

## Project 2021 - The New Workplace Reality in a Post Lockdown world.

The global pandemic reached far into every facet of our lives and forever changed how we do things at home, work and play.

In March and April 2021 while NZ was in lockdown, members of the AA Group of Companies surveyed hundreds of workplace stakeholders including architects, designers, property owners, property managers, tenants, engineers and workplace psychologists to understand the changes we have seen and what we can expect in the months and years ahead.



## “How has the COVID epidemic impacted the culture of the business?”

When it comes to Productivity, Working from Home (WFH) had a profound impact on organisations. Most feedback was positive with an overall uplift in productivity in some cases as high as 30%, despite some of the domestic hurdles some team members faced – children, broadband, access to company servers, proper office environment etc.

Speaking about Culture, by trying to replace everyday physical interaction with video conferencing, cultural engagement with larger teams was lower. However, many managers previously adamant WFH wouldn't work have changed their minds. Some companies struggled assessing productivity.

*“I think it's fair to say we will see more WFH in the mix so we have to ask what is an office for? Some architects have said they expect the office to become more like a Koru lounge with more social and meeting areas. While the work floor is reduced to allow for focus work from home and staggered staff occupancy. Others have speculated that the social areas will reduce in favour of bring back the cubicle. “*

## “What are the important factors you will be considering regarding your workspace in the post COVID world?”

Survey Trends:

- Effective cleaning and sanitising regimes
- Reduced occupancy and space management to enable social distancing
- Reducing shared contact surfaces: Door handles, light switches, touch screens etc.
- Easy contact tracing

*“We need to ensure our people feel safe and that our environments are kept clean and managed accordingly.”*

## “How will your organisation address creating a ‘Safe’ workplace?”

### Survey Trends:

For some existing spaces it will be difficult but effective signage, foot traffic direction and sanitation stations will be the first steps taken. Existing workspace will be re-arranged in such a way that adequate social distancing can be maintained. Many are unsure of the appropriate way forward for new spaces.

“We are rolling out thermal cameras to detect people with fevers when they enter the building. Not long ago this might have been deemed as intrusive”

## “What have the effects been on your ability to communicate with your team internally - Has that impacted business at all?”

### Survey Trends:

Most clients had some form of video communication already in place allowing some work to carry on. Leaders using video regularly were perceived well, leaders using email or text only communication fell short. The addition of Teams or Zoom added new challenges to daily communication with many reporting unusual fatigue from back to back calls.

*“I can relate to feeling drained from back to back calls. I think this is in part due to not making the time to digest the information from one meeting before starting the next. But I also think this is just part of the early learning curve. “*

*“I want to steer us back to architecture now it seems like some of the big challenges would be limiting congestion in shared spaces like cafeteria and lift areas. Maybe we could we see eating / ordering food from desks? “*

## “What strategies will your organisation employ to invite tenancy owners/occupiers, clients, customers back into the workplace, retail space?”

### Survey Trends:

One respondent has embarked on a re-launch of their shared workspace highlighting the implementation of social distancing process and a clean environment. While looking at implementing event broadcasting to enable better digital communication. Many participants want their team and/or customers to feel safe and are looking at occupancy management, contact tracking and tracing, advertising cleaning routines and reducing shared touch surfaces.

*“We have implemented voice command technology for clients but haven’t pushed the technology due to perceived privacy concerns around microphones in commercial environments. There is always a balance between privacy and convenience that tech like voice and facial recognition can provide. “*

*Co-working has been an increasingly popular in recent years. While some are calling the death of co-working, I wonder if it could become the third workplace. With more people working from home the need for more places to meet and do business outside the city might see these spaces used in a more ad-hoc format.*



## “Do you have any final thoughts on how these changes will roll out?”

*“From what I have read there is a possibility of a mutation of COVID19 or a new emerging disease surfaces **five times a year**.*

*For these reasons **we should be taking the redesign of our commercial spaces seriously.***

*I have some concerns because of our fortunate status of becoming COVID free in NZ that in our rush to get back to normal we might not make the necessary changes. **We are all susceptible to the path of least resistance** particularly when that path is more familiar, comfortable and cost effective.”*

AA Group would like to thank everyone involved in Project2021 and invite you to contribute to the ongoing survey at [www.aa.net.nz/project2021](http://www.aa.net.nz/project2021) where you can also view the full video of the panel discussion.

For more information on Project2021 or for help with technology to maximise efficiency in your new workplace reality please contact [sales@aa.net.nz](mailto:sales@aa.net.nz)

