'COVID-19 aftermath: Safe return to the office during the pandemic'

Dr Evangelia Chrysikou[1], Eleftheria Savvopoulou[2], Eva Hernandez Garcia[2]

[1] University College London - The Bartlett Real Estate Institute, University of Crete
University College London - The Bartlett Real Estate Institute

Issue

COVID-19 has affected almost all aspects of our human activity globally. Changing our working norm is one of them. **This project explored strategies and control measures that could be adopted in different countries for preventing or limiting the transmission of the SARS-CoV-2 virus in indoor office workplaces, focusing on space and the well-being of workers.**
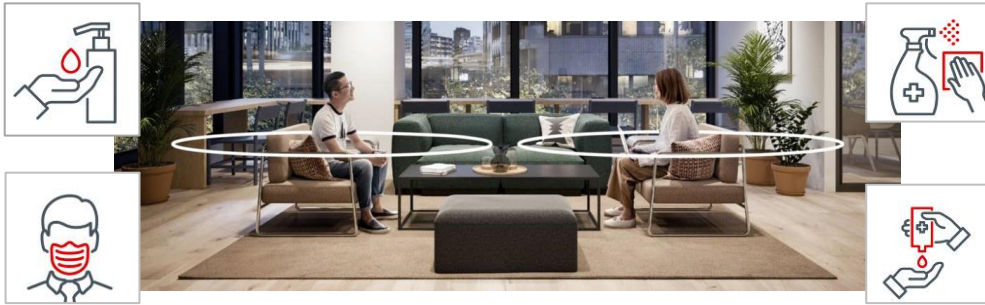

Figure 1: SARS-CoV-2 virus measures in indoor office space

Methodology

Research took place in May-July 2020. **Methods used comprised both systematic and narrative literature reviews as well as stakeholder consultations with executives involved in the office supply chain.**

Figure 2: Methodology

Suggestions were split in: a) **top-down suggestions, i.e. governmental and b) bottom-up guidance, generated by industry.** Surface contamination, protocols to reduce the psychological stress of employees, ventilation and virus transmission were some of the questions raised along with a broader series of aspects involving employee wellbeing.

Results

Results were organised under four themes: a) advice on surface interactions and virus viability; b) behavioural advice focusing on the return-to-work effects on the psychological state of workers along with control measures; c) suggestions on preparing buildings to return-to-work during the pandemic and study of indoor environment parameters and their effect on office workers and d) advice on thermal and ventilation conditions and virus transmission.

Figure 3: The four themes of the results

Conclusions

The public health effect of COVID-19 on workspace is more relevant than ever globally as people return to work. This project demonstrated the complexity of decision making and the series of conflicting priorities that arose, especially infection control vs employee mental health or increased business costs for modifications during economic recession.

This report was issued by UCL Consultants Ltd, under a consultancy contract with Savile Row Projects Ltd.