



## Exploring the future of office design - by Steve Delfino

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While the coronavirus pandemic has, for the moment, upended our personal and professional lives, our team at Teknion believes that the fundamentals of work are unlikely to change. On the other side of this global event, we will still need to focus and to collaborate, to learn and to mentor. This will result in smaller shifts in workplace design in order to adapt to our new normal, rather than dramatic upheavals of what we have come to expect out of an office space.

As most of us have adjusted to working from home, we will see an increase of residential design influence on workplace design. Designers will start to rethink the ways we've simulated the comforts of home within a more professional space. A residential design influence has already been permeating workplaces in recent years, with the addition of more comfortable seating and break out spaces. As many of us have learned, when given the option of various places to work in our home, we seldom use our desk space for the entire work day. Employees will continue to want this

flexibility and will look for the ability to change their work atmosphere or setting based on the task at hand or the time of day. Design will open up spaces to allow for mobility, undoing a proper balance between sociability and privacy.

The open office floor plan has been the prevailing design in workspaces for many years. As a result of our current pandemic, many have become wary of expansive, open layouts that can hold large groups of people. Despite this, we will not revert back to closed off private offices, but rather, the open floor plan will be expanded on to ensure that people feel safe when they re-enter their office, which will require additional measures to be taken. Workstations will need to be redesigned to have five-inch-wide seat intervals that are deemed suitable for both heads-down work and collaboration. Partially enclosed personal workstations will re-emerge, to help people feel comfortable and protected in their environment. These types of workstations, along with on-demand quiet rooms, will see a rise in popularity to allow more individualized control of employees' surroundings. Rather than boxing everyone in, the workplace must allow for people to choose the level of protection they feel comfortable with.

Even as we search for additional protective measures for infection control, humans are still extremely social beings. Many workers prefer an open, fluid environment in which to work "alone together," which is in line with the popularity of social spaces. However, more rigid boundaries will be set up to define personal and shared spaces. Just like in our homes, which can contain a dedicated office and a communal area, the function and our behaviors in these spaces are not interchangeable. We understand that each space is designed for a specific need, and we respect these boundaries. This same mind set and design separation can be applied to workplace design. People are social creatures and will not want to remove this aspect of the work day but personal space and shared space, individual, and collective work areas will become more distinct.

At the moment, daily life may be difficult, we will learn, adapt, and emerge from this period with new knowledge and intentions. This pause gives us a chance to focus on respecting and caring for others; reaffirming our commitment to building a better office and a better, greener, healthier world through design. By taking the lessons we have learned during this time, we can come out stronger together, and learn more about ourselves and each other. Fostering this change through design will not only make us better prepared for the future but also create a momentous positive impact on our day to day lives.

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