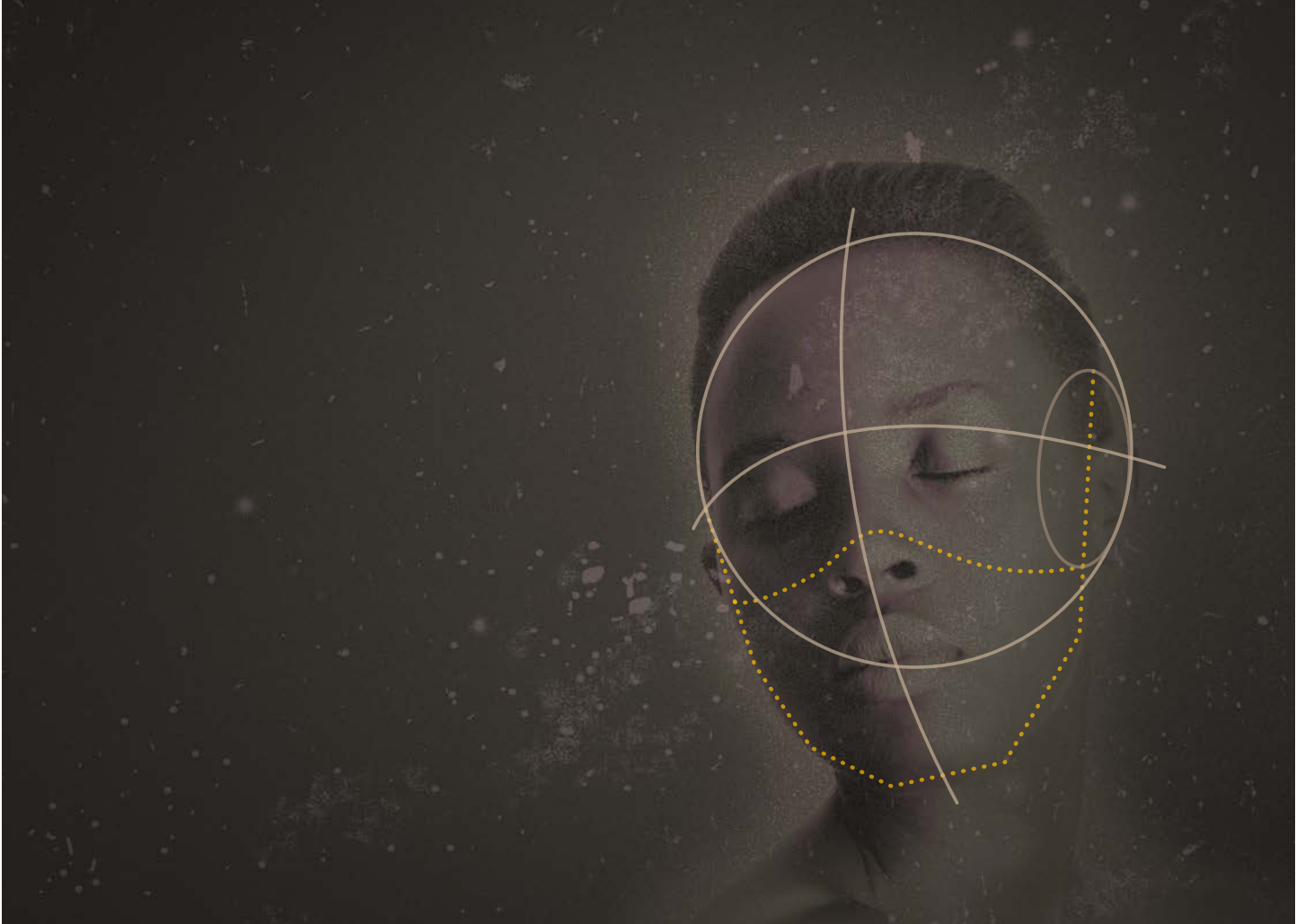


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Reenvisioning Workspace



**ecosystems defined by
human connection**

AUGUST 2020

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Design strategy is vital to creating an effective and energetic workspace. Good design processes navigate spatial and personal priorities in a constant state of flux, creating high quality productive environments. Over the years, trends in workplace design have shifted from private and enclosed, to open and agile, to shared and flexible. These typologies represent a wealth of knowledge that designers can harness to create an improved model for future work environments.

The coronavirus pandemic presents the opportunity to rethink the way we work. There are no blanket solutions, no one-size-fits-all. Truthfully, there never were. What is most important, now more than ever, is for businesses to deeply understand the unique needs of the people that work for them. When you focus on the human experience, you will find a solution that is unique to your organization, and one that will improve productivity and profitability.

As the models below will show, the future of workspace is fluid and transitory. It includes our physical offices, our homes and the virtual spaces we inhabit. As we navigate this liminal space, solutions must be adaptive.

How? The best way to climb a mountain of change is also the simplest: one step at a time. The following steps map out a framework for approaching any workspace in 2020 and beyond: **gather data, analyze that data, implement changes based on your findings, then test and repeat.**

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DATA GATHERING

STEP 1 | ENGAGE

People are the beating heart of any business. A design strategy is meaningless without staff engagement. You pay your workers a salary that helps them pay their bills and ultimately support their families. In exchange, they drive your business to success everyday. While professional, this exchange is inherently intimate, dependent and relational. **So start by asking them what they need.**

Depending on the size of your organization, you can use surveys, consensual surveillance, logs and other human resources tools to get a sense of where people are mentally, how they move physically, and how space impacts their work. But no matter what tools you use, the lifeblood of useful employee data is having open lines of communication. This relies on the culture and values of your organization, which are also crucial in understanding human spatial relationships.

Janelle in accounting is struggling working from her dining table with three kids under the age of four at home who need near-constant care.

Jared, a recent grad working in the innovation department, misses the camaraderie and mentorship that comes with in-office work, while he struggles to share a cramped two-bedroom condo with three roommates.

Samuel a business development manager, loves the flexible hours and the extra time he gets to work on fixing his vintage car by avoiding a 2 hour commute into the city.

Whatever the story may be, each individual has a unique view on the apparent binary of working from home or going into the office. Each employee will have a different level of comfort returning to the office. Some have health restrictions to navigate or family obligations that require them to be home. Business owners need to understand what tools and processes are necessary for these individuals to work effectively.

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DATA GATHERING

STEP 2 | IDENTIFY

You've spoken to your staff and you have a handle on how they are thriving (or barely surviving) in their current scenario. Now you can look at the structure of your organization, the physical office environment and the technology needed to sustain the business.

What are the necessary structures and processes that contribute to productivity and profitability?

What spaces within your office are key to the running of your business and which are underutilized?

What technology is improving productivity and what equipment do individuals need to do their job properly, both from home and at the office?

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ANALYSIS

STEP 3 | ASSESS

You have the data - so what do you do with it? Before you can implement changes, you have to thoughtfully **analyze it - meaning translate it into priorities and goals**. This is a step that often gets skipped in favour of jumping directly to implementation, but it is a crucial stage in directing the course of the physical design process. This is where a good design consultant can step in to make sense of the research as it applies to space. The knowledge gained from listening to your team and scrutinizing your processes will guide your workspace and workflow improvements.

How do people play a part in the structure and process of your particular organization? Where are they comfortable or uncomfortable?

What legacy problems are you facing, and what do they say about your culture? How can you move beyond them?

What processes can be done from home (alone), home (collaborating virtually) and what work is required to be completed by individuals or groups within the office setting?

These answers will vary from individual to individual and organization to organization.

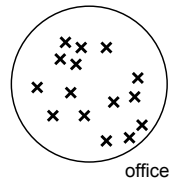
The diagrams in fig. 1 illustrate a concept of the past, present and future of structures for working environments. It imagines the workplace structure as an **ecosystem**. With this understanding, businesses can navigate change in the same way the living systems do, but with the added dimension of mindful human empathy: addressing the needs of individuals while maintaining the goals of the collective.

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FIG. 1 | EVOLUTION OF THE WORKPLACE ECOSYSTEM

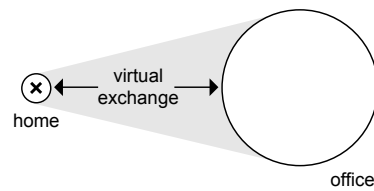
PAST

Static Office

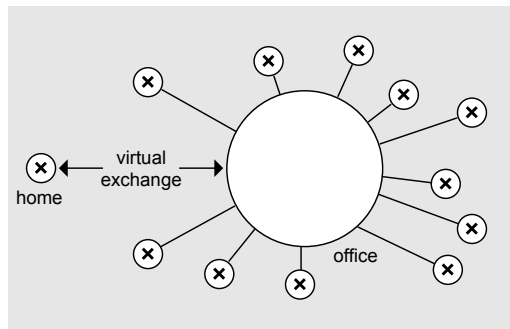


PRESENT

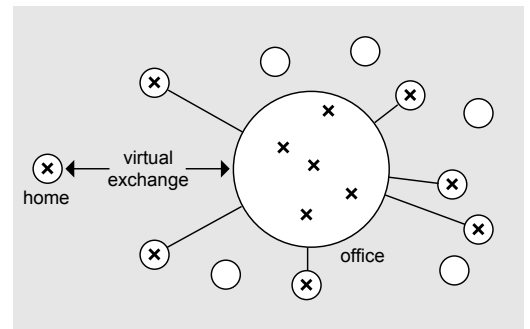
Home Working



Home Working with Colleagues



Home/Office Working with Colleagues



FUTURE

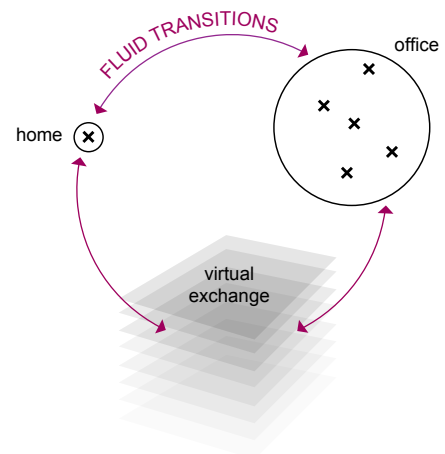
Home/Office Ecosystem and Improvements

HOME | live/work space; business identity; equipment; furniture, etc.

OFFICE | skill sharing; collaboration space; team building; client hosting, etc.

VIRTUAL | connectivity; security; software; technologies, etc.

TRANSITIONS | programming; interfaces; teams; project design, etc.



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IMPLEMENTATION

STEP 4 | DESIGN

This is the point where we give you a pile of suggestions for physical workplace changes to get everyone back into the office, right?

Wrong!

Remember, there are no blanket solutions. Effective design is inherently individual and iterative.

Are drastic physical changes necessary within your office environment to support a "back to work" goal, or is attention better focused on technology to support a mixed office typology?

Should changes be temporary, permanent, or a mix of the two?

What accommodations need to be made for people who cannot return to the office? How can your organization assist team members with improvements to their home setup?

The solutions will be agile, adaptable and ever-changing as we transition through this pandemic and into a post-pandemic world. A qualified interior designer and workplace consultant can help define the best solution to your unique problem, because they have the experience to understand best practices for health and safety, municipal codes and dynamic public health recommendations.

A significant ancillary benefit of this process will be the **reallocation of newly vacated spaces within the office**. If your people are working from home more often, the square footage of their individual workspaces can be reallocated to provide space for new functions that serve the collective.

You have a staff of twenty previously attending the office every workday. Now five will work from home permanently and two will work from home the majority of the time.

You now have square footage to reallocate to other processes. Consider a new piece of equipment that can be shared by all staff, an extra meeting space, or space for an entirely new department of people.

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IMPLEMENTATION

STEP 5 | EDUCATE

How do you ensure the long term success of the investment you have made in research, analysis and design? **It starts with educating your team.**

Train staff in the new protocols, technologies and workflows. Let them experience new spaces and make them their own.

Give employees the appropriate tools to succeed, especially for those who will work from home.

Understand that this is a process that evolves with the business. It will take time to test what is and what isn't working. You may need to make tweaks to your solution or even make major changes as your business changes.

Finally, understand that this will be a process you need to repeat periodically for the life of the business. If you go into these changes with the mentality that they are fluid, then you will never be dissatisfied with the outcome.

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A society hooked on instant gratification and quick solutions to complex problems has been confronted with a global pandemic, forcing its individuals and organizations to take a breath and assess what is truly important. In our lifetime, the opportunity to slow down at such an immense scale had yet to present itself, until now. The best responses will result from deep research, strategic thinking and a focus on the wellbeing of people. When applied to physical environments and the businesses that occupy them, we can use this opportunity to produce highly efficient spaces with happy employees, without minimizing the catastrophic losses we have suffered as a society. Meaningfully designed collective spaces can **embody empathy** and support workforces experiencing cataclysmic change.

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