



What does an office fit out look like in 2020 and beyond?

Amid the COVID-19 crisis we've seen huge changes in office structures. Although most of Australia has somewhat opened back up, there's still going to be restrictions and guidelines in place indefinitely. So what does that mean for the future of office fit outs? Pre COVID-19, offices had turned to open plan layouts and break out areas to encourage staff engagement and boost office culture. Now with staff wellbeing being more important than ever, how do we continue to encourage staff culture and implement safety measures at the same time? Now there's not one turnkey solution that will work for everyone – every business is different in regards to staff numbers and job roles and whether they can work remotely or not. Let's touch on some factors to consider when planning your office fit out in 2020 and beyond.

Open floor plans – yay or nay?

Open plan offices are proven to boost company culture by encouraging collaboration and creativity but will we see a shift back to a closed plan office?

Offices will need to have the right balance of staff safety but still encourage staff to be part of a team; whether this is in the way of portable partitions and sneeze screens or closed offices. Now there's arguments for both sides as some would argue that there's no point in going back to partitions when you'll be passing colleagues in the hallway and sharing toilets, kitchens and lifts. These are factors to consider when planning the office layout – the need for more space for staff to navigate the office by widening hallways and walkways. Another argument is that open floor plans are easier to clean as there's less surfaces for germs to cover e.g. door handles and it's easier to ventilate one area by opening windows and assuring adequate airflow.

Safety and hygiene

Hand hygiene stations, appropriate ventilation and motorised doors and touchless entry are a few ways to avoid the spread of germs. If motorised doors aren't achievable, consider an open door policy so that staff can easily see if a meeting room is being used, or to pop in on another

staff member without having to make contact with door handles. This will also help with ventilation. Basically, anything that helps to stop the spread of germs and maintain a safe distance from one another should be the new normal. Directional traffic signs and other workplace signage should be implemented and workstations should be kept clear from clutter to make surfaces easier to clean. Lunchtime schedules might need to be implemented to avoid congestion in the office kitchen and common areas to maintain social distancing.

Technology

As touched on, automation is key. On top of motorised doors and touchless entry, workplaces should install automatic taps, soap and paper towel dispensers in bathrooms and kitchens and automatic sanitisation stations around the rest of the workplace. With the increase in the need for digital connection between colleagues and clients, staff may need laptops to work from home and access to screen sharing capabilities and online conference calls.



Furniture

Think about your current or future furniture and how easily it can be cleaned. If your office is fitted with luxury, soft furnishings think about whether the upholstery can handle harsh cleaners. Ideally look for solid surfaces that can be cleaned frequently without damage.

Portable office pods

Perhaps the need for large (expensive to build) conference rooms may not be so prevalent. With social distancing, people working remotely and interstate clients visiting less (if at all), acoustic office pods might be the solution. A portable, private space to join a conference call or meet with another staff member. Being portable means that with the unpredictability of the future, the pod can be moved if a company decides to downsize their office or relocate. Office pods should have proper ventilation for not only temperature comfort but to minimise germ spreading too.

Pre-fitted offices

With tenants being more hesitant to invest in a full fit out of a premise due to the unpredictability of the

future, it's up to landlords to create a space that tenants want to move into. Basically, landlords should create an appealing, generic fit out to attract tenants. When creating the fit out landlords need to consider social distancing, as mentioned, implementing wider walkways and adequate space in common areas. On top of the amenities, during these tough times tenants are expecting shorter leases and more affordable rates. If situated in an office building with multiple companies, an option to reduce expenses is creating a coworking space for meetings or maybe even a mutual office pod?

Hot desking

Some would say hot desking is dead. And it probably died before COVID-19. Having to set up and pack up your desk and deal with less hygienic colleagues – not ideal. The use of hot desking, having multiple employees use the same desk throughout the day, means more frequent cleaning as multiple people would be using the same keyboard, phone and stationary. Although a hot trend for some companies, it might be best for staff to stick to individual desks for the time being.

If you have any questions regarding this article or anything else related to office fit outs, we'd love to hear from you. Send us an email at hello@croudaceconstructs.com.

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