

Redesigning workspaces for a post-Covid-19 world

By [Michael Aldridge](#)

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Countries that have suffered the most severe outbreaks of Covid-19 are seeing infection rates level off as lockdowns and widespread restrictions on movement take effect. Experts around the world are now looking at what measures need to be in place to allow industry to safely restart over the coming months.



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One area that will come under particular scrutiny is the office workplace where social distancing measures are often difficult to maintain, and workers are often in close proximity to each other – for instance in lifts, passing through corridors or at co-working desks.

After emerging from self-isolation, employees will be hyper alert about hygiene and density issues, and, although most countries in Africa have (to date) avoided the need for a complete lockdown, workers will expect global standard safety measures to be in place when they return to the office.

Greater health, safety measures

Globally, flexible and serviced office providers, like Kofisi, have seen the damage Covid-19 wreaked on the industry in the US and Europe. Demand for commercial space there plummeted, and office providers took a hit because clients had to work from home. Now people will soon be allowed back, there are calls for increased health and safety measures – above and beyond providing hand sanitisers and deep cleaning - to reduce the transmission of viruses in the workplace.

There's going to have to be a complete redesign of some office areas. Most of our members rent private offices, but our co-working spaces focus on people getting together, maximising collaboration and community. Now it's about redesigning for safety and providing enough space, while making sure workers can collaborate in other ways.

Most office providers implemented WHO guidelines at the start of the pandemic, but we believe workers will want to go further to ensure their personal safety by combining private offices or enclosed work zones with larger desks in shared working areas where there's more control over who they interact with.

Smaller private offices preferable

Speaking on a virtual panel on Instagram, the CEO of Industrious, Jamie Hodari, believes the co-working part of his business will probably diminish because of a perceived risk of infection. He argues that 30 private offices, housing one to four people would be preferable to a giant open floor plan for 120 people.



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Michael Aldridge, CEO of Kofisi Africa

Other safety measures suggested by the industry include:

- Increasing the size of desks from 1.4 meters to 1.8 or two metres wide, making it easier to observe the six feet rule.
- Using disposable paper placemats for co-workers to put under laptops.
- Installing air filtration and ventilation systems.
- Installing thermal imaging systems to check the temperature of colleagues.
- Zoning areas to make it easier to social distance and creating one-way traffic systems around the office to minimise transmission of the virus.
- Limiting the number of people in the office at one time.
- Improving smart technology that limits the need for touching the building. Tech could also be used to track employees' movements and notify them when the six-feet rule is breached.

But improvements to office facilities and having fewer people in the office comes at a cost to landlords, office providers and end users. Not easy to stomach given the current economic climate.

Office space still needed

We firmly believe that despite current challenges, businesses will still need office space in the future.

To meet clients and to affirm or share ideas requires a formal work environment. Technology has made home working easier and remote meetings possible, but like home schooling, you miss out on all the benefits a specialised environment provides.

At home, small children, pets and unfinished chores make it difficult to be wholly productive. Add that to unreliable power and poor internet service and it can be frustrating getting things done. An office solves this, delivering a stable and reliable work environment, every day.

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Blended way of working

The pandemic will bring about an acceptance for a more blended way of working, allowing clients to work from home a couple of days a week, whilst also having access to office facilities.

Equally, a flexible office licence is more appealing financially during uncertain times because they allow for agility. Businesses aren't tied to traditional long-term leases with additional operating costs in an unreliable economy.

Things have been tough, but we see this as an opportunity for innovation. If there's one thing we've learnt as flexible workspace providers, it's that constant innovation and being agile is what our customers need.

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