

A modern, open-plan office space with exposed ductwork, a staircase, and bright green chairs. The space is bright and airy, with large windows on the right side. A woman is walking away from the camera in the foreground, and another woman is walking up the stairs in the background. The ceiling features exposed silver ductwork and recessed lighting. The floor is a light-colored, polished material. The walls are a mix of white and wood paneling. The overall atmosphere is clean, professional, and inviting.

Bringing People Back to the Built Environment

How can space support people's safety?

As millions of people around the world begin reentering spaces outside the safe confines of their homes, we have to think critically about necessary and desired behavior and interactions. What will bring them back to the built environment? How can the environment create an experience worth the risk of uncertainty?

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Actual or perceived control is essential for an individual's wellbeing. Without it, negative consequences at emotional, cognitive, and motivational levels can occur (Yarritu et. al.). It has been suggested that control is not only desirable but likely a psychological and biological necessity. "If people did not believe they were capable of successfully producing desired results, there would be very little incentive to face even the slightest challenge. Thus, perception of control is likely adaptive for survival (Leotti et. al.)" Outlined as one of Maslow's basic needs, safety and security are just above air, food, water, and shelter. A science-based approach is necessary to establish appropriate policies, but a people-based approach for choice and control is paramount in implementation.

Research on the psychological and physical effects of COVID-19 is happening around the clock and the world. New information is being published daily to keep us informed. Most, including a study conducted by Harvard

T.H. Chan School of Public Health, cite that, "Under current critical care capacities...the overall duration of the [COVID-19] epidemic could last into 2022, requiring social distancing measures to be in place between 25% and 75% of that time." As designers, this means our response needs to be thoughtful and not a knee-jerk reaction. BSA's rich history in healthcare design provides us with a diverse background of expertise that can inform future designs of our Workplace and Learning markets. Temporary tape on the floor and rapidly installed plexiglass screens are important, but they are not a permanent solution. History tells us that fear-based behavior such as this is not sustainable. Still, certain habits can remain if we can create awareness for the benefits and desire within people to participate. What are potential solutions that will fulfill our need for perceived safety and control and create permanent behavior changes for our physical safety? The solutions should be rooted in choice.



Getting Back to the Workplace

Work is more than what we do day in and day out; it is part of our identity (Fryers). Similar to how work is part of an individual's identity, the workplace is a physical manifestation of a company's brand, mission and vision, and culture.

To fulfill a person's need for safety and control, the evolution of the workplace will need to provide choice over how, where, and when we work. The built workplace environment has a responsibility to protect the physical and mental health of its inhabitants. According to Smith, A. in the article "How important is the physical workplace to engagement and productivity?" the "presence of job resources leads to engagement, while the absence evokes a cynical

attitude." As designers, we have the opportunity to provide spaces rich in resources to create meaningful experiences that can't be achieved virtually. A space paired with desired behavior should allow staff to flourish, resulting in a higher rate of engagement (i.e. less time physically and mentally absent from work), unyielding alignment to company goals, more significant innovation, and a stronger bottom line.

How do we bring public health practices into the workplace to contribute to feelings of safety and control? What can be done now and, in the future, to promote the health and wellbeing of a company's biggest asset, the people?

WORKPLACE CONSIDERATIONS

TODAY

FORECASTING

FUTURECASTING

PHYSICAL

- Minimize risk by using Hierarchy of Controls (1)
- Observe 6' distancing guidelines by rearranging and/or modifying existing furniture, adding screens/barriers to supplement
- Use visual cues/signage to guide traffic flow, queue spacing, and furniture placement
- Stagger employee time in the office to reduce overpopulation of space (10)
- Provide access to PPE and implement protocols (4,7)
- Increase cleaning measures
- Implement clean desk policy
- Implement stay home when sick policy
- Perform building system (air) checkup
- Reduce visitor access

- Reimage workplace environments
 - Reduce desk density per area and widen circulation paths (10)
 - Provide more localized copy / break zones per area (10)
 - Make spatial delineation part of the design
 - Provide increased access to outdoor workspaces
 - Design with flexibility in mind, allowing spaces to change during peak times
- Bring public health practices into the workplace (4,7)
 - Integrate PPE / hygiene stations into the design
 - Increase number of sinks and implement more stringent sink guidelines (2)
 - Increase focus on material selections and infection prevention (5)
 - Provide touchless technology / automatic doors (10)
- Implement building system improvements (air)

- Long term, design teams will need to innovate interactions within a built environment.
- Which interaction types benefit the most from face to face connection?
- How can we create spaces that support those vital interactions while keeping us safe?

MENTAL

- Allow users to be (and feel) in control (3,8)
- Choose where, when and how you work - home, office, shared space, outdoors
- Provide access to PPE, hand sanitizer, wipes
- Supply welcome-back kits to include PPE, hand sanitizer, drink cup with lid, personal white board marker
- Communicate what has been done to prepare the space for re-entry (make the invisible visible)
- Make cleaning practices visible ("cleaning theater" and signage)
- Implement cleaning checklist and scorecards
- Provide clear instructional signage

- Reimage workplace environments
 - Understand that experiences and resources matter (11)
 - Use spatial delineation to reflect personal space
 - Optimize outdoor work environments
 - Maximize access to daylight and views
 - Use multipurpose spaces for collaboration and team engagement (with clear instructions)
- Take a holistic approach to wellness by implementing WELL Building principles
- Create a forum to develop work from home and workplace behavior and safety policies together

- Designs should take away any distractions or fear that could affect a person's ability to succeed and thrive in the workplace environment.

EMOTIONAL (SOCIAL)

- Stay connected with virtual meetings, interactions, and social events
- Implement technology upgrades to ensure optimal connectivity for everyone

- Build a sense community and respect for the variety of work preferences

- Emotional safety frees our minds to collaborate, build relationships and trust, be creative, and make innovation leaps.



Getting Back to Campus

Before COVID-19 disrupted college campuses in the spring of 2020, one in five college students were already experiencing one or more diagnosable mental disorders worldwide. To make matters worse, the effects of this pandemic have led to a variety of psychological consequences for humans globally, including anxiety, depression, substance abuse, difficulty sleeping, and stress eating (Zhai and Du). This has the potential to greatly exacerbate the mental health issues that are already affecting college campuses, so how can we help mitigate these problems? One way could be to give students choices in how, where, and when they learn. This supports the safety and control needed to prepare a student, both physically and mentally, to learn.

The HyFlex course model was initially developed to provide choice and balance for busy students. The model provides the opportunity for learning institutions

to offer both online and classroom-based courses and programs without requiring separate classes in each mode. Today it's gaining traction for its flexibility in allowing students to decide, week by week, which mode they'd prefer to help achieve social-distancing goals and accommodate students who can't be on campus for health or logistical reasons (McMurtrie). This is one great example of how choice can offer the perception of safety. What else can be done now and, in the future, to promote the health and wellbeing of the faculty and students to give them the best opportunity for barrier-free learning? How do we bring lessons learned from first returning the workplace to the learning environment?

LEARNING CONSIDERATIONS

TODAY

FORECASTING

FUTURECASTING

PHYSICAL

- Observe 6' distancing guidelines by rearranging and/or modifying existing furniture, adding screens/barriers to supplement
- Use visual cues/signage to guide traffic flow, queue spacing, and furniture placement
- Stagger class start times to reduce corridor interaction
- Provide access to PPE, hand sanitizer, and wipes
- Increase cleaning measures
- Conduct classes outside
- Implement stay home when sick policy
- Perform building system (air) checkup

- Reimagine learning environments
 - Reduce density with optimal furniture layouts and visual cues
 - Make spatial delineation part of the design
 - Provide increased access to outdoor learning spaces
 - Design with flexibility in mind, allowing spaces to change during peak times
- Bring public health practices onto campus (4)
 - Integrate PPE / hygiene stations into the design
 - Increase access to handwashing sinks (2)
 - Increase focus on material selections and infection prevention (5)
 - Provide touchless technology / automatic doors (10)
- Implement building system improvements (air)

- Long term, design teams will need to innovate interactions within a built environment.
- Which interaction types benefit the most from face to face connection?
- How can we create spaces that support those vital interactions while keeping us safe?

MENTAL

- Allow users to be (and feel) in control (8,12)
 - Implement the HyFlex model and allow students to choose where they learn - home, classroom, outside, common spaces (9)
 - Provide access to PPE, hand sanitizer, wipes
- Make cleaning practices visible ("cleaning theater" and signage)
- Provide clear instructional signage

- Reimagine learning environments
 - Build choice into the design (8,12), offering a variety of space types and seating options
 - Optimize outdoor learning spaces
 - Maximize access to daylight and views
 - Bring nature and natural elements indoors
- Take a holistic approach to wellness by implementing WELL Building principles
- Implement effective wayfinding and signage strategies to reduce anxiety

- Designs need to evoke a sense of calm and reduce fear. When a person fears their safety is in jeopardy it will distract them from learning and productivity.

EMOTIONAL (SOCIAL)

- Stay connected with virtual classes, meetings, and social events
- Implement technology upgrades to ensure optimal connectivity for everyone

- Build a sense of community including safe social and learning circles

- How can we create a better virtual connection without actually being together?
- How can our learning model adjust to fit the evolution of the classroom?
- What infrastructure does the built environment need to support the change?



Creating Change

To build long-term desired behaviors within the workplace and learning environments, they should be developed by a team of change leaders. If it feels like a mandate, it's likely to wane as the immediate impact of the pandemic fades. What we know about the steps to create organizational change (Prosci's ADKAR model) successfully should be applied to creating changes in behavior policies and procedures.

1. **Build Awareness.** Tell people the why for these changes. Include information from health experts like the CDC and WHO, but make the message feel personal. It should incorporate the reasons that are specific to your organization's culture.
2. **Create Desire.** Go a little deeper with messages from organization leaders. Demonstrate a direct connection to their ability to choose and their personal safety.

3. **Spread Knowledge.** Create a plan to educate externally and internally. Communicate the vision - what will be different and what will stay the same.
4. **Develop Ability.** Remove any obstacles mentally or physically that could prevent your people from implementing the changes.
5. **Reinforce the Right Behavior.** Celebrate what is going well and continuously improve what isn't working.

When a person feels like their concerns have been heard and addressed and that they have been part of developing the solution, their inherent need for control has been fulfilled. They are part of the change, they are invested in the improvements, they feel safe, and they'll be back.

In future articles, BSA will take a deeper dive into the details around these topics and explore potential solutions.

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