CORT

Workplace Survey

An industry-wide survey of how COVID-19 is expected to change the workplace

The post-pandemic workplace – tracking the changes, challenges and cost impacts in a time of uncertainty.

Will every desk be full? Will square footage increase? Will employees continue to work from home? Our expansive study of 885 respondents across 12 industries gives insights on where businesses are focusing their efforts and the changes business owners and employees will see as they return to work.

We've explored 10 areas related to the pandemic so you can learn from others, hear new perspectives and possibly integrate some ideas into your own business plan for a safe return to work.

1 Is WFH the new normal?

For many, it seems that everyone is working from home. Articles about video-call fatigue and productivity levels are everywhere. But, exactly how many people are working from home and is this trend likely to last?

Of the companies surveyed, 83% still have employees working from home. And of those, 41% have half or more of employees at home.

But, when analyzing the permanent employee WFH outlook, the trend doesn't seem sustainable.

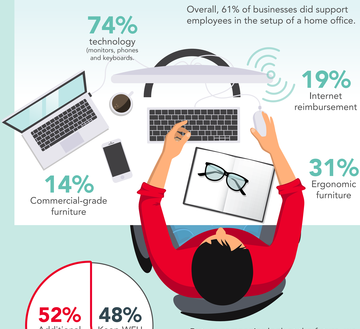
57% say less than 10% of workers would remain at home permanently

8% say at least half of their workforce would stay at home.

2 Supporting the WFH effort

In the mad scramble to set up home offices, sometimes in a matter of hours, both employees and businesses had to pivot quickly to support this new way of working.

Overall, 61% of businesses did support employees in the setup of a home office.



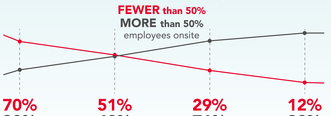
But, as companies look at the future, we see an almost even distribution of employers considering new or additional policies to support working from home.

We can infer that WFH will be a part of the working landscape for some time to come.

3 How soon is too soon?

While almost every business is eager to get back to "normal," it's obvious that returning to work will not be the flip of a switch. Instead, responses suggest most companies believe employees will return to work in a staggered approach through the rest of the year and into 2021.

As the timeframe extends, the numbers diverge more widely.

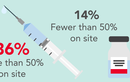


June-July	August-September	October-November	January 2021
70%	51%	29%	12%
30%	49%	71%	82%

The most divided timeframe seems to be during the traditional back-to-school season.

Post Vaccine

Confidence in more populated offices does increase with the arrival of a vaccine, but only by 4% from the January 2021 numbers but it still appears there will be some sustained WFH activities.



4 What concerns businesses most?

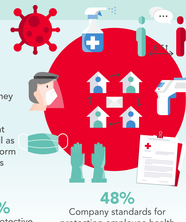
The impact of the virus has caused more than a sharp deviation to working from home. Companies must now reconsider and balance their overall priorities for both safety and revenue – and do it in a time that's at best, uncertain. It's no wonder the list of primary concerns businesses face associated with returning to work led with these:

Additional concerns ranked by businesses:

- **24%** Additional costs associated with enhanced sanitizing procedures
- **13%** Additional costs associated with reconfiguring or retrofitting current furniture
- **12%** HR updates to employee policies and processes
- **9%** Employee compliance
- **8%** Additional costs associated with health screening of employees and visitors
- **7%** Downsizing office space
- **6%** Lost productivity due to enhanced building entry measures
- **4%** Employee turnover
- **3%** Reliance on landlord to make building improvements
- **2%** Lack of capital

5 What do employees care about?

On the flip-side, employees feel they are more productive working at home. The majority are also interested in protective equipment when they come into work, as well as guidance and reassurance in the form of company standards and policies regarding their health and safety.



75% Option to work from home

61% Personal protective masks, gloves, etc.

48% Company standards for protecting employee health and safety in workplace

Here's how respondents ranked other key issues:

- **33%** Staggered work hours
- **27%** Protective barriers between workstations
- **21%** Body scans to take temperatures
- **20%** Home office furniture
- **17%** Paid leave for COVID19 illness
- **14%** COVID19 testing
- **6%** Telehealth provider
- **3%** Onsite healthcare

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Preparing for employee returns

With the countless directives from health experts, it's no wonder social distancing requirements lead the way in driving company-led office changes. But that seems to also translate into the needs for additional space, furniture and dividers as well.

49% Space and furniture requirements

26% Technology needs

7% CAPEX constraints

85% Social distancing requirements

48% Dividers or barriers

10% Space utilization sensor technology

Here are some illuminating comments on policies from across the industry:

"Cleaning more, wearing of masks, repositioning of furniture."

"Face masks required. No drop in visits."

"We're adopting a policy of 'maximum flexibility' through the end of the year, allowing employees to return to the office on an optional basis."

"We have all visitors sign in for contact tracing. We are practicing all CDC and local health protocols."

"WFH, 25% capacity, extra sanitizing efforts."

"COVID health screening when coming into the office."

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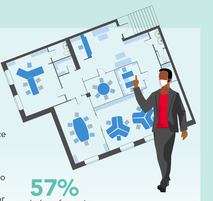
Is it time for a change of space?

Overall, the data we've seen so far seems to indicate that more space will be needed for employees to effectively practice social distancing. However, respondents did not overwhelmingly agree. This seems to be largely attributed to employees continuing to work from home, either temporarily or permanently, but also the addition of using flex space or co-working space to meet social distancing requirements.



57% workplace footprint would change.

55% increase footprint to accommodate the need for social distancing.

Here are the rankings of how businesses will accommodate social distancing while not increasing their footprint.

51% Higher percentage of employees staying home temporarily

49% More flex or co-working space to accommodate employees

43% Higher percentage of employees staying home to work remote permanently

38% More space to accommodate social distancing guidelines

5% No change in the workplace or workforce post-COVID

It's important to note that workforce reductions in these industries do not seem to be impacting the need to alter square footage.

Only 38% reported a workforce reduction

Majority of which citing reductions of only 5%-20%.

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Usage trends – more, less or the same?

Like fashion, architecture or design, office trends come and go. But it appears the post-pandemic office will see some changes. Open workspaces are losing favor while high-walled cubicles and panel dividers are gaining favor to enhance social distancing measures.

Data shows that we will **see more of these trends**– likely to retro-fit existing low-or-no-wall spaces.

- High wall cubicles
- Additional dividers

Data shows that we will **see less of these trends**.

- Benching
- Co-working space
- Low or no panel workstations

However, it seems many things will **stay the same** for offices as employees return to work.

- Small conference rooms
- Phone booths
- Private offices
- Serviced offices with dedicated client-specific

Respondents were evenly split when it came to **open collaborative spaces**.

41% see less

41% stay the same

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So, what will all this cost?

Thinking about how much it will all cost was a tough question to answer. Some saw it as just the cost of hand sanitizer and masks, while others viewed it as a per-employee cost or loss of revenue. The one thing that is certain, businesses need to stay flexible in their budgetary planning process and set aside funds now for the inevitable changes that will be implemented with a full return to work scenario.

65% Agree there will be some cost associated with implementing new or enhanced protocols to create a safer and healthier office environment.

When asked to share thoughts, we received a variety of ideas and also some uncertainty.

"Undetermined at this time. More than we wanted to spend."

"We have approached the $10,000 mark on upgrades, PPE and reconfiguring."

"Loss of revenue in excess of $1 million."

"Lower occupancy in our workspace means lower revenue. 40% cut in coworking space."

"Minor... just the cost of hand sanitizer and masks."

"$1-2K per employee."

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How do you plan for the unknown?

From the responses, it seems there is no clear view as to the right path for returning to work safely, and most prefer to keep the status-quo for now with some minor adjustments. This may be the best course of action for now, but we know that some changes will be inevitable.

	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	N/A
Reviewing retrofit options to space and furnishings to help mitigate the spread of virus.	27%	37%	13%	5%	19%
Allotting funds toward improving work from home environments.	12%	38%	20%	6%	24%
Hesitant to use co-working or shared spaces as part of our real estate strategy.	21%	36%	17%	4%	22%
Increasing our square footage per person.	19%	29%	21%	9%	2%
Considering increasing our use of short-term leases and flexible space.	9%	18%	26%	10%	37%
Decreasing our real estate footprint.	10%	23%	32%	10%	26%
Adding more regional and suburban offices.	4%	13%	27%	12%	45%
Decreasing the length of our traditional leases.	6%	23%	25%	6%	40%
Exploring additional temporary space to support social distancing in our office.	10%	22%	29%	11%	28%

WE're All in this TOGETHER

Whether you are in the 85% that are most concerned about social distancing in the workplace or part of the 52% looking to support more work from home efforts, CORT has solutions that can help your business no matter what comes. In times of uncertainty, long-term investments in short term solutions doesn't have to be the only way forward.

Reach out to your CORT Rep to talk through the opportunities Furniture as a Service (FaaS) provides or visit our website at cort.com for more safe workplace ideas.