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DESIGN HUMAN LIFE

A RETURN TO THE OFFICE AFTER COVID



TOOL ISSUE 003
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During the Phase 2 many companies were forced to re-adapt rapidly their workspaces in order to enable entrance for their employees. But how was this return to the office done and what were the main areas that received major interest?

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Short-term and long-term scenarios

First of all, it is necessary to divide the possible interventions in short-term actions some of which, however, could **become part of a more structured future**, and long-term interventions. This paper aims to list the **activities linked to the first scenario**. Whereas for the second one, it is necessary to set up more structured moments of analysis **involving the companies**.

In fact, as a consequence of the pandemic and, especially, as a consequence of the actions set up to secure a “forced” remote working from their homes, many are carrying on the need to revision their ways of working, and therefore their organizational structure, to revision the digital infrastructure and certainly to comprehend what meaning to give to their workspaces.

These considerations, though, cannot be done generically without taking note of diverse and multiple components at stake when it comes to the redesign of spaces for a company or a multinational corporation.

If already previously an approach to co-design capable of involving the entire organigram was giving major security for the achievement of results, and thus for the creation of an **efficient, effective workplace**, capable of conveying the brand and creating a vibrant environment loaded with meaning for its users, today it's even more required to involve managers and employees in the process of comprehending what meaning to give to the new spaces.

Which activities will be performed in the office and which will continue to be conducted from home? How much space does the company need to acquire in view of an intense implementation of a **more structured agile work**? The technology cannot substitute completely the relations between people, how can we restore spontaneous collaboration, attraction and training of new talents in the spaces? These are some of the many questions that the companies are asking themselves in this period.



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PRACTICAL ACTIONS FOR MANAGING THE RETURN

In accordance with the Italian Government, on March 14, trade unions and companies signed a **protocol to protect the health and safety** of workers from a possible contagion of new coronavirus and to secure the healthiness of work environment. The protocol was integrated on April 24 and was inserted as Attachment 12 in the Prime Ministerial Decree on May 17, 2020. On the government's website* one can consult in more detail the **recommendations for workers** and those regarding the use of workspaces. This paper aims to provide help in this respect, in order to constitute a practical application of the recommendations in the different floors and spaces in general.

So what are the operations we need to put into practice in order to enable the employees' return, clearly partial, to the office?

The actions to be taken can be the following.

1. Cutting the density of corporate population whilst securing the correct distance in the environment.

*In order to ensure at least one-meter distance between people it is necessary to monitor entrances and verify presence in the office, perhaps using a **tool for booking** workstations or common areas. The latter ones, in the attempt to cut down as much as possible live meetings, can be temporarily converted to **desk-sharing** workstations. The layout of a typical floor will therefore remain unaltered, some workstations will be enabled for users while others shall be left free, in a conformation that figuratively resembles a chessboard. Some companies had the necessity to change their furniture by inserting desk dividers or even changing writing desks to favor wider and more distanced workstations. Such activities certainly require an economical investment. All these operations secure the copresence of **approximately 20-30%** of the entire corporate population. A further suggested activity could be that of making **alternate the work groups**, and thus the possibility to travel to the office, in order to restrict and monitor the presence of the virus even more effectively.*

2. Managing the flows.

*Controlling the presence at workstations is definitely easier than managing the flows where simultaneous presence can hardly be controlled. It will therefore be necessary to try to secure **single-direction flows** and avoid places where more people could gather. It's therefore fundamentally important to have clear and precise signage that would indicate places where to stop, directions that can be taken, corridors enabled and not. The entrance point cannot be an obstruction either. Moreover, it will be necessary to enable **temperature check** on behalf of the staff right on the arrival to the company, this could even be done using more advanced technological tools capable of automated detection.*

The actions to be taken can be the following.

3. Defining hygienic norms and their rituals.

*Points for **sanitizing and cleaning used surfaces** (keyboards, tables, etc.) shall be inserted within the area. It could be a good practice to establish a ritual for the use of shared elements and for their subsequent sanitization and cleaning.*

5. Sanitization and eventual use of new materials.

*The company must ensure **daily cleaning and periodical sanitization** of premises, rooms, workstations, common and leisure areas. In case there's a person with Covid-19 in the company's premises, cleaning and sanitization of the area shall be carried out according to the norms of the circular letter no. 5443 of February 22, 2020 of the Ministry of Health, along with the ventilation of the premises. A cleanup at the end of a shift and periodical sanitization with appropriate detergents of devices such as keyboard, touch screen, mouse, both in the offices and production units must be ensured.*

4. Digital connection and use of personal devices.

The use of technology will certainly continue to provide constant support, both outside and inside the office. Considering the recent experience of working from home, it is not excluded that many employees who have been making use of a laptop computer are likely to continue to use it also in the office, in a way to limit the use of shared objects as much as possible. Technology can also help, for example, to avoid touching surfaces (doors, handles, intercom, etc.), thanks to the opening sensors or more advanced entrance systems such as facial recognition. As mentioned before, a tool for booking workstations will be necessary if desk-sharing policies are adopted.

6. Environmental branding, internal communication and signage.

*All the points described above shall be communicated and "narrated" through graphics, images, wall and pavement signs. Sort of a **mild environmental branding** that allows to make clear and easily understood all the dynamics that are necessary in order to enable the control of the virus in the work environment. We're not speaking yet about the "construction of a common identity" through the graphics, an activity that can certainly become part of a future scenario, more distant and more structured, as we mentioned at the beginning of this paper.*



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REFERENCE

<http://www.salute.gov.it/portale/nuovocoronavirus/dettaglioContenutiNuovoCoronavirus.jsp?lingua=italiano&id=5383&area=nuovoCoronavirus&menu=vuoto>