GROUP GSA

Designing the
New Workplace
Covid-19 and a New Future

Disruption Creates Ingenuity
A new normal

We find ourselves in unprecedented times and circumstances arising from the current global pandemic causing much tragedy and pain. Despite this, there arises many challenges likely to result in positive impacts on many aspects of our personal and working lives. We have learn to adapt to rapid change, to question and reflect on many aspects of our lives previously taken for granted.

As workplace specialists we have asked ourselves how can we gain perspective on the future of office environments able to respond to a new dynamic, with new challenges in spatial use and user expectations. Workplaces are more than places to work and this is more relevant now than in any other moment in time.

86% of people expect to do most of their work back at their workplace post covid[1]

42% of people expect life to return to normal within 12 months[1]

25% of people expect to decrease their public transport use post pandemic[1]

71% of people agree they would like to work from home more often[2]

35% of people felt they were more productive than normal working from home[2]

As workplace designers we ask:

– What innovations will the pandemic create for workplace design?

– How will the purpose and size of the workplace be redefined?

– What will be the 'new norm' and how will organisational and employee concerns shape the future workplace?

We believe the size of workplaces will be reconsidered based on the somewhat forced realisation working from home can be an effective and comfortable working option for many.

That said, there are many aspects of workplace environments not easily replicated in a working from home model, namely the ease of collaboration, social nature of working and access to technology.

Rather than being vehicles to only produce work, post-covid workplaces will amplify the importance of social connections and collaborations. A greater emphasis will be placed on 'in person' social connections rather than desk-based activities.

It is a valuable question to ask if desks will become redundant.

Perhaps not immediately but the shape, size and purpose of desking spaces will change. The need for desks will remain, as for many their office environments are more comfortable, congenial to focus and technologically equipped than their home environments. Despite this, there will be a continued and greater acceptance of working from home which will not dismantle the office workplace but will most definitely redefine it.

'Comfort' will be an important focus and our research by the Working Brain team is determining the importance of comfort in the workplace for the neurodivergent cohort.

Our research is based on work outputs, ideas, innovation and mental health for greater community inclusivity and sensory variations. The current workplace default is to cater for the neuro-typical cohort whereas the future workplace will be focused on bringing comfort for all to the forefront as it exists in working from home environments.

Most of our workplace designs have environments enabling collaboration, creative and critical thinking through a diversity of spaces including think-tanks, Kanban walls, collaboration pods and interactive technologies. These are flexible environments encouraging mental and physical exploration designed to harness idea generation, problem solving and creativity.

1. Beck, MJ, Hensher, DA & Wei, E 2020, 'Slowly coming out of COVID-19 restrictions in Australia: Implications for working from home and commuting trips by car and public transport', *Institute of Transport and Logistics Studies (ITLS)*, The University of Sydney Business School, Sydney, NSW 2006, Australia

2. Transurban 2020, 'Industry report: urban mobility trends from COVID-19', *Transurban*, viewed 11 September 2020, <https://www.transurban.com/content/dam/transurban-pdfs/03/Urban-Mobility-Trends-from-COVID-19.pdf>.

Our learnings from Covid-19

Consideration of distributed sites

Already we are experiencing large space users strategically reviewing the locational footprint and whereby regional locations and closer proximity to the employee home base is more desirable – reducing transport time and opportunity to minimise dependencies of public modes of transport. The property portfolio will evolve to supporting a greater diversity of business function with less prioritisation on any one location being deemed head or operational office.

Investment in the human sphere

The importance of employee wellbeing will elevate beyond recent investments. Environments and behavioural work patterns will accommodate meditation, coaching and broader activities which embrace mindfulness, wellbeing and health. Spending patterns will shift where the disposable dollar is invested in wellbeing and many organisations will seek to include those facilities and programs as part of the workplace offering. Employees will seek to engage with organisations that are authentic at every level.
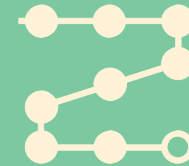
Locational patterns of people

Choice of where an individual can work and the times they work will be common place. This will influence both tenant and landlord. Organisations will shift to provide supportive locational choices for their people. Utilisation will be grounded on patterns of people choosing home, core base workplace or regional locational working options; and the option to work when it best aligns with life demands. Several multinationals already indicate a 30% employee preference for reduced presence in the workplace.

Humanity and technology

Collaboration and communication become equal regardless of geography, hierarchy or team structures. Technology of course plays a critical role in the success but behavioural shifts in the adoption of technology to compensate for the loss of human touch - achieving humanity through digital platforms will be key. Workplace communication platforms will consider simulated technology to enhance the communication experience.

Intuitive planning

Diversity of work setting choices will remain important supportive of diverse functions and activities. Ratios of desk assignment will reduce and will be dependent on booking systems as opposed to free address - this platform providing the user confidence the workpoint has been serviced and clean and the employer an application for tracking and identification of respective users. Neighbourhood zones will become smaller deliberate in managing the occupancy and users and supportive of smaller group isolation should second waves of infections arise.

Zero touch

The emergent workplace will embrace

– Auto sensor entries
– Frictionless security
– Primary circulation paths to accommodate a minimum of 1500mm passing
– Reduced sharing of computer peripherals
– Facial recognition lockers
– Enhanced fresh air intake
– Smaller workpoints with greater separation between workpoints
– Open acoustically performing meeting spaces in lieu of built zone

The Post-Pandemic Workplace

The office as a place of work is not redundant but it won't be as we know it...

We have identified a number of shifts arising from the current disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic we believe will influence the future of work and the workplace. The future workplace will embrace change and fluid expectations.

1 Workplaces will not need to be as large as the knowledge worker will be empowered to choose to work from home

2 Working from home productivity will be amplified by output

3 Not only will knowledge workers be working more frequently from home, but other functions like call centres may be as well

4 Digital dependence is much higher now than before the crisis. Investment in better technology to enable agility (lightning fast agility) will therefore become a priority

5 Greater investment in solutions supporting collaboration (for example video team walls, 'zoom' rooms or 'zoom' furniture) will define workplace planning

6 Physical distancing will result in decreased desking densities

7 Desks may reduce in physical size as a result of technology enablement, although circulation will likely increase to accommodate physical distancing. This development will result in new and different floor plan typologies based on smaller working groups and an increased emphasis on planning flexibilities

8 Apps may be used to identify recently cleaned workpoints or track users and adjacent users to manage health proximities

9 There will be a greater emphasis on pathogen retarding and self-cleaning materials and finishes

10 Artificial intelligence will be more prevalent as smart building system evolve with touchless technologies such as automatic doors, sensor taps and mobile apps controlling destination lifts and meeting room booking systems

11 Agility and mobility in the workplace will be more widely accepted and desired with a likely move towards comfort-based working

12 Although raising challenges for hygiene and management, it is anticipated a desk-per-person approach will become less the norm with acknowledgment of employees balancing working from home with working from the office

13 In working from home people are re-discovering the simple life (cooking, gardening, knitting, yoga). Workplace will be redefined by this back to basics phenomenon and become more focused on the social and cultural aspects of work acknowledging that diversity fosters creativity

14 With an increased recognition of the importance of wellness and exercise, workplaces will include facilities and discrete spaces for activities like walking meetings, stretching, cycling and push-up bars

15 The workplace of the future will better provide for individuals to deliver specific tasks through greater flexibility and workplace customisation

16 Decentralisation may change the shape and size of workplaces and cities as people opt to work more often from home, reducing their public transits and carparking needing. People may move further away from cities to connect with nature and CBDs may become more liveable with decreased densities. Imagine cities with less vehicular traffic and more green parks as workplace extensions
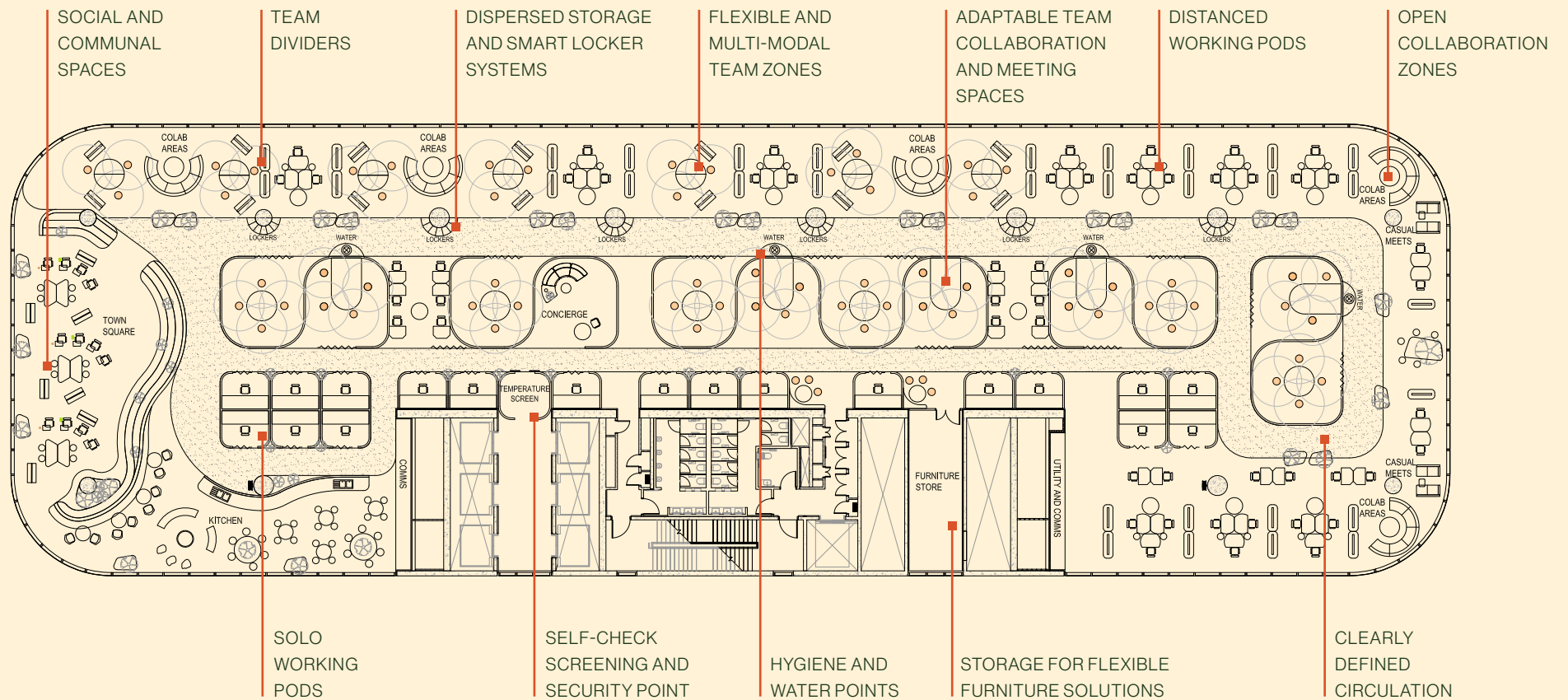
17 Design for sustainability and environmentally positive impacts will become paramount, recognising the devastation caused by pandemics and climate change. It is hoped organisations and individuals become more focused on the need for environmental responsiveness

Planning for Distance

At times when social distancing is important

If nothing else, the unprecedented current environment has shown how fast change is possible when committed. We have a unique opportunity to leverage from this change with confidence. Once the current pandemic has been overcome, how will our workplaces and working environments sustain **resilience and adaptability** for the next big thing?

The following planning model is supported by home working and may be equally valid as a longer term workplace solution.

SOCIAL AND COMMUNAL SPACES

TEAM DIVIDERS

DISPERSED STORAGE AND SMART LOCKER SYSTEMS

FLEXIBLE AND MULTI-MODAL TEAM ZONES

ADAPTABLE TEAM COLLABORATION AND MEETING SPACES

DISTANCED WORKING PODS

OPEN COLLABORATION ZONES

SOLO WORKING PODS

SELF-CHECK SCREENING AND SECURITY POINT

HYGIENE AND WATER POINTS

STORAGE FOR FLEXIBLE FURNITURE SOLUTIONS
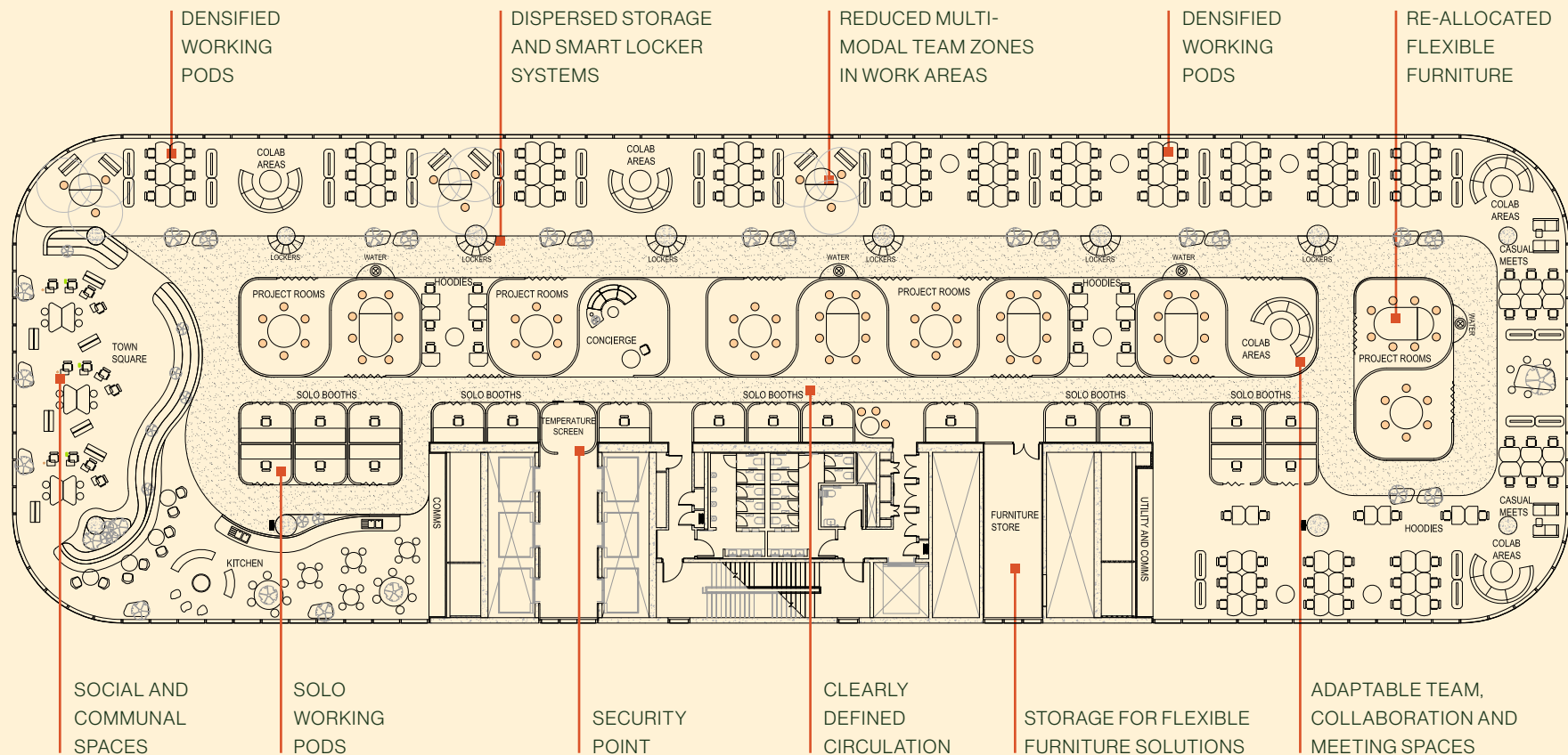
CLEARLY DEFINED CIRCULATION

Planning for Density

At times when social-distancing is not required

It is hopeful that confidence returns to our communities and our lives realign with earlier times as the current pandemic eases and a vaccine is found. Our workplaces should be designed to respond to these developments and the ebbs and flows of the future.

This planning model adapts with minimum change the Planning for Distance model with increased desking count and less reliance on working from home.

DENSIFIED WORKING PODS

DISPERSED STORAGE AND SMART LOCKER SYSTEMS

REDUCED MULTI-MODAL TEAM ZONES IN WORK AREAS

DENSIFIED WORKING PODS

RE-ALLOCATED FLEXIBLE FURNITURE

COLAB AREAS

COLAB AREAS

LOCKERS WATER LOCKERS LOCKERS WATER LOCKERS LOCKERS WATER LOCKERS

COLAB AREAS

CASUAL MEETS

PROJECT ROOMS HOODIES PROJECT ROOMS PROJECT ROOMS HOODIES

TOWN SQUARE

CONCIERGE

COLAB AREAS

PROJECT ROOMS

WATER

SOLO BOOTHS SOLO BOOTHS SOLO BOOTHS SOLO BOOTHS SOLO BOOTHS

TEMPERATURE SCREEN

COMMS

KITCHEN

FURNITURE STORE

UTILITY AND COMMS

HOODIES

CASUAL MEETS

COLAB AREAS

SOCIAL AND COMMUNAL SPACES

SOLO WORKING PODS

SECURITY POINT

CLEARLY DEFINED CIRCULATION

STORAGE FOR FLEXIBLE FURNITURE SOLUTIONS

ADAPTABLE TEAM, COLLABORATION AND MEETING SPACES

Attributes of the Future Workspace

We believe the following key attributes will guide the workplace of the future.

ABC, NSW

Stone and Chalk, NSW

7-Eleven, VIC

NEXT, VIC

1 Adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness

2 Multi-modal environments

3 Dynamic design for spatial expansions and contractions

4 The home as an extension of the office

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MK Lawyers, VIC

Chanel, NSW

Ernst & Young, NSW

UTS Institute of Sustainable Futures, NSW

5 Socialisation and a sense of family balancing both personal and working environments

6 Team and solo working spaces with likely increased emphasis on team-based activity spaces

7 Comfort and design for safety and hygiene
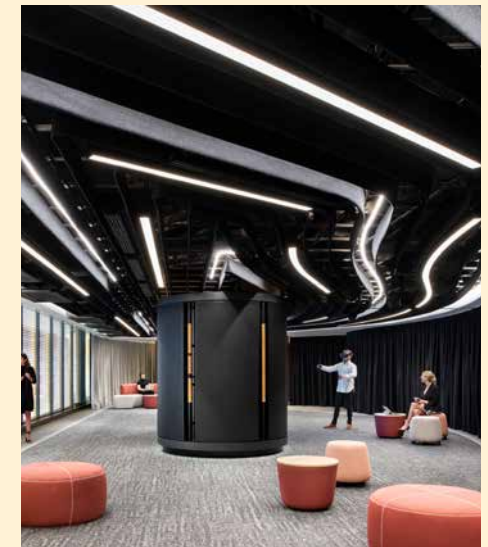
8 Personalised, integrated and connected technologies

Questions or Comments?

Please contact one of our GroupGSA workplace specialists in your capital city with any questions or comments relating to the information herein or how these approaches may be applied to your current or future workplace. This is an open dialogue and we would love to hear from you.

DISCLAIMER NOTE:

Planning solutions are intended as a guide only to represent the currently recommended social and physical distancing guidelines suggested by the Safe Work Australia guidelines. They do not represent a medical opinion or advice by GroupGSA.

Implementation of planning solutions do not warranty immunity or protection from infection. It is offered as general design advice in response to currently accepted guidelines and GroupGSA take no liability for interpretation or implementation.

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