



Colliers

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The Future of Office

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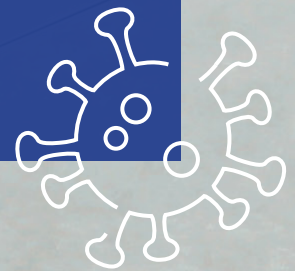
Associate

Accelerating success.



COVID-19

COVID-19 has brought changes to different facets of our individual and communal lives. One such change is the evolution of the notion of 'Office.' Jennica and Colin approached executives from international award-winning architectural firms and Canada's largest landlords to discuss their opinions of effects of the pandemic on workspaces and its future.



Is there a “future of office”?

The pandemic kick started the greatest social experiment of working-from-home. Many companies and institutions shifted to online platforms such as Zoom, Google Meet, Teams and others to continue their collaborative activities remotely, thereby decreasing physical attendance at workplaces. Given the relatively good results of this experiment, the question arises: Is the work-from-home model going to become permanent?

Perhaps not, thinks Lou Ficocelli, Vice President Leasing at Cadillac Fairview. Telling us about what Cadillac Fairview has gone through and is expecting, Lou conjectures that employees will return to physical workspaces, but perhaps not to the same workspace structure/design which they used to inhabit pre-pandemic. Lou further believes people will use their space differently for different purposes but nonetheless use their space. Cadillac Fairview regularly used to have 90% of its occupants within the building; now, with the pandemic, occupancy levels have decreased to 9-30%, with the lowest at 200 Burrard and highest at 750 W Pender. Lou is optimistic that attendance will continually increase in the short term with physical distancing measures in place and in the longer term with the general distribution of the vaccine.



“Work from home forever?”

Gradual increase in employees returning to the office

Executives from large landlords corroborate this view. According to them, there has been an increase in occupancy levels (up to 11%) from March- since COVID-19 first hit- till November

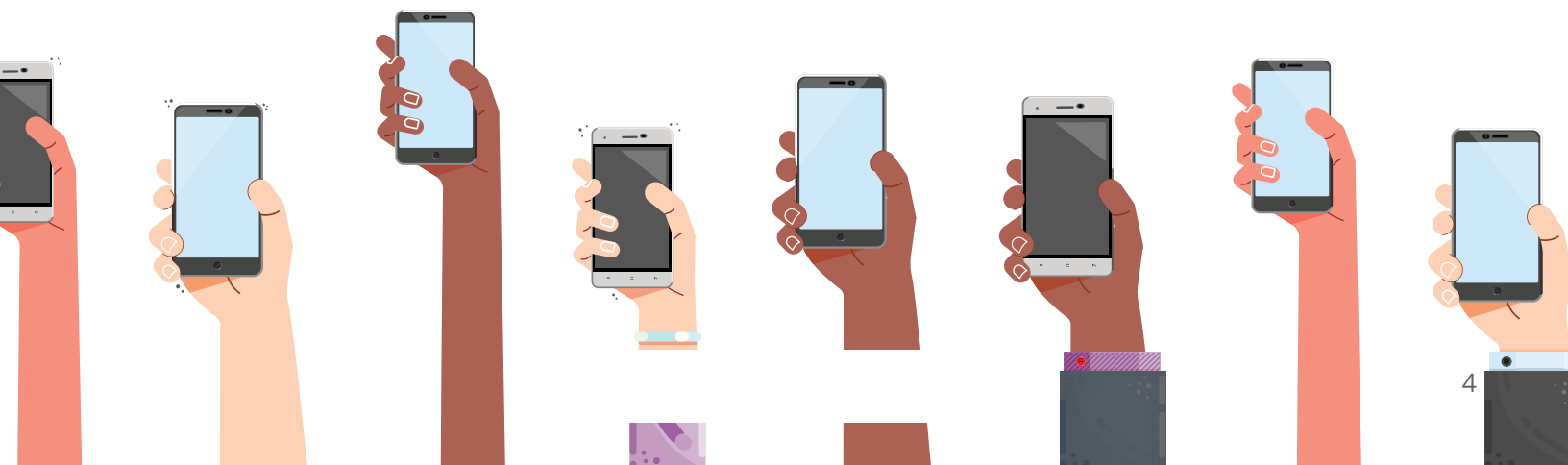
2020. In the words of Benedict Tranel, Principal at Gensler San Francisco, "there is definitely a future of office. The future is always different and I'm glad it is."

So, if there is a future of office and employees are coming back – what does it look like and how we can employees safely return?

Technology is more important than ever as a means of collaboration, communication and most importantly connection

Currently, companies are going through a situation where some employees are coming back to physical workspaces, while some are working remotely through online platforms. In such a hybrid situation the role of technology becomes even more crucial. Not only do companies need to make their physical workspaces safer and healthier to allow the return of more employees, but they also need online platforms and mechanisms to keep their remote team members connected. One such online tool is designed by Charlton Hutton, Associate Director of Design at M Moser, New York City. Charlton and their team implemented

a company centric mobile app in their New York Woolworth Office, the one raved about in [The New York Times](#) amongst others for its innovating design. The app allows the company's employees to converse, give feedback to their peers and book conference rooms thereby increasing efficiency and collaboration amongst the team members. Employees can also use the app to see which teammates will be in the office on what days, allowing employees to choose days to come in based on who they may want to connect with.



Zoom Rooms

Increased quantity of virtual meeting rooms (“Zoom Rooms”) with a decrease in size

Such virtual solutions are becoming more common and perhaps needed, affirms Barbara Riekse, Workplace Practice Leader based in NELSON’s Chicago office who has previously implemented workplace strategies for Google and BMO Harris, as well as developed strategies for clients such as Clorox, Intuitive Surgical, Brunswick Corporation and the American Dental Association. According to her, a trending demand for meeting rooms or ‘Zoom Rooms’ originated out of the pandemic. The purpose of a Zoom Room is to connect the team

members physically present at the workspace with those who are working remotely. Computers, web cameras, microphones, and tables usually constitute a Zoom Room as shown in figure 1. Usually, employees already have all of the mentioned components, making this a cost-efficient choice. If they do not have them, Zoom may provide a ‘Zoom Hardware Kit.’ With more people using these virtual platforms, companies can designate less space for their boardrooms - again cost effective.



Fig 1. (A Zoom Room)



Photography: Eric Laignel Fig 2.

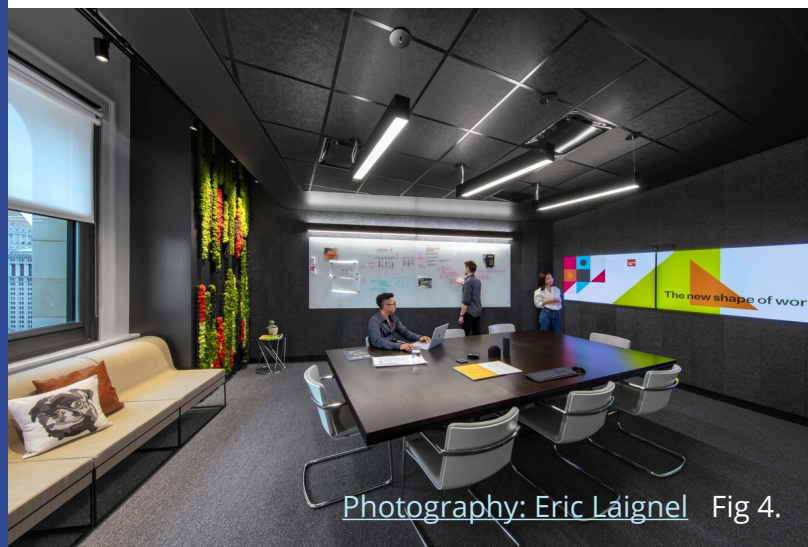
Hoteling Stations

Increase in non-designated offices and variety in hot desk options

A trend of similar nature is observed by Scott Hierlinger, Vice President of Interior Design and Managing Principal at NELSON's Minneapolis Office who specializes in Financial and Legal workplace. Many of Scott's Legal clients have shown a desire for non-designated desks or 'hoteling stations' for employees who have to work from home for a few days a week. A traditional industry such as law welcomingly adopting such a flexible design is unprecedented indeed. The employees can choose for themselves the types of desks (such as traditional seated or standing) and the types of rooms (such as open lounge, small, or closed). This freedom of tailoring allows employees to design their workstation according to their needs and desire, thereby yielding maximum productivity and employee satisfaction. M Moser's New York office hosts a couple of such tailor-made workstations as shown in figures 2, 3, and 4.



Photography: Eric Laignel Fig 3.



Photography: Eric Laignel Fig 4.



11% Recorded increase in productivity because of improvement in air quality

Focus on sanitization

Another important aspect of the gradual return to workplaces in the pandemic context is the quality of environment created at the workplace, through standard operating procedures and other health promoting measures. According to the World Green Building Council, there's an 11% recorded increase in productivity because of improvement in air quality and reduction in pollutants, thereby increasing employee health and productivity and decreasing absenteeism in the company. Andrew Dickson, Senior Leasing Manager at Oxford Properties, believes that a steady demand for office space will remain for well-crafted class A buildings, because they can enact and sustain the measures required for the production of a healthy environment, while demand for low-grade B buildings and lower quality will see a significant decrease. One such example of enactment of measures needed to produce a healthy environment is M Moser's Woolworth Office (figure 5) which features 5 movable 'Green Walls' for the purification of the air, thereby improving air quality and enhancing employee productivity and satisfaction.

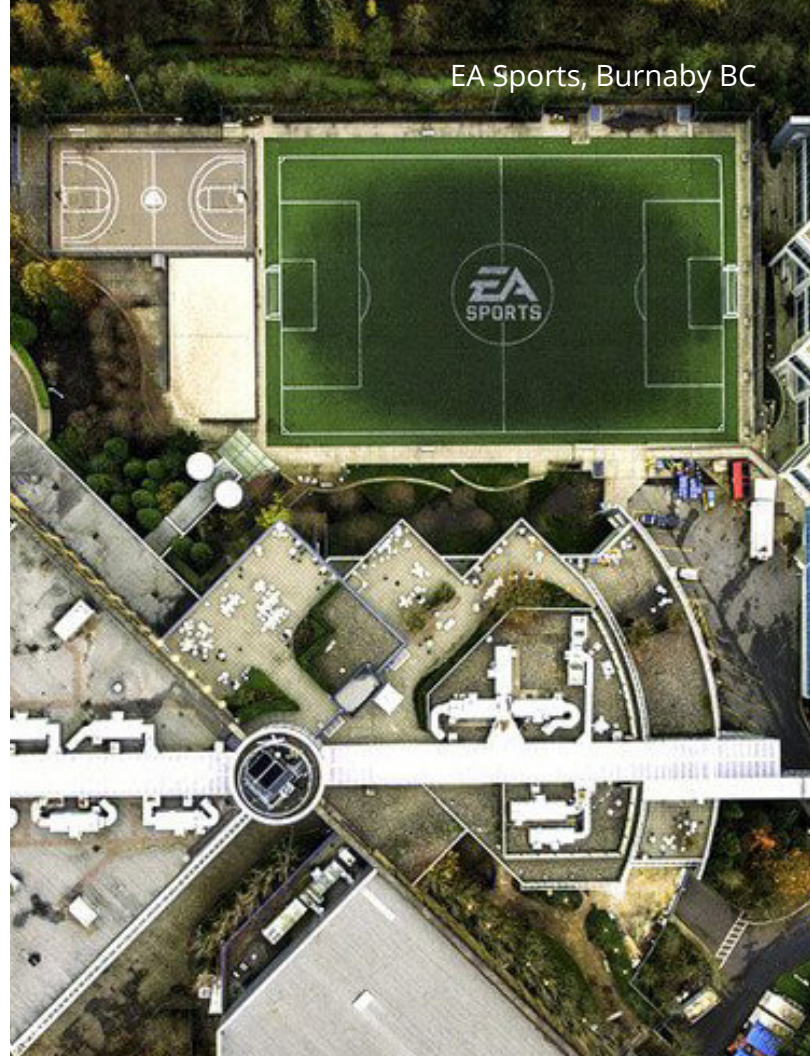


Less touchpoints

Decrease in touch points in the building is also expected as employees begin to return to their workplaces. Touchless technology such as motion sensor based automatic lights, doors, and elevators can render a safer and protective environment for the employees. NanoSeptic, in their office building, uses mats and skins to turn dirty high traffic touchpoints like elevator buttons and door handles into continuously self-cleaning surfaces. Antimicrobial surfaces in workspaces are expected to become more common to provide a sense of security to employees. But perhaps this only is not sufficient, remarks Benedict Tranel, Principal at Gensler's San Francisco office. We need knowledge networks amongst ourselves and clear visual clues embedded in our physical environments differentiating between safe and unsafe zones and practices in the workspace. In this way we can make sense of the new social reality which we have to live in in the pandemic context.

Increased focus on diversity and inclusion

Robyn Baxter, Senior Vice President & Co-Managing Director of Workplace Advisory at Colliers International in Calgary discussed the increased focus on diversity and inclusion in the workplace. Diversity and inclusion changes the way teams digest information when decision making by bringing together various perspectives. Employee satisfaction, productivity and happiness are subsequently increased as well as company returns. A 2015 McKinsey report on 366 public companies found that those in the top quartile for ethnic and racial diversity in management were 35% more likely to have financial returns above their industry mean, and those in the top quartile for gender diversity were 15% more likely to have returns above the industry mean (Harvard Business Review, 2019). Real estate can promote diversity and inclusion by offering amenities such as social areas, kitchens, and shared sporting rooms that facilitate interaction and relationship building with peers they may not have otherwise connected with.



35% More racial diversity in management proved more likely to have financial returns above their industry mean



A prime example is Electronic Arts' Burnaby Campus which includes sporting amenities such as a soccer field and basket court, as well as social areas such as coffee bars and shared kitchens. Ibrahim Hafeez, part of the Finance Team at Electronic Arts Burnaby believes his "strongest relationships have been built on those fields." Amenities such as these create spaces that promote togetherness and cooperation increasing employee and employer returns.

Increased focus on community

CityView in San Jose, California
Developer: Jay Paul

Increased focus on community

Benedict Tranel recently wrote an article, "[Rebuilding Community in the Post-Pandemic World](#)" discussing the loss of community and belonging that is inherently cultivated through in person interactions. Since COVID-19, interactions have shifted from relational to transactional. Instead of bumping into a colleague over coffee, we communicate only with people we seek out or have a transactional need for. Returning to the office will be an intentional choice by employees looking to regain that sense of community and relational interactions. Translating this into office design, workplace amenities such as outdoor terraces, connected kitchens and social areas will be vital in rebuilding community. Gensler's [CityView](#), 3.8M rentable square foot, tech office campus, is an example of this. Located in the heart of downtown San Jose, Gensler creates an environment to foster community with almost 2 acres of outdoor bridges and rooftop terraces to be enjoyed by everyone.



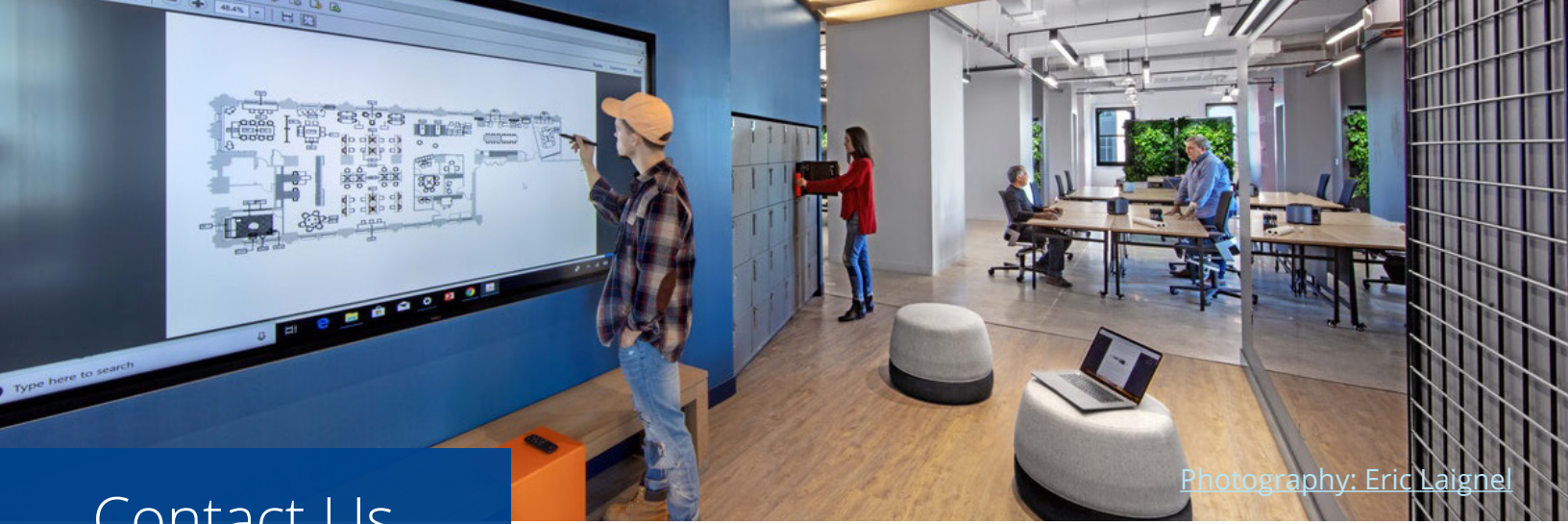
Conclusion

To conclude, those companies which can provide healthier, safer, and protective environments; integrate remote and in-person meeting mediums; and allow employees to design their own workstations according to their needs to reap maximum benefit, will drive the future of 'Office.' So perhaps, no, there is no future of 'Office' as we once expected it, but there is a future and it is of the kind which we never imagined. In Benedict's words,

“the future is always different and I'm glad it is.”

Thank you to Cadillac Fairview, Robyn Baxter at Colliers International and Ibrahim Hafeez at Electronic Arts for allowing us to peek into their perspectives of the future of 'Office.'





Photography: Eric Laignel

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Colin's Background

For over 27 years, I've specialized in finding real estate solutions for business challenges, with a focus on technology and professional services firms. I use an exclusive methodology to truly understand my clients' businesses and industries, giving them unique insights into their operations and positively impacting business drivers, including productivity, culture, engagement, retention/attraction, brand and operational efficiency. Not only that, I do it on the very best financial terms.

I've traveled to 20 cities around the world to research the future of office space, and to study workplace design trends that increase employee engagement. I speak regularly at conferences about my findings, and contribute to reports and white papers.

I am one of five people on Colliers' National Advisory Board which advises Colliers' Canadian CEO on key national business issues, am a regular faculty member at Colliers University in the Netherlands where I teach Colliers' leading professionals from around the world and have been awarded the Business In Vancouver Top Forty under 40 Award.

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