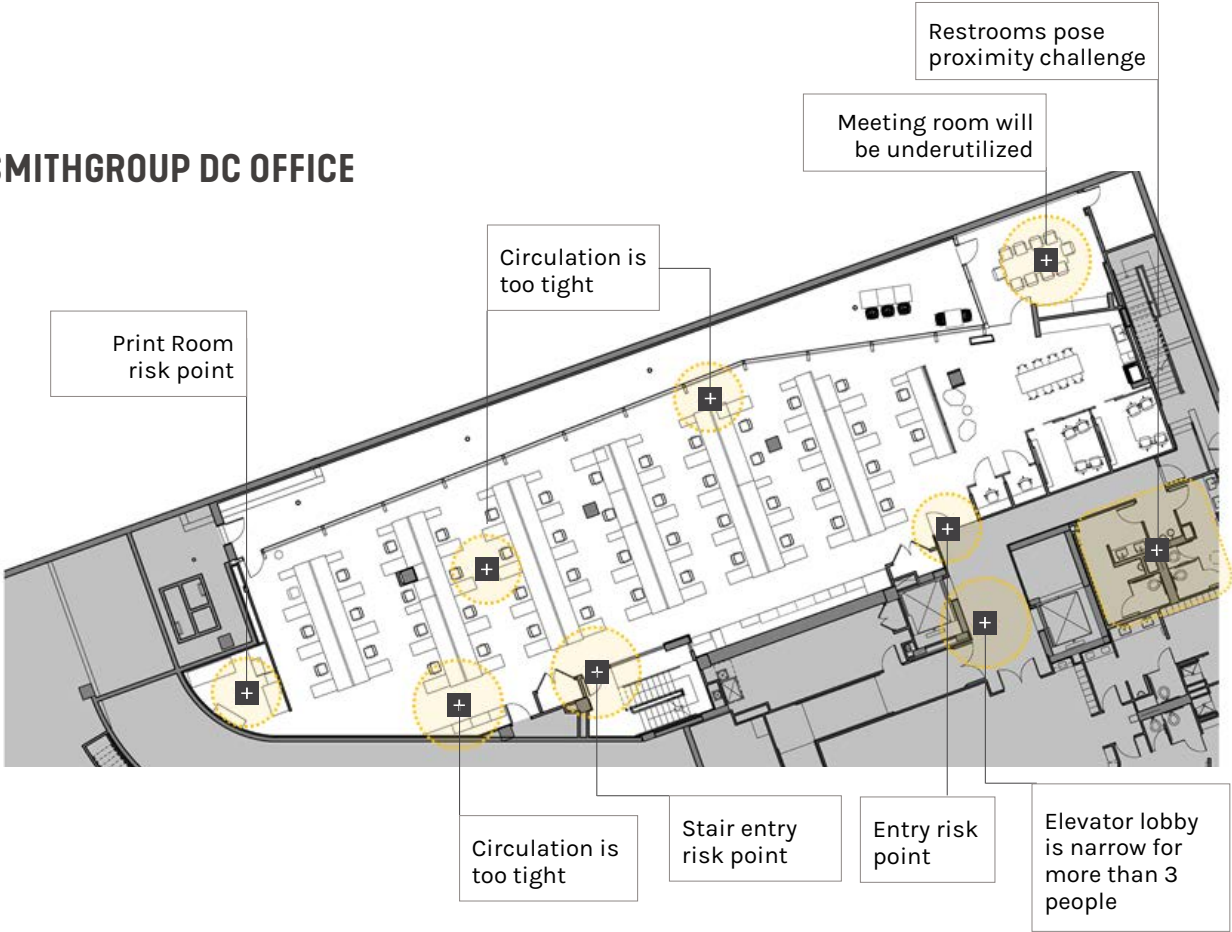
Identify spatial risk points within the existing workspace. What's critical here is ensuring team members can maintain six-foot distance guidelines not only when sitting at a workstation, but as they move about the space. Key considerations include the following:

- Entry and exit points
- Circulation spaces
- Open-office seating
- Elevator lobbies & banks
- Print and supply rooms
- Meeting rooms
- Stairwells
- Restrooms
- Amenity spaces

## SMITHGROUP DETROIT OFFICE



## SMITHGROUP DC OFFICE





# PHYSICAL SPACE PLANNING

## SPACE PLANNING SCENARIOS

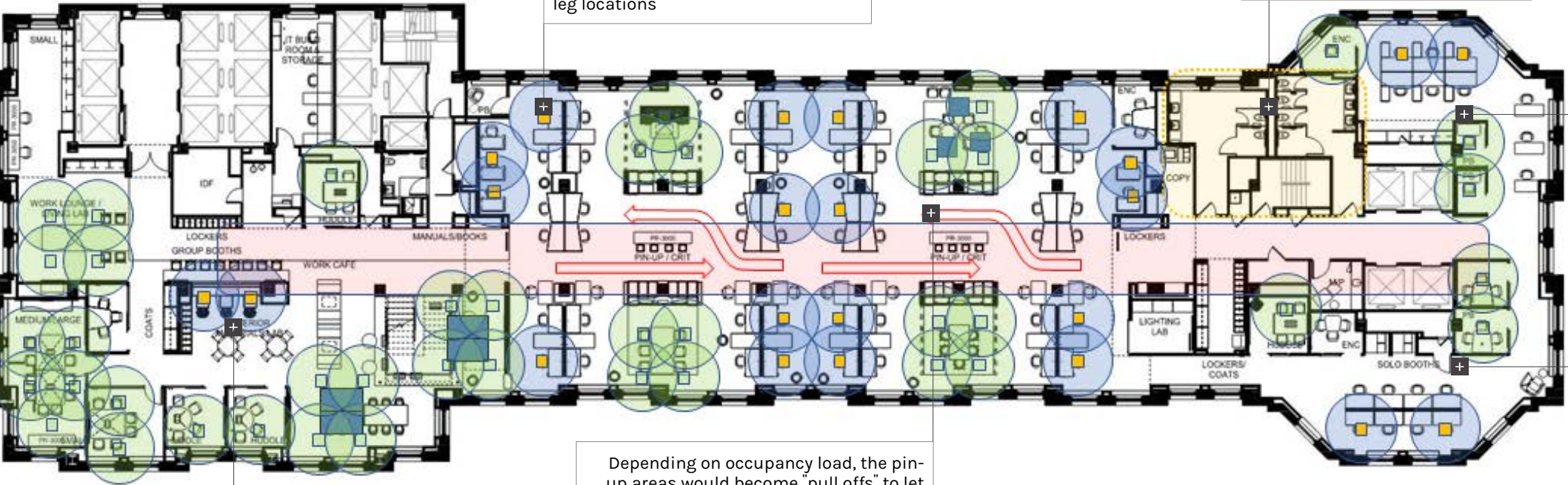
Before putting pen to paper, it is important to remember the "why" in returning to work. Company goals for getting back to the office will vary widely and should be based on the employee survey results as well as overall organizational business goals. Reasons could include connectivity, collaboration, culture, ability to work effectively, tools and technology, etc. Utilizing your Design Partner, Facilities Team, or SmithGroup's proprietary tool Disto (see box, right) develop scenarios to address the reasons for returning. Overlay your organization's existing workplace layout and reallocate the utilization of space by balancing safety with employee experience and effectiveness. The Design Partner, along with your Re-Entry team, will identify the tactical changes necessary to implement each phase of the plan. Key areas of consideration include the following:

- Identification of safe workstations that meet physical distance guidelines
- Creation of new, open collaboration zones, if needed
- Separating existing furniture to allow for 6' distance
- One-directional circulation paths and/or non-pass through zones
- Removal of furniture to create additional circulation spaces

## SMITHGROUP DETROIT OFFICE

PHASE 1 DEDICATED SAFE DESKS: 33

POSSIBLE COLLABORATION AREAS: 9



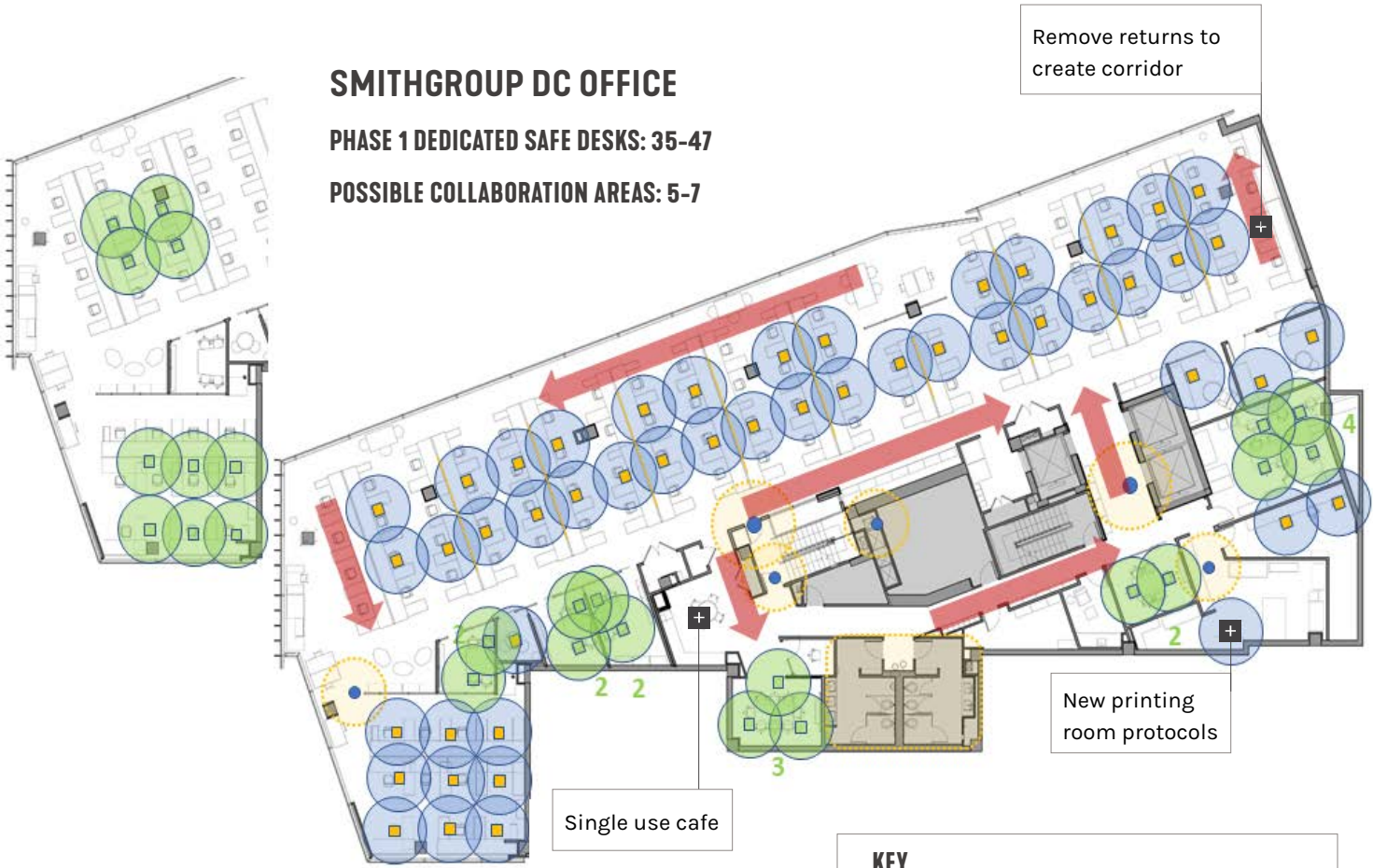
Challenging to enter/exit if every seat is occupied

Depending on occupancy load, the pin-up areas would become "pull offs" to let people pass in the other direction

## SMITHGROUP DC OFFICE

PHASE 1 DEDICATED SAFE DESKS: 35-47

POSSIBLE COLLABORATION AREAS: 5-7



### KEY

- Safe Desk
- Collaboration Space

## DISTO

### SMITHGROUP'S PROPRIETARY TOOL

Our Disto Tool helps organizations prepare for a post-COVID-19 world. SmithGroup can input your current floorplan (AutoCAD or Revit files) and quickly identify which seats can be safely filled while adhering to physical distancing guidelines. This includes seats in workstations, conferencing, collaborative and common areas. The flexible parametric interface allows design teams to explore various corridor layouts and physical distance parameters in real-time.



# PHYSICAL SPACE PLANNING



## ENGINEERING CONSIDERATIONS

SmithGroup values a holistic approach to all things design—including how the physics of indoor air environments inform strategies for returning to the office.

### FIRST: LIMIT INFECTIOUS AEROSOLS AT THE SOURCE

Respiratory aerosols present two infection paths—direct airborne exposure and indirect transmission via surface deposits. The CDC’s six-foot guidance addresses this, based on representative cough analysis, though it is not a guarantor of safety. Nor is the risk profile that of a simple 12’ circle since risk depends upon how and the direction in which a potentially infected person emits aerosol.

Coughing and sneezing are the most obvious risks, but merely talking is a risk due to fine aerosols from the vibration of moist vocal cords. The CDC’s recent broad recommendation for face masks addresses all such activities at the source—which is the most effective strategy.

### SECOND: INCREASE AIR FILTRATION AND OUTSIDE AIR

As a benchmark, the base filtration level of an N-95 mask corresponds to HVAC filters with a MERV rating of 13. Drop-in filter replacement options may be available with this rating, both in central air handling units (which may be a matter of tenant influence if not control) and in-space fan-terminal units.

Increasing outside air to variable volume air handling units may be feasible, possibly to 100%, to the extent that a lower internal load density (i.e. fewer occupants) offsets higher load for conditioning outside air, though energy use would increase.

### THIRD: INCREASE MINIMUM RELATIVE HUMIDITY

Though not high in public awareness, research links indoor air between 40% and 60% Relative Humidity (RH) with less-effective aerosol travel, shorter airborne and surface survival times, significantly lower transmission rates (1/5 as much at 40% RH as at 25%), and more effective lung repair functions. General wellness benefits also include improved cognition, sleep, and rates of absence. The recent [ASHRAE publication on Infectious Aerosols](#) recommends careful consideration of this 40-60% range.

The psychrometric overlap of climatic seasons and HVAC system operation determines the indoor RH and opportunities and constraints for maintaining an optimum range in RH, with the winter risk of condensation on windows or in building envelopes a key consideration. SmithGroup’s white paper, [Climate-Informed HVAC Increases in Relative Humidity May Fight Pandemic Viruses](#), unpacks those opportunities and constraints, presenting climatic visualizations with specific guidance for cities in climate zones around the world.

### FOURTH: ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

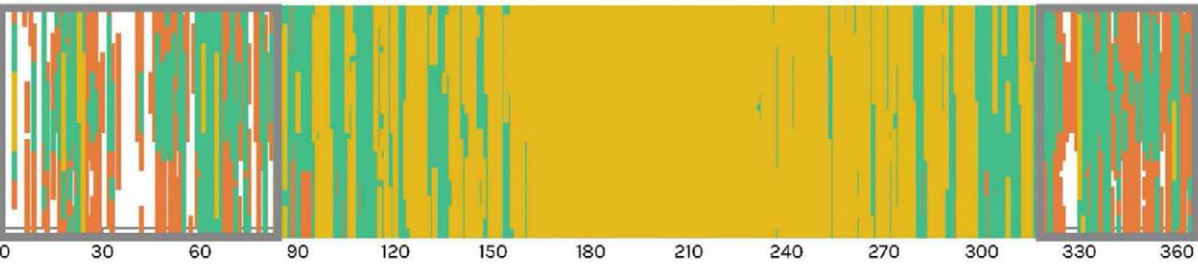
In-duct UV-C light systems can deactivate infectious aerosols in supply air streams. Alternately, UV-C light can provide in-space activity using upper-room germicidal irradiation (UVGI) units that circulate air through them. Both are considered conventional applications. Two more novel approaches offering in-space action:

- Bipolar ionization, which activates supply air, while in the supply duct, with an ability to disinfect aerosols and eliminate VOCs after it enters the space.
- FAR UV lights, which use a different frequency of UV light to allow direct exposure to rooms and occupants.

### NEW YORK – KENNEDY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT (ASHRAE CLIMATE ZONE 4A)

OUTSIDE AIR (OA) < 32F (0C), BASE LEVEL OF HUMIDIFICATION\* - 10% OF DAYS PER YEAR  
OA = 32F-40F (0C-4.4C), OPTIONAL HIGHER LEVEL OF HUMIDIFICATION\* - 15% OF DAYS PER YEAR  
OA > 40F (4.4C), HUMIDIFICATION TO 40% MINIMUM - 29% OF DAYS PER YEAR  
OA > 40F (4.4C), NO HUMIDIFICATION NEEDED FOR 40% MIN - 46% OF DAYS PER YEAR

New York-Kennedy Intl AP, USA  
16 FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL  
LATITUDE: 40.65 / LONGITUDE: -73.8



DETERMINE APPROPRIATE CONTROL AT LOWER RH\*  
DAYS OF A REPRESENTATIVE YEAR (JANUARY TO DECEMBER)  
\* PER BUILDING ENVELOPE CONSTRAINTS



# 3. POLICY & PROCESS



## STEP 3 | POLICY & PROCESS

Just as important as a physical plan for re-entry, modified guidelines for company policies and operational process must also be considered. Each member of the Re-Entry team established in Phase 1 brings special expertise which should be leveraged as these guidelines are established. Considerations may include the following:

### REMOTE WORK

As there may be efficiency advantages, as well as situational requirements post COVID-19, will your organization allow a percentage of staff to permanently perform a portion of their work from home?

### ROTATION SYSTEM

If a portion of your workforce will work remotely, (either in Phase 1 to accommodate fewer in the office to achieve distancing requirements, or permanent remote work in a final phase) how will it be determined which individuals and teams can be in the office at any particular time? Will your company consider staggered shifts and/or weekend operations? Determine who in your organization will lead this effort and manage the process.

### TECHNOLOGY & EQUIPMENT

COVID-19 challenged corporations worldwide to change their operations seemingly overnight. IT departments from companies small and large had to work swiftly to adopt to the new norm of remote work. For some, the shift was fairly seamless, but others struggled immensely. As we work to bridge the gap between shelter in place orders and business as usual, technology and equipment must be critical considerations. Is your company set-up for a both/and scenario in which employees working from home and in the office can be equitably supported? This must be carefully considered and managed.

### LEGAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

If your company determines that post-COVID-19, there will be a subset of employees that will work from home, additional human resources and legal guidelines may be required. Beyond remote work policies, companies may want to consider additional ways to increase safety in the office (i.e. antibody testing, temperature testing and/or infrared fever screening system (IFss)). As the government reviews current HIPPA regulations, your legal and human resource leaders should determine what is possible and necessary for your organization.

### SEATING APPROACH AND CLEAN DESK POLICY

Multiple studies have shown that the personal workstation in an open office often has more germs than found in the restroom. This is because cleaning crews are not able to clean around items left on, in and around a personal workstation or desk within an office. A clean desk policy should be implemented whether an organization has assigned or unassigned seating. Consider providing sanitizing wipes and cleaning sprays at each workstation.

### HYGIENE AND SAFETY

Some jurisdictions may have legally mandated requirements for wearing personal protection equipment (PPE), such as face masks and/or gloves. In addition, some landlords will have requirements for PPE that will go beyond jurisdictional requirements. A designated re-entry team member should investigate all external requirements for safety. The team should determine whether hygiene and safety measures beyond what will be required jurisdictionally should be implemented within the office. Considerations may include:

- Hand washing stations (locations, number available, signage, etc.) to encourage proper and frequent hand washing
- Policies for employees and visitors regarding temperature check and antibody testing, if available





- Ability to purchase supplies (hand sanitizer stations, bottles, wipes, masks, gloves) in appropriate quantities for staff and determine where they should be placed in the office
- Creation of and location designation for signage/posters re: hygiene protocols and information, distancing marking and maximum occupancy of common spaces such as meeting rooms and amenity spaces.
- Removal of all shared work tools such as keyboards
- Disabling of all water fountains, consider replacing with bottle fillings dispensers for higher safety
- Unplugging computer monitors and docking stations at workstations that should not be used to achieve distancing guidelines
- Consider foot door openers at restrooms and other key areas (stairs, entry and exit points, etc.)
- Revisit your company's sick policy to improve safety standards of all staff members in the office.

#### CLEANING PROTOCOLS

A designated member of the re-entry team should work with the cleaning company (either private or via landlord) to establish and confirm new daily and nightly cleaning protocols. For example, organizations may want to implement additional cleaning throughout the day for shared spaces, and more extensive cleaning with more effective cleaning products each night.

#### SPACE USE PROTOCOLS AND PROCEDURES

Specific guidelines should be established for the use of both individual and shared spaces such as toilet rooms, meeting rooms, teamwork areas and common amenity spaces.

#### OPERATIONS TEAM

Once employees return to the workplace, it will be important to have a team to ensure that the policies established are effective, or perhaps need to be tweaked as the result of the new shared work experience. Additionally, how space is being utilized, either through technology tools or physical observation should be monitored by the Operations team.

## 4. TRANSITION & MANAGING CHANGE

### STEP 4 | MANAGING CHANGE

Change of any kind is often met with resistance; it is human nature to prefer the familiar and question the unknown. Returning to the office after this very unfamiliar and disruptive time will require additional effort on the part of office leadership to ensure a positive experience for employees. Transparency is critical; making much of the unknown known will provide employees with confidence and trust.

- **Human and social factors.** Supporting all aspects of well-being should be the fundamental approach to a holistic workplace, ultimately supporting organization's success. Assessing the findings of the company-wide employee survey will provide the leadership team insight regarding employee perspective on inhibitors and enablers for returning to the office.
- **Explore Strengths, Weakness, Threats and Opportunities** for the company in the post-COVID-19 context to create a framework to share with employees. This could be a virtual workshop with company-wide leadership participation.
- **Develop key messaging** that emphasizes the advantages of returning to the workplace while acknowledging the challenges employees may face, with highlights from the company-wide employee survey.
- **Design a communications plan.** Connecting the modified workplace environment to the business goals and priorities of the organization while acknowledging employee safety will reassure staff with facts early on to avoid rumors. This communication can include

- Overarching messaging about the company's return to the workplace
- New protocols and etiquette guidelines for the post-COVID 19 use of the workspace
- Resources and Frequently Asked Questions

- **Provide virtual training** before employees return to the office. This is a great opportunity for employees to provide feedback and ask questions prior to returning to the office.
- **Feedback and adjustment.** Any transition into a new environment requires an adjustment phase to be successful. During the first three months following the return to the office, communication from staff should be assessed on a weekly basis to implement any tweaks that will improve use of the space and overall satisfaction, without compromising safety.
- **Opportunity for organizational longevity.** Organizations that are able to build in resiliency in their approach to returning to the workplace from this devastating crisis will not only be more successful in the immediate future but will thrive in the long-term.

"In light of recent world events, businesses are asking whether being prepared for continuous change is enough. The next step will be to test whether or not corporations are agile enough to deal with sudden, unpredictable change and future-proof themselves."

- Don Schuerman, CTO at Pegasystems



# LEADING BY EXAMPLE

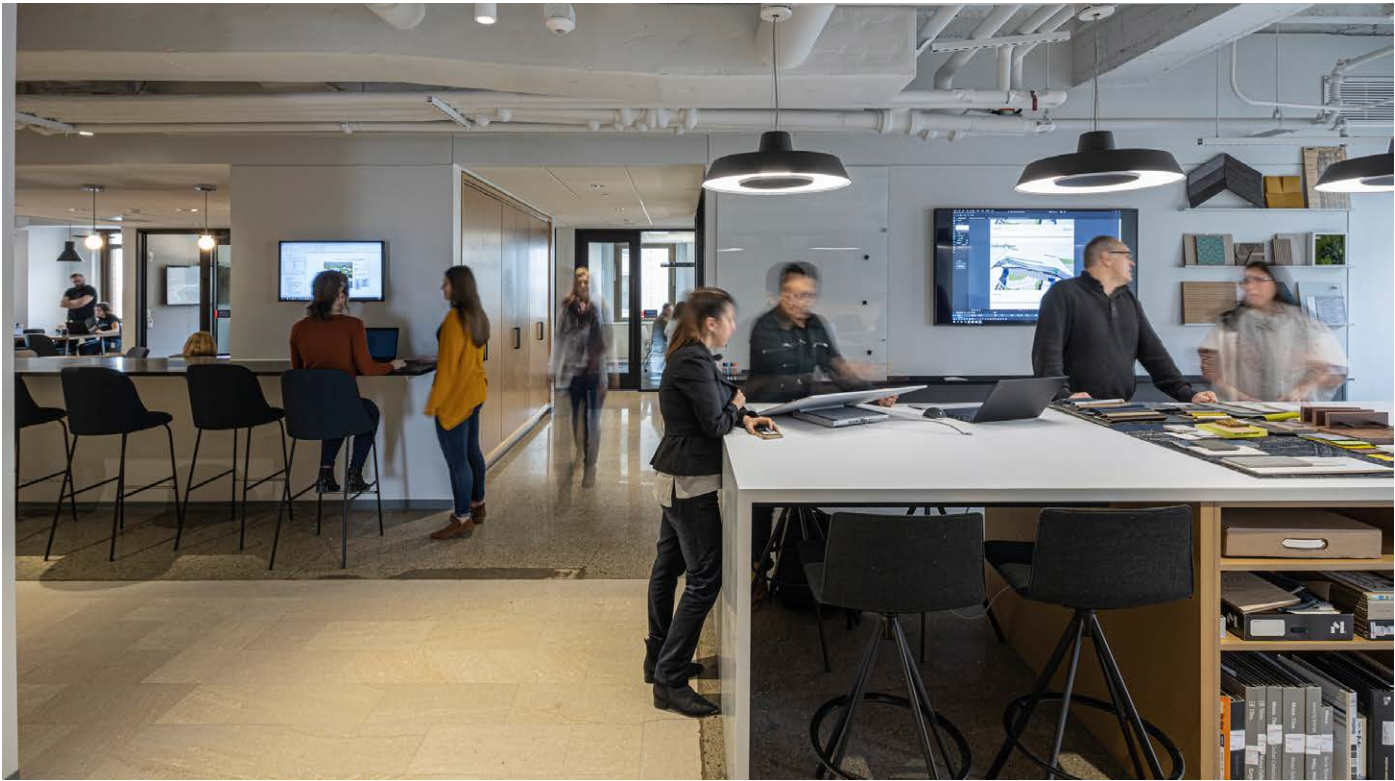
## YOUR TRUSTED ADVISOR

As a firm, SmithGroup was already working virtually before the outbreak of COVID-19, collaborating across 14 offices coast to coast as well as Shanghai. Our staff are immensely connected through various communication tools. No firm was prepared to have every single employee working independently, but in a matter of two days we were able to leverage our existing remote capabilities and adjust our work practices for a seamless digital transition between clients and project teams, with no interruption of the work. Are we perfect? No. But, was the transition to remote work fairly painless for us? Yes.

This next stage of transition has proved to be much more complex. But we are leading by example. Our Workplace Practice Leaders, alongside representatives from multiple disciplines including human resources and IT leadership, has been at

the helm for devising our plan, utilizing the process summarized herein. This Re-entry Task Force is working swiftly to bring our employees back to 14 offices across the country, with key drivers being employee well-being and user experience.

But this is just the beginning in what we see as a paradigm shift in work across our industry. Once the challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic dissipate, returning to business as usual would mean we missed the opportunity for learning and improving that all challenges pose. We want to return better, improved, whole. That can only happen if we make near-term decisions with a keen focus on improving future outcomes. If your organization needs help devising a *Holistic Approach for Returning to the Office*, we are primed and ready to assist you as your trusted advisor. Let's Design a Better Future, together.





# SMITHGROUP

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## Design a Better Future

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