



# FACILITIES MANAGEMENT ACROSS THE NEW WORKPLACE ECOSYSTEM



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## INTRODUCTION

The role of Facilities Management (FM) was brought sharply into focus due to COVID-19. Personnel who used to operate comparatively unnoticed “behind the scenes” were suddenly thrust into the spotlight, operating on the built environment front line of defence against the virus. While the fundamental role of the Facilities Manager – to provide a safe and healthy work environment – has not changed, the means of achieving that outcome most certainly has, and in some cases, radically so.

Playbooks have been changed to meet new requirements resulting from the pandemic. However, when we look at FM from the view of the corporate environment, we find that it is not sufficient to just modify existing procedures and adapt to a “new normal”. Here, there are wider, accelerated changes underway that revolve around the fundamental concept of **the workplace**.

Although substantial questions remain about the future of the workplace, it is becoming increasingly clear that a focus on the office as the sole place where work is done is no longer applicable and that there is actually an **ecosystem of workplaces**. FM needs to adapt and evolve accordingly. There are already changes in the way corporate offices are managed; that transformative approach will need to continue and soon expand to also consider non-office locations.

The COVID-19 pandemic has been a very human crisis, which has been experienced in individual, personal ways. In line with this, FM should be observed through the lens of the individual and adopt a more people-oriented approach. With this comes an increased breadth of scope to accommodate multiple workplace types and locations, and a renewed focus on what users need at and from each workplace. It is not the sole responsibility of the Facilities Manager to enact these changes. Everybody from the landlord to the corporate occupier to Facility Manager and the individual employee has a role to play to build and maintain the workplace of today for tomorrow.

From our collective experience across the globe – the development of best practices, solutions we have implemented for clients, data collected and analysed – we identify what has significantly changed, or what is new, within facilities management across three core areas:

- **health and safety**
- **technology and innovation**
- **culture and experience**



# HEALTH AND SAFETY

It is inevitable that in the wake of a pandemic, health and safety considerations come to the fore. However, it would be remiss to think that they were not important prior to the recent COVID-19 outbreak. The basic issues around health and safety remain the foundation of FM. However, the significance of these issues has risen considerably, bringing them into even sharper focus.



## What's Changed?

### Higher “minimum” standards

Hygiene and sanitation have understandably risen in prominence due to the pandemic. This not only reflects that people are more conscious of their own hygiene but also the hygiene of others around them.<sup>1</sup>

Cleaning was something that generally used to occur outside of office hours. Employees now want to clearly see the corporate response to hygiene and sanitation, not just be told what procedures have been put in place. The key here is to be more overt. While the addition of sanitation stations is an often-used response, some corporates are also adjusting cleaning rosters, so that the most intensive cleaning periods occur during, rather than outside of, the standard working day. Not only does this clearly demonstrate to employees the corporate commitment to hygiene and sanitation, providing them with greater reassurance, but also facilitates the higher frequency of cleaning required in high-traffic areas. Employees no longer complain about cleaning occurring whilst working.

### OCCUPIER TIP:



Build resilient supply chains. The pandemic has revealed the fragility of “just-in-time” procurement models for essential services and equipment.

### The shift from “just-in-time” to “just-in-case” inventory

There has been a shift in focus on supply chains and procurement. Similar to many industries, a “just-in-time” approach had become the norm — holding just enough stock on site, with the promise of swift delivery when in need of resupply. The pandemic has ruthlessly highlighted the downside of this approach as supply chains seized up the world over. Companies are now seeking to hold higher inventories of essential cleaning and PPE products, “just-in-case”, to ensure continuity of supply.



### Increased scrutiny of cost management

A product of more regular cleaning regimes and higher cleaning inventories is greater cost. Corporates need to ensure that sufficient cost allocations are made to meet these higher standard requirements. Within this, Facilities Managers have an integral role to play to ensure that corporates are bearing appropriate and not over-the-top service-level costs.

### New cost-benefits

In a similar vein, Facilities Managers can also help advise on the cost-benefit of installing additional safety mechanisms such as the cost of complete air sterilisation technology versus implications of a complete office closure. What was once financially unviable may now not only be viable but cost-efficient, if it can help avoid a lengthy business shutdown.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.fmj.co.uk/returning-to-work-hygiene-must-be-top-of-the-business-agenda-according-to-research/>



## What's Emerging?

### Stringent Business Continuity Planning (BCP)

The pandemic has revealed that stringent and wide-ranging BCP is essential for all businesses. Equally, existing BCPs need to be regularly revised to cover newly identified threats and incorporate the latest best-practice responses.

### Cleaning without chemicals

A more rigorous approach to cleaning doesn't have to mean a greater reliance on harsher chemicals. The use of ultra-violet (UV) light to disinfect surfaces is being increasingly investigated and adopted. Applications include the cleaning of all parcel deliveries, IT peripherals and high-touch areas such as escalator handrails. However, efficacy is varied and dependent on the type of surface, strength of UV and duration of the sanitisation process. There is also a growing array of "green cleaners" that are not only as efficient as more abrasive, chemical alternatives, but also more environmentally conscious.

### Antimicrobial surface protection (ASP)

Dispersion of cleaners and disinfectants is not always reliable, even with an electrostatic sprayer. ASP cleaning protocols were originally developed to combat the rising number of hospital-acquired infections, such as pneumonia and MRSA, that were plaguing the healthcare industry, but are now being considered within corporate environments. The use of ASPs provides an extra layer of protection against unforeseen human error when cleaning and disinfecting, and can help reduce potential bacterial cross-contamination.<sup>2</sup>

### Provision of safe commuting

It is evident that employees remain wary of public transport even several months after lockdown restrictions ease. Some companies are investigating methods to facilitate the movement of their staff to corporate sites, such as private buses, taxi or ride-sharing vouchers, or availability of on-site parking, especially for those with critical roles.

<sup>2</sup> <https://cwservices.com/antimicrobial>



#### OCCUPIER TIP:



Consult FM's on appropriate new cost benchmarks and service levels to set sensible budgets and avoid over-paying on contracted services.

## What's Next?

### Focus on offsite wellbeing

Physical and mental wellbeing both have an established place within a workplace wellness program, though most initiatives are directed toward on-site employees. As flexible working practices become more widely embraced, employers should actively consider the health of remote staff. At the fundamental level, this includes physical wellbeing (correct ergonomics and home office set up) and mental wellbeing (regular communication and creating an inclusive environment based on trust, regardless of the work location). However, best practice goes further and requires a different corporate mindset, in which risk management considers risks in their broadest sense, not just the immediate work environment.

### Supportive guidelines for remote workers

Clear communication needs to be provided on the occupational health & safety (OHS) implications regarding remote working, with a focus on supporting intrinsic motivation to be productive. Ultimately the organisation needs to provide a supportive and safe environment for these workers that balances employer and employee needs but also gives autonomy to the worker to make informed choices of where and how to work.



# TECHNOLOGY AND INNOVATION

In many respects, 2020 could be identified as a watershed year for technology. Robust digital infrastructure is now all but a pre-requisite. From an FM perspective, if two words were used to summarise the current technology focus stemming from the pandemic, they would be “tracking” and “touchless”. While much of the heavy lifting in this arena has been undertaken by corporate IT departments, Facilities Managers have acted as aides, playing a vital role in deploying or using this technology.

## What's Changed?

### Tracking attendance

In some regions, government mandated requirements have made tracking office attendance compulsory. Within an office environment, this has driven a rush to off-the-shelf apps, or the repurposing of existing apps, to meet the new requirements. What initially started as a focus on tracking office attendance has rapidly expanded into desk booking applications and beyond. Of course, this raises understandable privacy concerns and while employees are more willing to be tracked during the pandemic, corporates will need to clearly articulate how this data is being stored and more importantly, used.

### Efficiency dividends

With fewer people attending the office, technology such as desk and room booking systems can be used to co-locate employees in certain areas while still adhering to any mandated social distancing requirements. Using smart systems will allow the partial shutdown of any unused space for as long as necessary and allow lighting, HVAC and cleaning systems to be rationalised. Not only should this help reduce direct usage costs but also ongoing maintenance and therefore lifecycle costs for some of the larger FM expenses in office occupancy.

#### OCCUPIER TIP:

Use technology to create efficiency dividends from lower attendance levels. Co-locate office attendees, within distancing guidelines, to allow partial shutdown of unused space.



### Going touchless

Touchless technology has dramatically risen in prominence in recent months and is permeating through many different aspects of FM. Remote thermal scanning has become more prevalent, as have methods for contactless entry such as **elevator management, facial recognition and visitor management**, many of which were being increasingly adopted prior to the pandemic. However, the speed at which companies have needed to find touchless solutions has meant reverting to tried and trusted technologies, such as **sensors** and **QR codes** and then adapting them to today's requirements. There are increasing instances of “e-pantries” where food and beverage orders are placed via QR codes/mobile apps, or using IoT sensors to alert cleaning requirements in areas that would normally be monitored in-person, such as toilets and breakout areas.





## What's Emerging?

### Identifying efficiencies

Here we have seen innovative use of **car-parking** allowances and greater sharing for the common good. As employees have adopted more flexible work strategies, this has often left car-parking bays unused for days at a time. Some companies have now taken to pooling parking bays and allow them to be booked through workplace apps or online systems. Not only does this provide tangible benefits, but also overcomes reticence in using public transport and so acts as an incentive to attend the office.

Further linkages could also be made to use **desk booking** apps to determine changes to onsite staff catering where provided, to avoid over- or under-catering on any given day.

Occupiers are also using desk booking app to inform **cleaning companies** on when to clean workstations.

### Air quality improvement and analysis

As airborne transmission of COVID-19 has become a greater focus for health departments around the world, corporate occupiers are likewise considering ways to maintain highest quality standard within their offices. An array of measures exists to increase air flow, sanitise air and constantly measure its quality; all of which can be monitored remotely through cloud-base systems. Together, not only will these assist in reducing contagion risk of COVID-19 but also other medical conditions that rely on airborne transmission.

### Remote workplace check-ins

Facilities Managers have been identified as essential workers, therefore granting them freedom of movement during lockdowns. With this, they have taken on additional roles to deliver corporate IT and office equipment to remote workers. At the individual level, some have also used this time as an opportunity to check-in with colleagues and enquire on their wellbeing. Together these roles have been immensely successful, providing a technical and personal point of contact to remote staff and should be part of ongoing support programmes for these personnel.

#### OCCUPIER TIP:

Consider linking office attendance to car parking allocations and pool unused parking bays for other employees to use. This will help incentivise office attendance and overcome reticence to use public transport.



## What's Next?

### FM Super Apps

Corporates are faced with a wide array of apps to perform a variety of tasks such as health status declarations, onsite registration and desk booking. However, they have been developed in isolation of each other. It is partly for this reason, that there has been a resurgence in the use of QR codes; they are quick to develop, cheap and easy to use. The next evolution is the development of a "super app" that combines multiple uses into one application. Something that can not only perform the above tasks, but also uses that information to feed into other processes such as building access, cleaning regimes, air-conditioning/ventilation settings and building a remote personnel directory so that colleagues can identify who is onsite or offsite.



# CULTURE AND EXPERIENCE

FM has progressed further from just the oversight of the physical environment to being integral in creating and curating workplace experience. As the nature of the workplace continues to evolve, this workplace role will receive even greater attention. As lockdowns ease the world over, executives are all asking how to bring their employees back into the office. Separate research has revealed the importance of choice<sup>3</sup> in this, so the logical next question is how to create a workplace experience that makes employees **want to** come back into the office.

As employees return to the office, the saying “first impressions last” is very appropriate. There has been renewed attention on making the small things perfect, such as daily morning checks to ensure work areas are functional with regard to sanitation stations, lighting levels and Wi-Fi connectivity; as well as ensuring meeting rooms are fit for purpose. In an environment where employees have an array of potential work locations, that first impression will have a large impact on whether the office is chosen not just once, but time and again.



## What's Changed?

### Equal experience for all

As employees embrace a wider range of workplace locations, the role of the Facilities Manager is to help ensure equality of experience across all locations. The pandemic has shone a light on the need to have a common level of service regardless of whether that is a corporate headquarters or satellite location. Employees now expect equality of service regardless of where they are located.

### Inclusiveness for all

People managers are adapting their management style to be more aware and inclusive of non-office team members. Within a working environment this could be through running virtual and in-person meetings concurrently or giving adequate speaking time for offsite and/or remote staff to forward their views. On a more personal level, the provision of care packages has also become more prevalent to help build collegiality, trust and inclusion. Technical solutions are also underway in this sphere, such as the development of chatbots to help monitor employees' mental health.

### Building neighbourhoods

Prior to COVID-19 many corporates were exploring the adoption of zone, or neighbourhood seating. Some have now accelerated these plans as another way to drive a sense of community and reinforce culture, especially as employees choose a more hybrid way of working. From an FM perspective this may mean new workplace protocols and etiquette around space use.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.cushmanwakefield.com/en/united-states/insights/us-articles/choice-drives-employee-experience-infographic>



## What's Emerging?

### A customer-centric approach

FM is no longer just about technical expertise. Customer service and end-user satisfaction are now even higher priority performance indicators of the quality of service being offered. In this regard, the focus has advanced from solely managing the asset to a technical specification, to also managing it to an end-user specification.

### The rise of Community Managers

The shift to a greater focus on end-users and their experience has seen the emergence of a new role – the Community Manager. The Community Manager's role is to not only facilitate a sense of community, but also to troubleshoot workplace issues, escalate user concerns, and act as the first line of response for all user needs. Occupiers across the globe are assessing whether this can be delivered by upskilling existing resources or through creating new service lines. Given the significant commonalities between the Community Manager and the Facility Manager, it is imperative these roles are clearly defined to operate in partnership with one another.



#### OCCUPIER TIP:

Ensure your C-suite, Human Resources, Marketing and Facilities Management are all strategically aligned in understanding the workplace experience they wish to deliver and the company culture they are trying to create.



## What's Next?

### An all encompassing strategic vision

The more prominent role of FM means it is vital that there is strategic alignment in a company around the workplace vision. The responsibility for workplace experience does not just rest with the Facilities Manager, but also needs to be collaboratively shared with the C-suite, Human Resources and Marketing teams. While we see this being discussed in the occupier arena at the moment, we foresee that FM will take an integral part in the core group responsible for creating the workplace vision, suitably funding it, ensuring it is best for employees, communicating it and then delivering it on the ground.



# OUTLOOK

The COVID-19 pandemic has thrust Facilities Managers into the spotlight. In doing so, it has **revealed the criticality of FM as a discipline.**

There has also been a much sharper focus on matters outside of (technical) FM and maintenance such as procurement, supply chain resilience, emergency response and resource allocation. In addition, the experience of the end-user is also of greater concern.

To excel in this new environment, Facilities Managers need to enhance their skills to include technical and interpersonal expertise. Companies are now closely examining how to meet these expanded requirements, whether by growing in-house teams or outsourcing to specialised agencies.

Regardless of the approach, the pandemic has revealed what class leading FM looks like and given the severity of the situation, it is something that every corporate wants to achieve.

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