Back to the new normal:

Returning to the office after COVID-19.

A Condeco Software Guide.

A how-to guide for utilizing workspace software to help with the return to the office.

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Introduction.

We all know we are living in strange and unprecedented times. In years to come, we will all look back on 2020 as the year COVID-19 transformed the world in ways that will have lasting effects on all of us. But in the here and now, we are all gradually trying to return towards 'normal' - in whatever shape or form that may be.

At the start of 2020, businesses across the world that normally operate in office-based environments had to suddenly adopt to home-working practices instead. While this has been a helpful short-term measure to ensure business continuity, it's critical that organizations get their employees back into office working as soon as is practical. That's because the physical interactions of the office environment can support vital productivity, collaboration, engagement and innovation in ways remote working simply can't.

Making that happen in a way that safeguards the health and wellbeing of employees will not be the work of a moment. Careful management of workspaces, meeting rooms, buildings, scheduling and sanitization will be essential. And a long-term solution that deals with these challenges will be necessary, as it is highly likely that official guidelines on social distancing measures will be in introduced by governments that businesses will need to adhere to for some time after you are able to re-open your office.

Workplace technology is the key to navigating this minefield, and this guide has been created to help you understand the how and why. Through a technology-led response, you can successfully manage your return to the office with coordinated and flexible organization of people, equipment and spaces. That way, you can get back to the 'new normal' in a way that keeps your workforce safe, complies with regulations, and maintains the highest possible level of business functionality in these turbulent times.

Once the threat of COVID-19 subsides, the business world that emerges will be very different to that which preceded it. React to the challenges ahead, keep an open mind to new solutions and opportunities, and most importantly remain safe.

About Condeco Software

Condeco was founded in 2005 and is the global leader in workspace scheduling software. Our technology supports more flexible and dynamic working environments, and helps millions of users all over the world meet and work more efficiently. Our pioneering ways of working, coupled with our constant investment in progressive innovations, allows us to deliver global, enterprise solutions to leading businesses and brands. This experience, our new generation of cloud-based workspace management solutions, and our ability to adapt them to meet new demands all mean we're ideally placed to support every type of business on the rocky post-COVID-19 road ahead.

The current situation.

Where are we and what's coming next?

In the coming weeks and months, governments around the world will gradually lift the lockdowns and restrictions they put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19. Businesses will naturally want to return to their previous office environments, but won't be able to operate there in the same way they did even just a few short months ago. Governments and industry leaders alike are now all considering their options.

Returning to work will have to be carefully managed so that employees can follow ongoing government guidelines to socially distance and keep themselves safe. How this can be achieved is already being considered by corporate real estate and building management, who have to consider that buildings, floors or even individual teams will not be able to enter, exit, move around or sit together as closely as before.

Too many people, not enough space?

There is likely to be a significant period after your office reopens where you will need to follow government guidance to socially distance your workforce as much as possible. The distancing requirements will vary across territories, but most will typically be around two meters (six feet) as specified by the World Health Organization (WHO)[1].

Organizations like Steelcase, a leading global company specialising in architecture, furniture and technology products and services, are encouraging firms to reconsider the design and geometry of their offices to maximize the number of people who can work in the building at any one time[2]. But nevertheless, in most office environments, these restrictions will still likely reduce the maximum number to a level far below the total headcount of the workforce.

The simple solution would be to divide the workforce into separate groups, who can come in at different times or on different days, and many businesses are already openly discussing this idea. However, this option isn't a practical long-term solution. It doesn't provide flexibility for workers and teams to collaborate across groups, can't account for previously agreed flexible working, and doesn't address challenges around sanitization, cleanliness and contact tracing.

A question of trust

Preparing your office for a return to work isn't just about making sure your workforce is safe - it's also about making sure they feel safe. Many employees will be understandably wary about a return. It will be the job of the employer to win their trust and confidence that you have taken every precaution to protect them from infection in the workplace. Indeed, Cushman and Wakefield, real estate solutions specialists, cite this as "perhaps the most important aspect of the return to work"[3].

It's therefore imperative to formulate a well-considered, comprehensive solution and to be fully transparent in how you communicate and explain it to your employees. A solution delivering enough flexibility that individual employees have a degree of choice over their working arrangements will be particularly valuable.

Workplace management goes proactive

Keeping track of workstation usage, cleanliness and sanitization, and the working times and places of employees (contact tracing), will be an absolute must, along with coordinating these two sets of information.

Maintaining clean surfaces and equipment such as keyboards and telephones is a key part of the World Health Organization's advice for employers[4], especially in a socially distant office environment where different employees will use the same workstation at different times. Alongside this, contact tracing of employees would help you monitor who is working where, when and with whom. This information could be vital if someone starts to feel ill and may be showing symptoms of the virus, as it would allow you to quickly isolate other employees members who may have come into contact with the infected party, as well as shutting off the areas they have worked in for deep cleaning.

What will the new normal look like?

Once the threat of COVID-19 subsides, the business world will not simply revert to exactly how it was before. The increased flexibility and reduced reliance on physical offices that have been seen during lockdown periods are likely to become long-term arrangements. So what will the 'new normal' trends be?

- **More flexible working:** many employees will want to take full advantage of flexible working models and reduced commuting needs, so offices will increasingly become places primarily for collaboration and meeting clients.
- **Reduced real estate costs:** with offices not needed for as many people or as many purposes, businesses can save money by scaling back city center locations that workers no longer want to travel into every day.
- **Lower workspace density:** the money saved in real estate can be used for a workspace redesign that gives people using offices more space for the safety and protection they need.
- **Smarter space usage:** this downsizing in both space and density will result in a need for dynamic utilization of the available space, facilitated by desk reservation and sensor technology.

What does all this mean?

In short, 'free addressing' - where employees simply turn up at your office and find themselves somewhere to work from - will for some time be impractical, inappropriate and quite possibly expressly forbidden. A clear, transparent framework where employees can see before they even arrive at the office exactly where they're going to be working from, and who they'll be working with, will be a necessity for health, trust and practicality reasons. The only realistic way to achieve this is to manage all of your corporate real estate and workforce is by improved technology integration software.

The why.

Why should you get your workforce back in the office?

It's easy to assume that the home-working practices adopted during lockdown periods are a long-term panacea for your business. Of course, homeworking does have its advantages in flexibility for employees, but it removes some of the key business drivers that can only be leveraged when people are in the same physical location:

Productivity
By being able to work in a more structured environment, employees can avoid the many potential distractions at home, focus on their work and get more done in their day.

Collaboration
Working together in person removes the rigidity of communicating through emails or video calls. Workers who are physically able to see and talk to each other will find it easier to streamline their communications and collectively innovate to develop new ideas.

Socialization
Employees can easily feel isolated when working remotely and shut off from face-to-face contact for long periods of time. Bringing them back to the office keeps them engaged and connected with their own team and with your wider workforce.

Flexibility
With more options and opportunities to work from home, employees can feel more positive and empowered by a job with less commuting and a better work-life balance.

Coordination
When different teams have to work together (for example, Marketing and Sales), it's much more straightforward to do this in meeting rooms than on large-scale video calls. Office-based work helps teams stay functional, and aligned with the work of others.

Health and wellbeing
By putting the correct measures around scheduling, social distancing, sanitization and contact tracing in place, you can not only safeguard employees' physical health, but also improve their mental and emotional health by giving them the confidence that they can return to work safely.

Scalability
By managing the return to the office with a flexible, technology-led solution, you can easily scale your business up and down to suit future needs.

Cost savings
More people working from home means you can reduce your office real estate and remove the need for disaster recovery sites, cutting operational costs and freeing up budget for workspace redesign.

What are the consequences of mismanaging the return?

Don't underestimate the importance of getting as many employees back into your office as possible, as soon as possible. Leave it too late, leave too many employees outside the office environment, or fail to correctly conduct the return-to-work process, and the impacts on your business could be catastrophic:

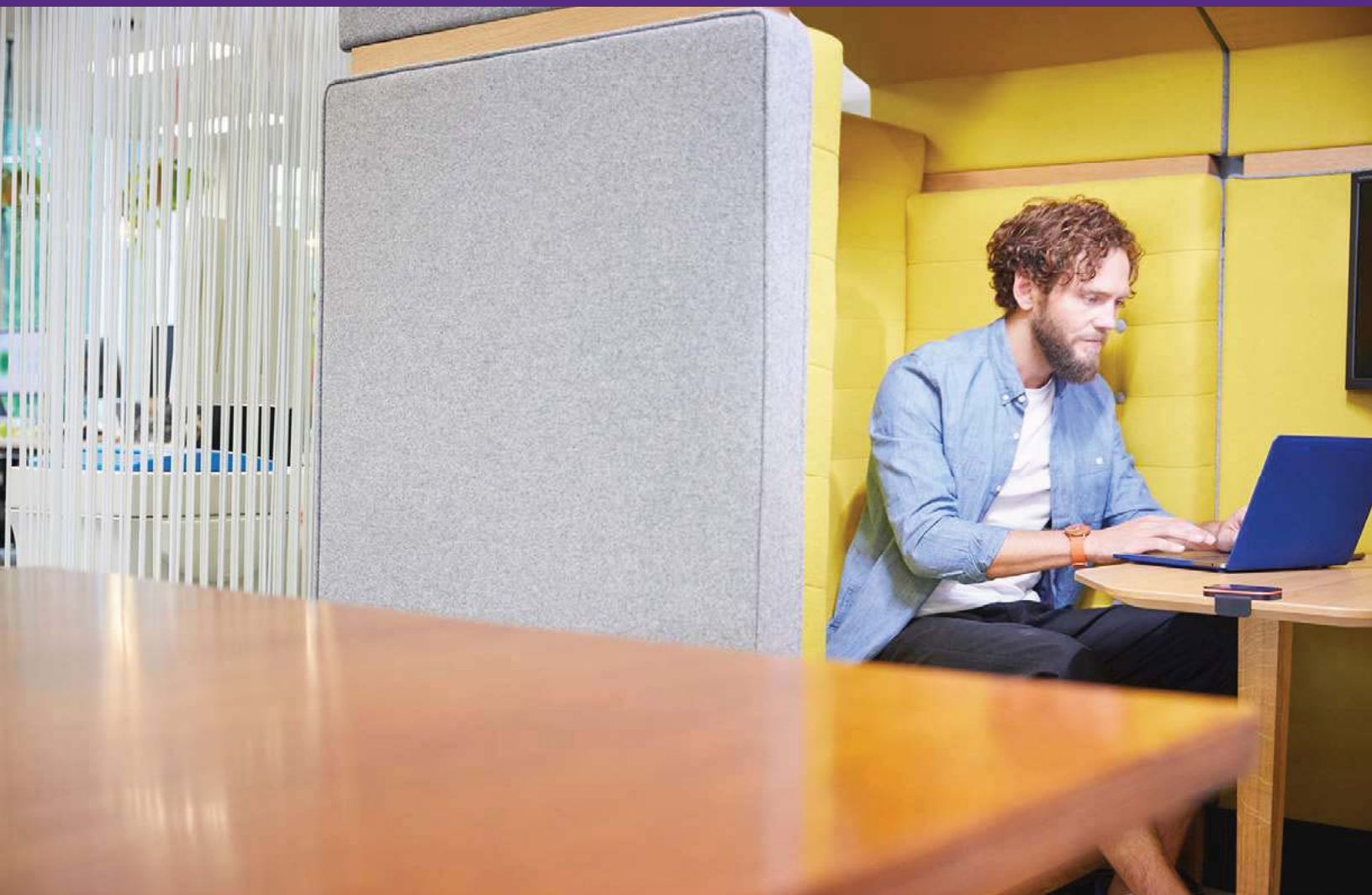
Financial
If you're unable to reopen for business promptly post-lockdown, revenue growth could be poor. And if continued employee furloughing causes costs to spiral, profitability will quickly be impacted. A combination of the two, and a lack of operational efficiency, could cause the business to fail completely.

Human
Key employees need to be brought back into work as a priority. If they remain at home on furlough or are made redundant, their vital abilities and job knowledge is lost.

Reputational
Any bad management of the return, especially if it endangers employee health, could very easily attract negative publicity and harm the reputation of your brand.

Legal
If your safety standards fall short of what's required and employees were to come to harm, they could take legal action against you that could quickly become harmful and expensive.

The how.



How you can get your workforce back in the office.

Keeping your employees safe in your re-opened office and complying with the relevant regulations and guidelines is a task that needs careful consideration. Gaining their trust and confidence in the measures you take is absolutely critical to your return, but a successful execution will deliver benefits both for them and for your business.

It will be an ongoing task, too: as your workforce returns, unforeseen issues or needs may emerge that require further reshaping of office layouts or modifying of distancing or sanitization practices.

There are three key phases to your preparation: short-term, i.e. the preparation and retro-fitting of your office environment before employees return; medium-term, which covers the act of bringing employees back and normalizing them into the adjusted environment; and long-term, which encompasses ongoing needs over the weeks and months to come.

Short-term considerations

Infrastructure
Reshape your office space into a socially distant format and assess your new office capacity; this may be reduced by as much as 60 percent as 15-20m^2 will be required per workspace to maintain social distancing.

Sanitization and personal protective equipment (PPE)
As workstations will be used by different employees at different times, ensure the right equipment and policies are in place to keep desks and meeting rooms are fully cleaned after each use, and that PPE is provided to all employees as appropriate.

Sickness policy
Develop a fast-acting, robust policy that eliminates the risk of the virus spreading if any employee begins to show symptoms.

Employee trust
Work to inspire confidence in your employees that you have delivered a clean, safe environment in which they can return to work.

Medium-term considerations

Employee information
As each worker will initially only be able to attend the office some of the time, they must be provided with clear information when their presence is expected.

Entry, exit and movement
Employees come in and out of the building, and how they move around it while maintaining social distancing will need thorough organization, as well as clear communication to the workforce.

Common digital touchpoints
Monitor hotspot areas where items may be touched by many different people over the course of a day (like a check-in kiosk, for example). Either minimize the use of these touchpoints or ensure they are cleaned at very regular intervals.

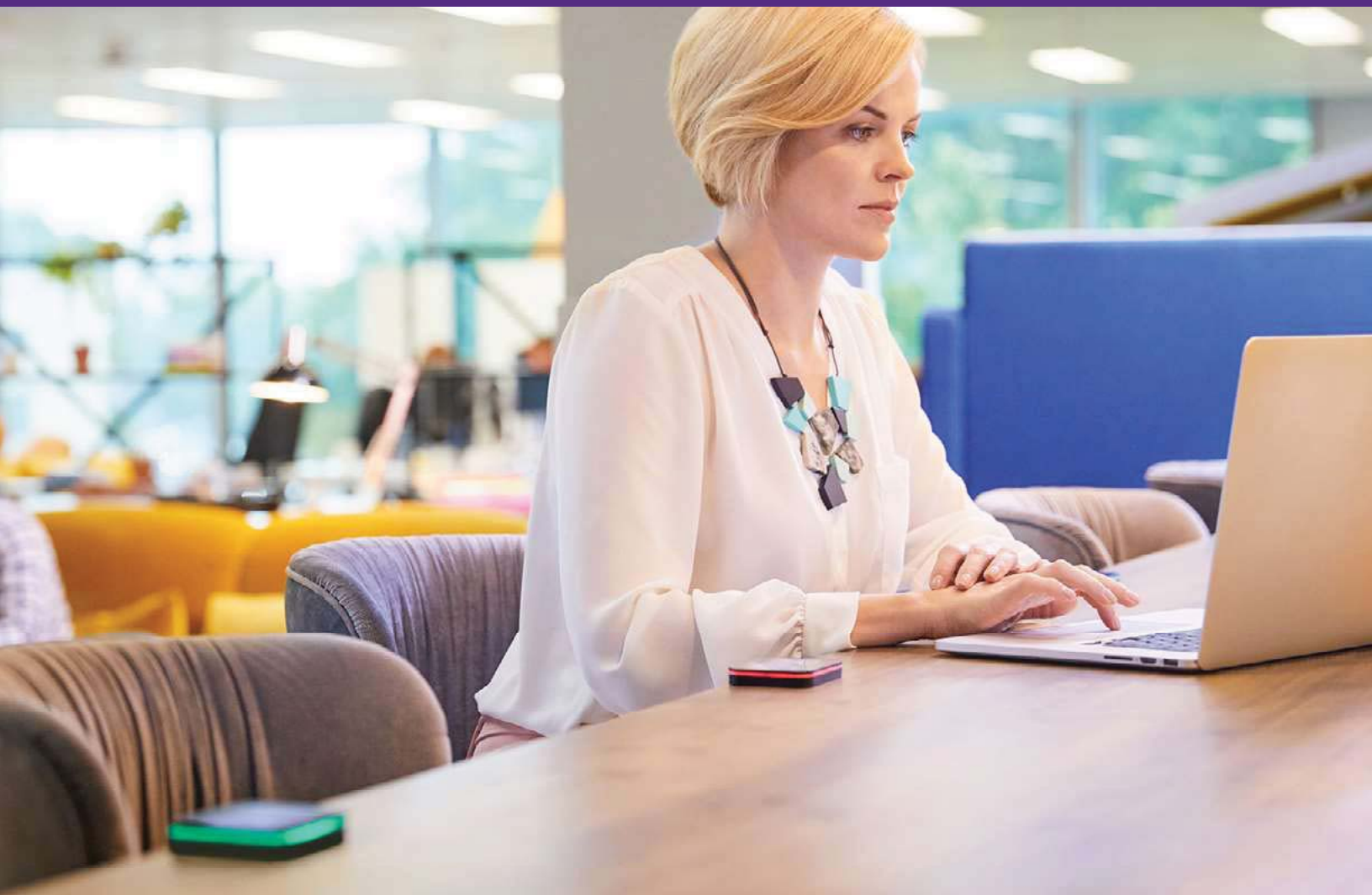
Long-term considerations

Enabling flexible working
Employees choosing where to work will become the new standard, so desk reservation and appropriate spacing will be required for when they do want to spend time in the office.

Open access to location info
To enable the smooth running of the business, everyone needs to know who is in the office and who is at home at any particular time. Providing universal access to this information is therefore essential.

Ongoing reconfiguration
Constantly monitor the success and practicality of the reconfigured working environment, including whether office use is needed for anything other than collaboration and client meetings. Social distancing requirements and the needs of your workforce are both valid reasons for making changes, but only do so if the adjustment suits both of these elements.

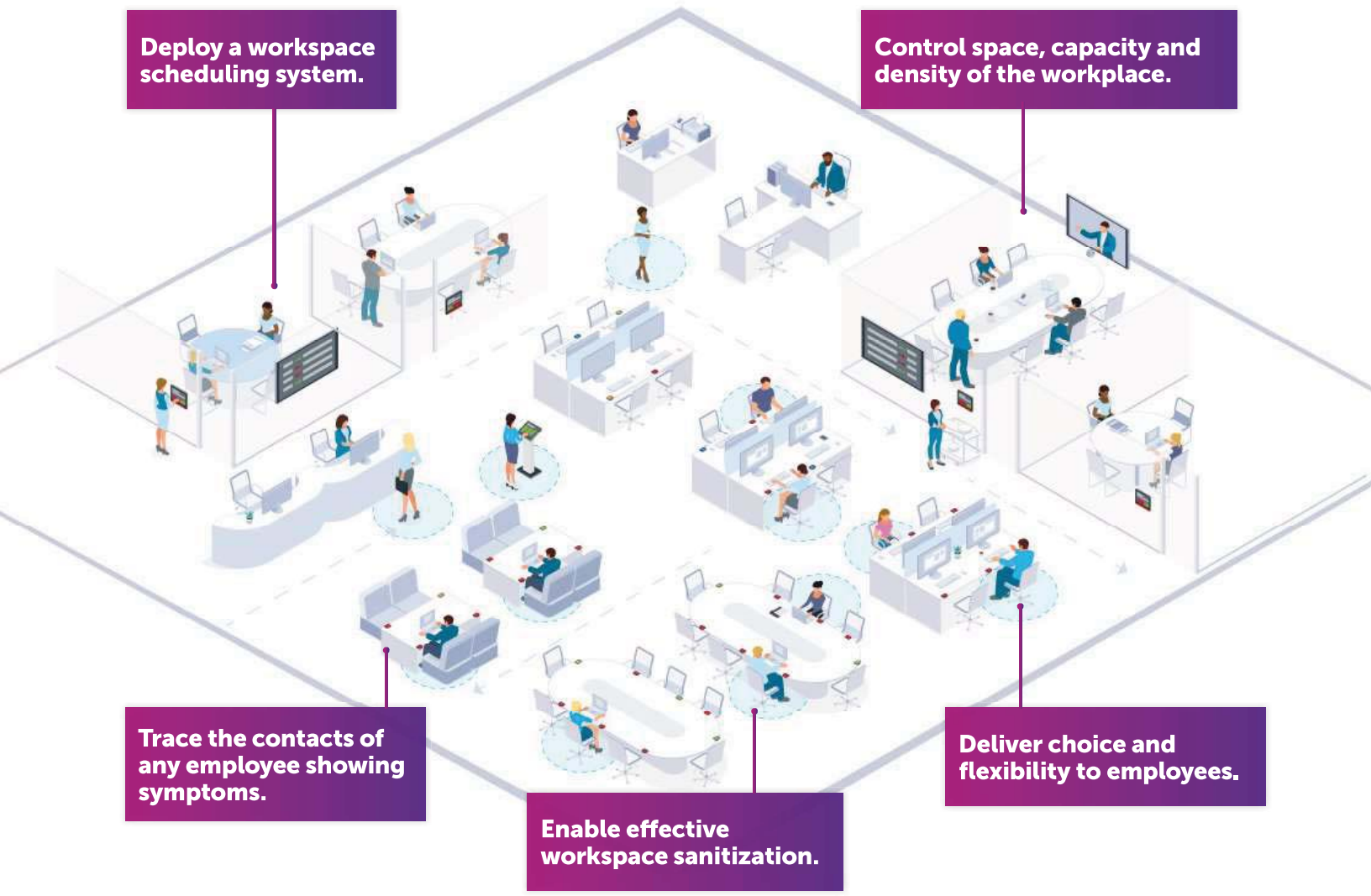
The solution.



Return-to-work essentials: the Condeco technology that supports this.

A strong technology-based solution is the only way to effectively manage a working environment fit for the post-lockdown era. At Condeco, we have applied all our rich experience in developing industry-leading workspace management solutions to adapt our software to suit the needs of the new normal.

There are five important processes that must be put in place by any professional, responsible business wanting to ensure a safe, orderly and compliant return to work for its employees. Our software supports all of them in an inter-connected, user-friendly, ISO-certified secure way that enables a successful, flexible return to work for everyone.



Deploy a workspace scheduling system.

The challenge

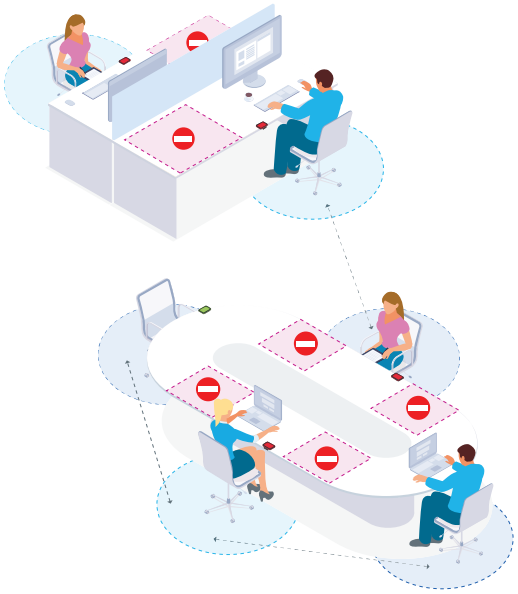
Making sure people and spaces are fully coordinated, so that workers are kept apart sufficiently while maximizing the functionality of the workforce and the wider business.

The Condeco solution

Our software can incorporate every single desk, meeting room and workspace into a single system, from where availability and scheduling can then be managed in real time.

With just a few clicks, administrators can de-commission desks or rooms to create enough space that social distancing is maintained. Total room capacities can be reduced, while arrival and departure times can be spaced out and staggered to prevent any unintended contact before and after meetings.

As the number of people who can work in the building at any one time will be reduced, our software allows you to limit the number of days each employee can book a desk for. You can also manage check-in and check-out times to prevent large numbers of employees arriving simultaneously, and set up teams and groups to reduce circulation but ensure the right people can still collaborate with each other.

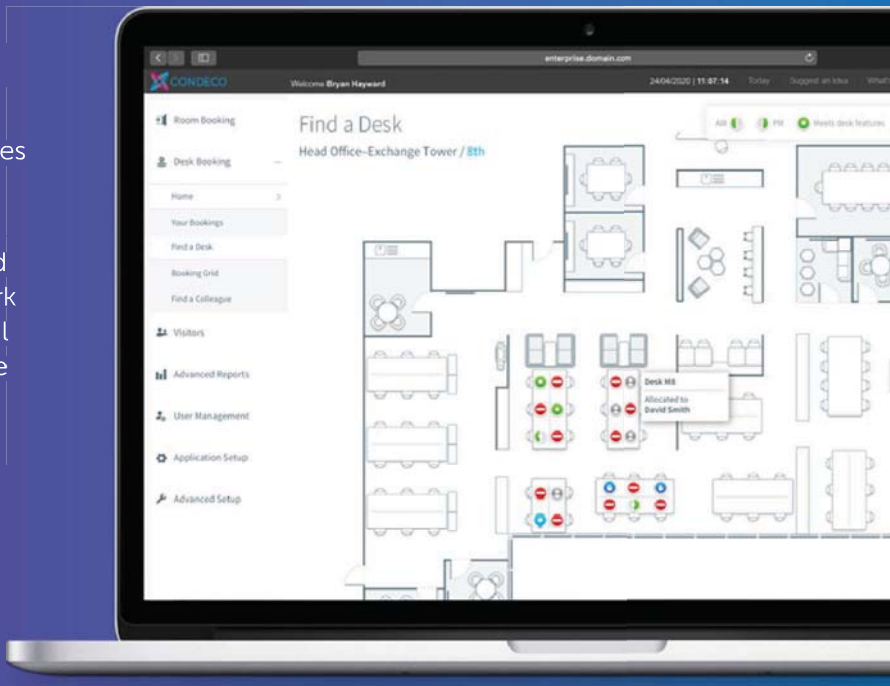


Key features

- Ability to close a space quickly if an area is no longer safe to be used.
- Automatically cancel bookings for closed spaces for the period in question.
- Automatic notifications to everyone who has a desk or meeting booked in a closed space, and should find an alternative available desk or work from home with rebooking through web portal and the mobile app, do cannot not leave home without having found an alternative desk.
- Bookings outside the closure period will not be affected.

Supporting products

- Condeco Desk Booking
- Condeco Meeting Room Booking



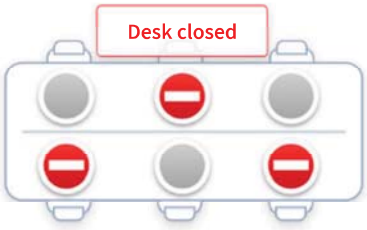
Control space, capacity and density of the workplace.

The challenge

To assess the maximum number of people who can safely use each workspace or meeting room, and then apply those rules efficiently and with full visibility for all.

The Condeco solution

We provide quick and easy adjustment of space availability, meaning you can change what's possible as the needs of your business and workforce change.



By reducing the capacities of your meeting rooms loaded into the software, you can prevent any meeting organizer inviting more people than the maximum permitted. You can also automate the sending of emails to all attendees advising them of your best practice around holding meetings safely. Additionally, you can block off time after each meeting to allow the space to be fully sanitized before the next booking, and to remove the risk of contact between attendees of adjoining meetings.

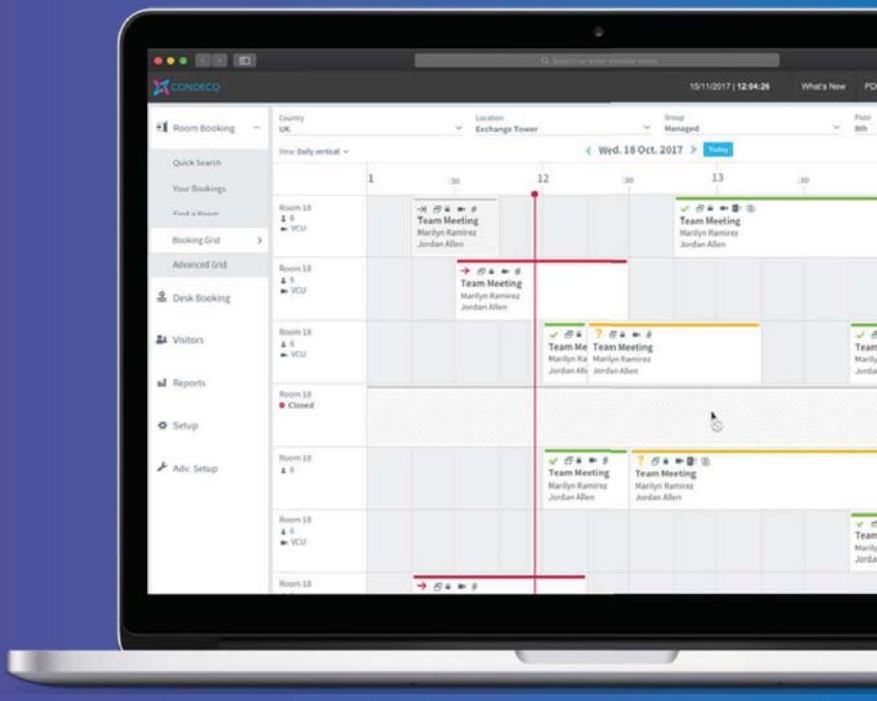
The risk of contact or infection while checking into a space can be reduced in two ways. The first is to allow employees to check into a space using their mobile device. Alternatively, you can enable proximity-based check-in which senses when an employee is in the vicinity of the building and automatically checks them into their allocated space accordingly. Both of these measures remove the need for employees to touch any communal screens on your premises.

Key features

- Easily take desk spaces of the system as required to reduce capacity and create more distance and space.
- Quick meeting room capacity adjustment in bulk process.
- Private offices can be made bookable by employees for additional space.
- Mobile check-in for meeting rooms and desk spaces.

Supporting products

- Condeco Desk Booking
- Condeco Meeting Room Booking



Enable effective workspace sanitization.

The challenge

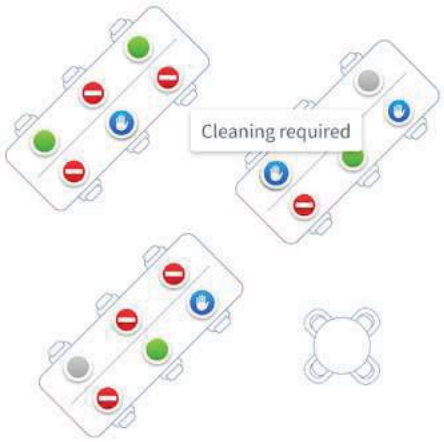
Ensuring that workspaces are kept clean between uses to prevent any possible spread of infection, and to prevent spaces from being used until sanitization processes take place.

The Condeco solution

Our space management can make sanitization just as important as an employee when it comes to scheduling.

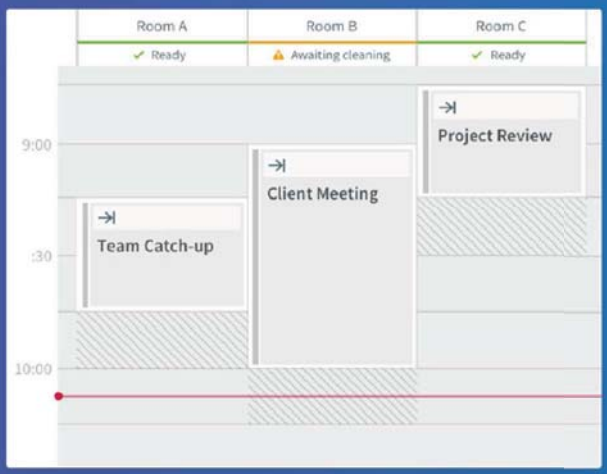
Sanitization time can be booked out to clean desks and meeting spaces after each use, with same-day rebookings barred until the space has been marked as clean. Your workforce will have full, real-time visibility of each space's situation, easily being able to identify which spaces are clean and which ones are awaiting sanitization. What's more, users can receive email notifications once a particular space they have booked has been returned to a clean state.

Our software also caters for the needs of your sanitization team. They can access a vendor dashboard on their own terminals that displays the status of each space, a to-do list of the spaces they need to clean, and from where they can re-open the availability of a space once it's been cleaned.



Key features

- Vendor workflow triggers a cleaning request for desks, with different cleaning requests if a space needs basic cleaning or deep clean for a new person to use.
- For meeting rooms, the workflow means a room can be automatically closed for cleaning after a meeting ends and blocks out a pre-set time for cleaning after the meeting.
- Clean spaces are automatically marked as bookable.
- If a space is not cleaned, the next booking will be cancelled, and user notified.
- For cleaning vendors, our dashboard generates a cleaning work order that can be viewed in real time. Once cleaning is complete, they close the work order, automatically changing the status to "clean".
- Audit trail of cancellations to monitor the performance of the cleaning vendor.



Supporting products

- Condeco Desk Booking
- Condeco Meeting Room Booking

Deliver choice and flexibility to employees.

The challenge

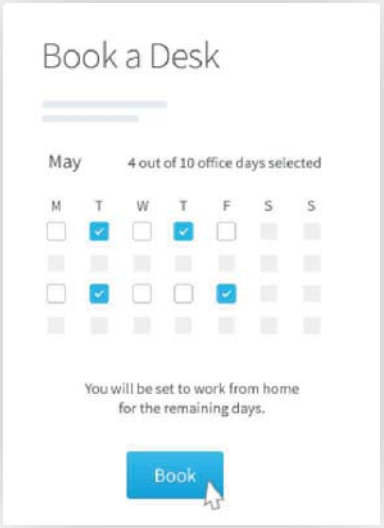
Employees need full visibility on when they can come to the office, where they will be working, who they will be working with when they're there, and the whereabouts of other colleagues within the business. This needs to work in a way that gives the employee some flexibility that fits with their work and their personal commitments.

The Condeco solution

All the relevant information within the Condeco system can be delivered to the individual user, either through Internet access or by using our mobile app.

Through this, employees can see the number of days they can come into the office and then book themselves a workstation as required. For the days they're working from home instead, automated app alerts can be set up to keep relevant parties aware that the employee is working remotely that day. It's also possible for users to set a 'not in office' mode that shows a user hasn't booked or assigned a desk for that day and isn't working from home.

Equipped with this information, every employee can understand everything they need to know about their on-site working day, and be reassured that they will be working in an appropriately safe environment, before they even leave home.

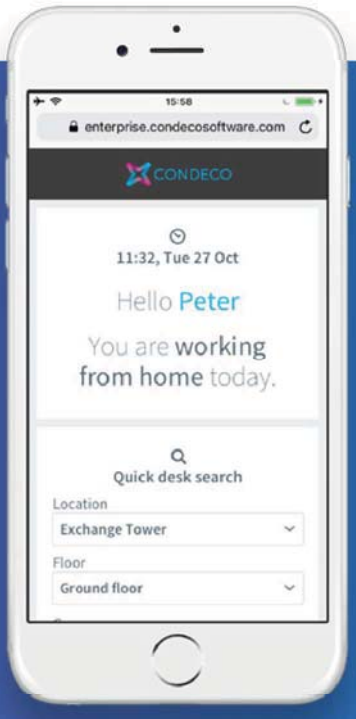


Key features

- Enforce employees pre-booking workspace to ensure social distancing, cleanliness and contact tracing with booking on the web or on mobile, only for a limited number of days in the weeks they are allowed.
- Easy navigation with floor plans showing all workspaces that are bookable, closed, or awaiting sanitization.
- Employees mark days they plan to 'work from home' or are not working, so colleagues know where they are.

Supporting products

- Condeco Desk Booking
- Condeco Meeting Room Booking



Trace the contacts of any employee showing symptoms.

The challenge

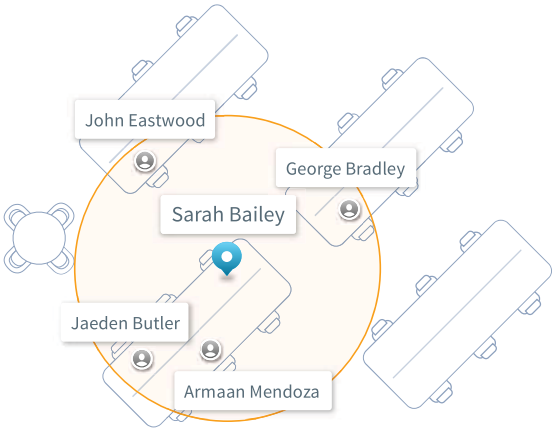
React quickly to anyone who could potentially spread infection by tracking which employees have come into contact and where they've worked, so appropriate isolation and sanitization measures can be enacted.

The Condeco solution

We deliver full monitoring and tracing data of every member of the workforce, and the ability to respond to any potential infection almost immediately.

For tracing, the software records and reports on each employee's booking and check-in data, including the desks they've used and who they have collaborated with in meetings. You can also take a more proactive approach to limit a person's contact within the office by restricting them to default desk groups, and do similar with teams or groups by chunking them to a neighborhood of desks.

If a response is required, our software makes it easy to shut things down quickly. Within a few minutes, spaces can be closed for sanitization, future bookings of those spaces can be cancelled, and the employee(s) involved can be set to work from home. Reporting functionality can then identify workers who have been in meetings or proximity to the affected parties, with automated emails sent to those concerned to keep them informed on the situation.



Key features

- Condeco manages all workspaces, either as allocated or bookable by the employee.
- Desks are grouped in neighborhoods and holds information about adjacent desks.
- All employees must book their workspace and booking details are stored for contact tracing and reporting.
- Attendee details must be added to any meeting room bookings.
- A contact tracing report can be created if an employee tests positive providing details of employees that were working in proximity or attended a meeting.
- Reports allow the relevant department to message the affected employees and request they work from home.

Supporting products

- Condeco Desk Booking
- Condeco Meeting Room Booking

Why investing in our technology pays off.

It may seem like making an investment in technology at such a difficult time for business is unnecessary. But the reality is a strong cloud based solution is the only way to manage a successful return to the office, and that Condeco's offering will comfortably repay itself during the return itself and during the 'new normal'.

During the return

Your business productivity will increase through a swift return to some form of normality, with employees able to meet with their teams to collaborate and plan better. Interaction with customers will increase as you'll be able to meet clients at your office safely, and by meeting government guidelines on employee safety and sanitization, your risk of litigation will be reduced. More directly, you can cut your cleaning costs by up to 50 percent by only deep-cleaning desks when employee changeovers are scheduled.

During the 'new normal'

Your real estate costs can be cut by as much as 50 percent by right-sizing your workspace to meet the new levels of demand. Furthermore, disaster recovery costs can be eliminated completely as you can remove the need to keep alternative workspaces permanently available and simply switch to home-working if an issue arises. And in the long run, employee productivity and talent attraction should improve through a truly flexible working environment where employees can choose where they work from, cutting commute times, reducing stress and promoting general employee wellbeing.

Implementing solutions.

As this guide has explained, there's plenty to consider in making your office ready for a return to work. The support we can provide to you through this process goes far beyond our comprehensive software offering. Once you've worked with our consultative accounts team to decide on the solution which best solves your challenges, our dedicated team of experts are here to help you every step of the way, supporting your six-step journey towards a post-COVID-19 office environment that makes sense for your business:

1. **Spin it up – the build stage**
You'll meet your Condeco project manager, who will get to work spinning up your products and services and building out your Cloud workspace.

Working with: Onboarding team, product experts.

2. **The techy bit – technical implementation**
Our expert teams will work with your technical resources to set up single sign-on, connections to Office 365 and any hardware devices.

Working with: Onboarding team, customer delivery.

3. **Make it yours – product configuration**
Your project manager and product experts will assess your business, processes and configuration to determine the best solution for your specific needs.

Working with: Onboarding team, product experts, learning experts.

4. **Knowledge is power – data import workspace data**
We can supply data import templates throughout the process if any importing to your newly-configured system is required.

Working with: Onboarding team, product experts.

5. **Pre-flight checks – testing and sign-off**
We will work together to help you test the configuration and relevant integrations to ensure success once the solution is live.

Working with: Onboarding team, customer delivery.

6. **Let's get to work – go-live**
Our hard-working project managers will plan your go-live for success, with onsite presence if required, and work with you to communicate the new solution's set-up to your employees.

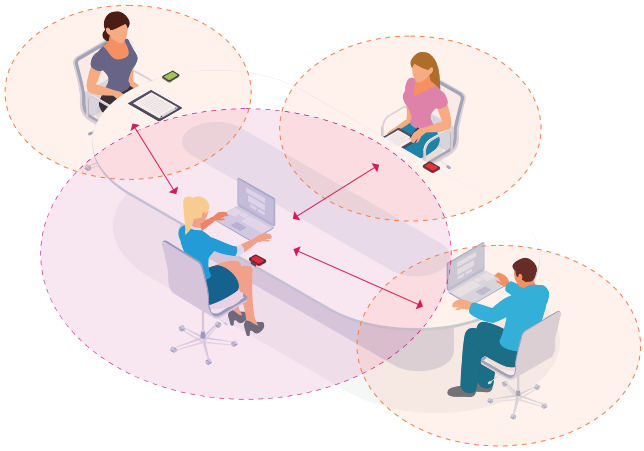
Working with: Onboarding team, customer delivery, product experts, customer success team.

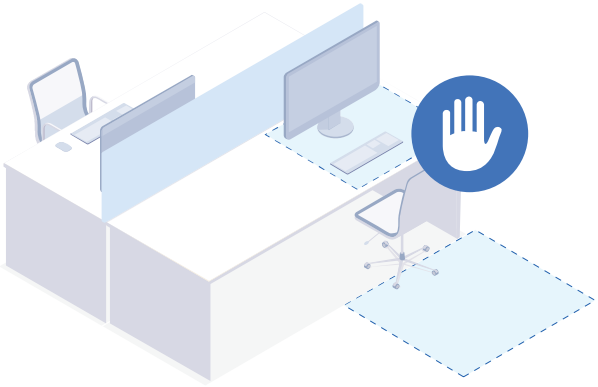
Next steps.

What to do next?

Hopefully this guide has given you a lot to think about as you plan out how to bring your workforce back into the office. Of course, every business is different and so some of the needs and priorities mentioned will be more important to you than others. However, there are some general key principles that should guide everything you do in your post-lockdown office, all of which can be supported by our technology:

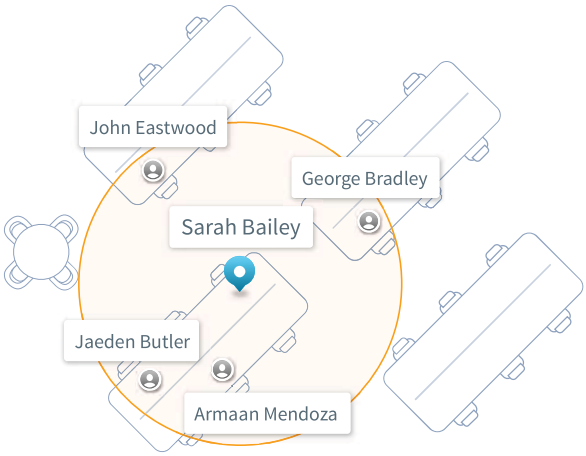
- Only allow every other desk to be booked in open-plan office set-ups and block off the other desks.
- Allow teams to book space for two weeks a time, and then schedule them to work from home for the following two weeks to enable half-occupancy of space.





- Schedule the sanitization of desks after a person finishes use as an integral part of daily bookings, or remove desks from being bookable until confirmed clean.
- Monitor who has booked where and alert everyone who has sat in close proximity to them if a person reports the virus or is showing symptoms.

- Ensure every employee knows which desk has been allocated to them before they leave home that morning, and ensure they are told to work from home is the space is unavailable or is being cleaned.
- Remove any possibility for workers to turn up and find somewhere to sit outside of the above framework.



Get back to work safely with Condeco.

The expert team at Condeco are happy to help you get your business back to the new normal. Whether you're ready to implement cloud-based technology to manage your environment, or just want informal advice about your options, get in touch today and get the benefit of our experience and expertise.

References

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Edition: 1.0 | 2020