



When making plans for the future, we always consider various scenarios, but the scale of the recent developments has come as a surprise even to the most far-sighted of us. SARS-CoV-2, commonly known as the coronavirus, made us face a completely new, unknown reality. This reality is **uncertain and dynamic**. It is a major challenge for the humanity – as regards our private and social life, but also with respect to the economy. Entrepreneurs keep wondering how to manage the current situation and what decisions to make to minimise the impact on their employees and business partners.

And yet we believe this experience will draw us even closer together. Together we can face the pandemic and slowly bring the situation under control. There is still a long way ahead of us before it all gets back to... We're tempted to say "back to normal", but the world we used to know has undergone a dramatic change, which may prove permanent and lasting. We need to get used to it.

We want to help you come to terms with the new reality, which is why we are now sharing the outcome of our interdisciplinary and international cooperation **in the area which has long been our domain – workspace organisation**. Just like before, it is supposed to support employees in their everyday tasks, and in the face of the recent developments, it will also bring about a safe and effective work environment for everybody. Drawing on our knowledge and experience, we would like to offer a few tips on **how to prepare for the return to the office: what changes and modifications you can introduce in the office layout and what products to use to ensure proper safety and hygiene standards**. We realise that the ultimate look of your "new" office depends on numerous factors, such as individual decisions and the capabilities of specific employers. That's why we want to show you various ways and best practices, which will help you find a solution that suits your needs.

This publication is addressed to all of you who will soon be faced with the challenge related to the organisation of bringing your employees back to the office setting. We are aware that **Administration, Facility Management, HR, IT, Purchasing or Workplace departments are in for a lot of work now**. Even more so, we hope our report titled "Welcome back... to the office!" will become a source of useful tips and inspiration. We believe the information included in this document will contribute to re-establishing interpersonal bonds and relations, and more importantly, help you organise a safe and comfortable workspace.

Enjoy the read!



Adam Krzanowski
CEO at Nowy Styl

Contents

- 04 Work in times of uncertainty
- 10 Ideas breed from experience
- 12 Structure of the report

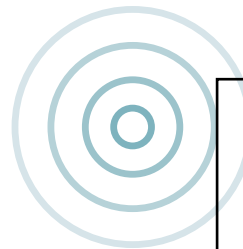
Workplace safety puzzles



#BeReliable

14

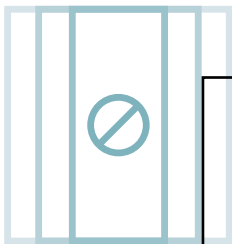
Transparent hygiene



#BeSecure

18

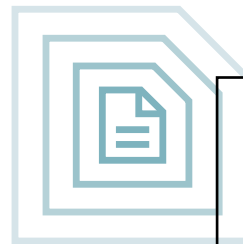
Distance planning



#BeClear

42

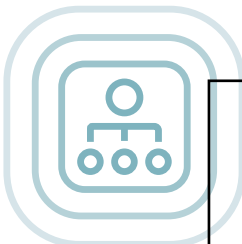
Visual communication



#BeOrganised

46

New workplace etiquette



#BeSupportive

50

Supportive management



#BeEquipped

54

Preventive products

- 58 We are here for you!
External consultants' support



Work in times of uncertainty

Many researchers agree that the world as we knew it before March 2020 is now a thing of the past. The future depends on many factors. One of them is the ongoing pandemic and its long-term effects, which we cannot fully assess. Initially, we thought it would be a disaster – a thing we knew from movies.

The first reactions focused on isolation, which in turn froze all social and economic activity. However, it is impossible to go on like this for a longer period of time. Concerns related to mental health and economic wellbeing are the main drivers behind the so called “back to normal” shift.

We don't know how long the uncertainty will last. And we don't know whether it's going to recur: it might be a cyclic affair, recurring in autumn and winter, or when a new virus appears and causes a new pandemic. This is why we have to prepare for a new reality and new conditions.

As specialists in workspace organisation, we asked ourselves what the new “normal” would be like. Will we go back to old habits, or will March 2020 mark the beginning of a new era, unlike any other before? Or maybe we will continue looking for new solutions, trying to combine the past with the future? More and more often we can hear opinions of employers who already expect or announce the return to office work. Will this be a return to the well-known past, or will we take new, rational measures to ensure safe working conditions and business continuity? This remains to be seen. Right now, though, there are already a few details that point to the direction of the new reality. In order to understand it, we have to look back and analyse the previous function of offices.

Functions of offices

The offices as we knew them for the past decades were designed as main workplaces for employees. Their layout and functionality were modelled on factory settings, where each worker had an assigned place and tasks to complete. With time, the layout was subject to changes (from open space to closed offices and then again back to open space). This was supposed to facilitate information flow in a company, to promote cross-team interdisciplinary projects and enable work in many settings with diverse and interesting design. Since working from home became popular (the so called Home Office), the traditional office began to change its primary functions and became just one of a few possible working environments. It has become a space for human interaction, which is an important element of creative work – an essential element of modern business in the 21st century. The offices, which we have recently left to work from home, had the following functions:

- **Social** – a place of everyday interactions, a place where you belong;
- **Cultural** – building rapport and relations, also with the employer; integrating with other employees, creating organisational culture, sharing experience;
- **Representative** – a place where you meet with clients, a place for employer branding, the main seat of the company;
- **Administrative** – main workplace, where you can complete your tasks in an effective, ergonomic manner, where you store materials, folders, company documents etc.;
- **Regenerative** – a place where you can chill in the company of other employees; separating home space from work environment;
- **Focus** – a place of individual work, for which you need deep focus.



Working from home during the pandemic

Right now, most, if not all, of these functions have been effectively suspended. The urgent need to work from home shifted many processes to virtual reality. Our homes became our offices and the recently mentioned term *work-life blending* has become true in front of our very eyes, although we might not necessarily like it. As employees, we miss actual contact with another human being. Despite numerous conference calls and long phone conversations, after some time **we felt we needed to go back to the office** – to the space which was designed to support our everyday work, even if we had failed to notice this function before. To the space with was a buffer zone between our private life and work. To the place where we met with the clients and colleagues, where we exchanged information over a cup of coffee, in between meetings, without a chain of extra e-mails. To the space where we learned from one another and built team spirit.

We know that the office impacts both our own wellbeing and the condition of our business. On the other hand, many employees and employers confirm that working from home proves more effective and that they perform many tasks faster than they would in the office, plus, the employees have more time to meet their own needs. When you couple this with the time and cost of commuting, you will discover that working from home does have its advantages. Still, it begs the question: is it really good for employees and for business?

At the beginning of the epidemic, there was a popular opinion that it spelt the end of office work and from now on working from home would be the thing. This was supposed to be profitable for employers: greater opportunities to hire employees from various parts of the world, reduced cost of renting office space, and increased effectiveness of teams. This, however, is a bit like the opinions formulated when the Internet and PCs were a new thing. Back then it was also speculated that employees would soon leave offices – work was supposed to be more and more detached

from the traditional office. As it turned out – it did not happen so quickly. The need to be in touch with the team and with the company business proved to override the original hopes and assumptions. However, the offices started to be rearranged so as to be more user-friendly. They were planned as a home office design – cosy, pleasant and nice to be in – rather than a cold corporation.

It is, however, worth noting that **working from home as we know it now was introduced under extraordinary pressure, in an extreme situation**, and neither employers nor employees were properly prepared for this situation. It is more and more often that we hear criticism on both sides and increasing complaints about the current solution. Isolation, reduced motivation, no sense of belonging to a larger community, working on a specific section of a project without having an insight into the big picture, countless video calls, hundreds of e-mails and notifications bombarding our devices – this is the reality of working from home without proper preparation for the new situation.

When discussing the phenomenon of working from home, it is good to remember what happened at IBM: despite considerable experience in this respect, 3 years ago the company decided to “bring back” many employees who worked from home and invited them to return to the office*. Why is it so? It turned out that although this model did improve their effectiveness (better time management), it often resulted in reduced innovativeness**. This was because the main function of a 21st century office is to bring people together – an office has become a place where various personalities, individuals, cultures and ideas meet in order to generate innovative solutions. On the other hand, **an office is a space where one human being gets in touch with another: this is something we need to function properly**. This is also a place where you exchange experience, learn from one another and become aware of what is going on in the company as a whole. It is necessary, especially for young employees, but also for those who work best in a team (shared objective, sense of meaningfulness, unity, belonging to a group). It’s a bit like attending a fitness class – the awareness of being there in a group, joined by a common goal, increases the probability of success – and sometimes it is even a *sine qua non*.

* John Simons, *IBM, a Pioneer of Remote Work, Calls Workers Back to the Office*, [w:] <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ibm-a-pioneer-of-remote-work-calls-workers-back-to-the-office-1495108802> (01.06.2020).



** [Click here to find out more](#)





A new hybrid model of work

We are of the opinion that **going back to the office is inevitable and sometimes even desirable**. However, this does not mean we will be going back to the office as we know it. Offices will have to change their role and layout – this is for sure. It is absolutely crucial that they adjust to the new mandatory sanitary requirements. This will also impact the way we behave in such places. As workspace researchers we hope that we are now going to appreciate our offices a bit more, especially that they are going to become much more friendly: less crowded, more diverse, with safety rules to guarantee being there together as a group.

Some employers will definitely enable further work from home, in a form that is better suited to the ongoing needs of the company and the employees. There is a lot of research to confirm that so far working from home has been treated as an actual benefit by many employees. This was proved by our research among IT employees*. A vast majority of the participants claimed that the possibility to work from home is the main benefit that proves the quality of the prospective employer. What is equally interesting, the very possibility to use this option was more important than the number of hours allocated to it – the preferences related to the hours worked from home per week were more or less evenly distributed. One more thing is important – nobody declared they did not need this option at all. Both this and other studies (conducted long before the pandemic) indicate that **the possibility to decide about the place and time of work is invariably important for contemporary employees**.

This hybrid model of work (part-time from home, part-time from the office) will also require some adjustments in our homes. At the onset of the pandemic, a lot of images of actual “home offices” appeared on the Internet. This proved that a majority of our homes are not adapted to

hybrid work or working from home. The situation was further complicated when children needed some space to do their schoolwork. Some employers were quick to purchase the necessary office equipment or loan some to their employees (computer screen, chair, extra ergonomic accessories), but this was by no means standard behaviour. This is why it is so important for employers to consider home offices – which were previously of no interest to them – when planning a new workspace. Taking care of effective and ergonomic work, also out of office, will probably become a new requirement to be met by employers. Many furniture manufacturers have started amending their portfolio to include the possibilities and space of home offices. As an employer, it is worth remembering about this aspect and being transparent when coming up with a relevant policy.

Towards a better workplace

Work in times of uncertainty will definitely be flexible – as regards hours, scope and location. With every passing week, each company has to come up with its own individual system suited to its business and organisational culture. There will be lots of new solutions on the market (technologies, furniture, spatial solutions), which will support business in its further growth, depending on individual preferences. These solutions will make it easier for people to communicate and complete projects, especially when it is the effect that counts rather than the hours worked. There will also be new communication patterns, where the content and the recipient are increasingly important – meetings will be shorter, more effective, following the rules of conversation. We will appreciate short face-to-face meetings with another person. As regards their function and layout, offices will become places of intense team work. An office will be a space of meetings. This will also impact new hygiene standards and their management. We will finally see ergonomic and comfortable spaces, easily adjustable to the users.

This may sound like a utopia, but would you have ever expected to be trapped at home for a dozen weeks? That’s why we’re not afraid to dream and formulate visions of a new, better workplace. This is something we wish for ourselves and for you, dear Readers!

**Workplace Research
& Consulting Team**



* [Click here to find out more](#)

Offices will become places of intense team work. An office will be a space of meetings. This will also impact new hygiene standards and their management. We will finally see ergonomic and comfortable spaces, easily adjustable to the users.

Ideas breed from experience

In a situation of threat and uncertainty – which pandemic definitely is – everybody must handle a variety of emotions. One of them is fear. That’s why we decided to have a closer look at the things we are mostly afraid of when we think of going back to the office, and to find some solutions that will help us through this process. In order to define the main sources of fear, we conducted 3 focused group interviews (FGI) with the use of projection techniques. The sample group for each of the focus interviews was selected in a non-probabilistic manner: the respondents were chosen from among office workers from large cities.

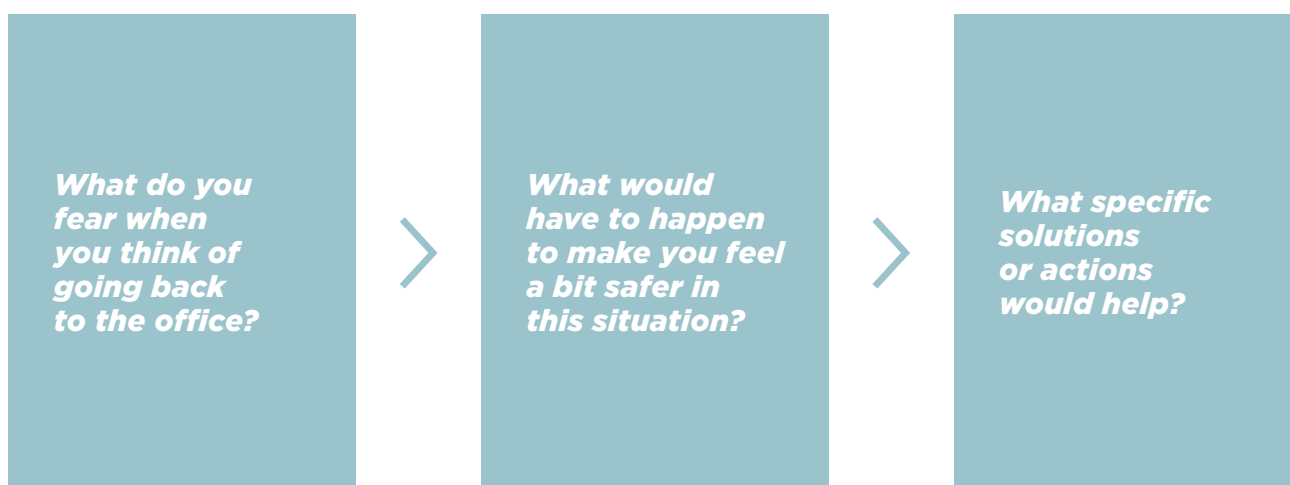
It’s natural that we are afraid. It’s good and needed. If we didn’t experience fear, we could be involved in dangerous actions. On the other hand, when we experience fear too often and it’s too intense, it may prevent us from performing our everyday duties or block our relationships with people close to us. Therefore, **if we don’t want to be overcome with fear in a new situation, we need to have a closer look at this fear and try to make it more familiar – or even become friends with it.** The ability to understand

the sources of fear and cope with it helps us function normally in our contemporary reality.

That’s why in the first part of our interview we asked the participants to list all the things they fear when they think of going back to the office in the current situation. This could be their own experience or the feelings/thoughts of the people close to them.

Having analysed this list, we asked the participants **what would have to happen in order to reduce their fear?** And what should be done in order to make their work safe and effective, in their opinion?

This is how we obtained a list of needs and specific solutions which would help us cope with negative emotions and make us feel safer. But most importantly, we were able to come up with 6 areas that should be secured above anything else, before we open the offices and let the employees return. These areas were the basis for a model, which – as we hope – will facilitate the arrangement of “new workspace” and help us predict potential problems that may arise in this process.



Based on own study – April 2020



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Structure of the report

Dear Reader, you are now holding a collection of tips and best practices, our puzzle pieces, which will help you “arrange” your office before the employees come back. The actions we recommend are equivalent elements, pieces of a puzzle, which are designed to create safe and supportive work. Each of these proposed solutions is an answer to the **fears and concerns of employees, as expressed before**. Although the address of the office remains the same, we treat this return more like moving to a new office space, which will have to adjust its layout and some of its functions.

We would also like to note that the new conditions may initially be a challenge for many people and involve overcoming certain previous habits. This may be an attempt at understanding and becoming used to something new. That’s why when implementing the **Workplace safety puzzles** it’s good to look at the office from the point of view of various users:

- > employees,
- > managers,
- > clients,
- > guests,
- > candidates.

WARNING! The above mentioned process is treated as change management, so that new rules are properly implemented and every stakeholder feels safe. It may be necessary to use the knowledge and ideas of a specially appointed interdisciplinary team comprising your employees (change ambassadors), or the knowledge of external experts.

The leading motif of our report is our **Workplace safety puzzles**. Each element is described according to the following scenario:



1 FEARS

What are we afraid of?

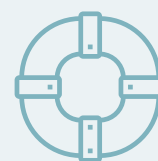
What makes us resentful about going back to the office, what makes us want to stay at home, despite the inconvenience.



2 RECOMMENDATIONS

Examples of rules for new functioning in a specific area.

What we have to define and make clear in order to reduce the fear.



3 SAMPLE SOLUTIONS

What exactly can we do about it?

Sample solutions we can implement.

In the **Distance planning** section a group of our experts shows two ways you can choose when preparing your office for the return of your employees.

The first way is arranging your office according to the guidelines mandatory in a specific country, without introducing major changes in the building. With this kind of support you can prepare your office in a short time.

The second way entails more complex activities, which involve rearrangement, replacement of furniture and sometimes even changing the functional and spatial layout of the whole office. It’s a long-term initiative, which may be considered at a further stage.

Workplace safety puzzles

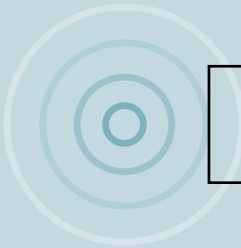
#BeReliable



Transparent hygiene

Guarantee hygiene and sanitise the workplace in a way that will be visible for your employees.

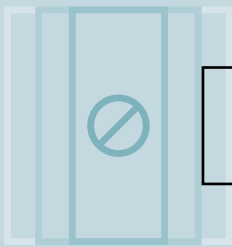
#BeSecure



Distance planning

Arrange proper workspace for every employee.

#BeClear



Visual communication

Label all the places where you need to observe certain safety rules.

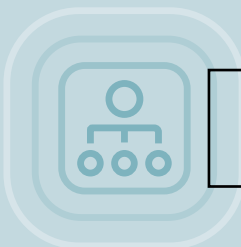
#BeOrganised



New workplace etiquette

Remember to implement new safety rules and communicate them through multiple channels.

#BeSupportive



Supportive management

Prepare a support programme for your employees and managers, so that they can easily find their place in the new reality. Be close to your employees. Be there for them.

#BeEquipped



Preventive products

Use products that are easy to clean and have antibacterial finish.



#BeReliable

Transparent hygiene

The question of hygiene was discussed quite often over the past few weeks. Many claim it's the easiest and most effective way to avoid infection. The office is no exception. Only by defining and following clear rules can you ensure a safe work environment. It is also the key element in building comfort and reassurance among the users of your workspace. If the employees realise certain steps have been taken, they will find it easier to come back to the office.



What are we afraid of? What are we concerned about?*

- Attendance list and other documents are signed with a shared pen. We also use shared office equipment and use certain shared areas in the office building. Is everything sanitised?
- Will I have the opportunity to sanitise my own workplace and the place where I have lunch?
- Even if we all follow the safety rules, what about guests and visitors?
- I know we use a cleaning service, but are the cleaners doing anything extra in this situation? What exactly are they doing? I'm afraid that some furniture cannot be properly sanitised, e.g. the upholstered panel between the desks.
- I'm afraid somebody working next to me will start coughing.
- I'm afraid of having to open the doors frequently - not all handles can be opened with an elbow!

We can see that most of the concerns arise because people fear they may become infected when using shared space or devices, which may have been touched by people who are sick, but have not been diagnosed yet. How to address these concerns? Furthermore, how to create an actually safe work environment?

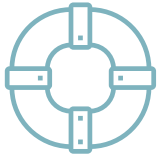
* Based on own study - April 2020



Recommendations:

- 1 Before the employees return, plan to sanitise the office thoroughly.
- 2 As an employer, have all shared spaces sanitised before and after work – define clear rules and assign relevant responsibilities.
- 3 Organise hygiene stations in the office, with sanitisers to disinfect hands, furniture and shared areas. Remember – these means of protection must be readily available and clearly labelled.
- 4 Come up with a relevant safety policy and rules to be followed by employees – communicate the mandatory rules on a current basis and in multiple channels.
- 5 Prepare similar materials for guests who come to your office (clients, suppliers, candidates) and communicate relevant information in multiple channels.
- 6 Publish a current cleaning schedule, so that the employees are aware that certain actions are being taken. They will feel safer when they know it.





Sample solutions:

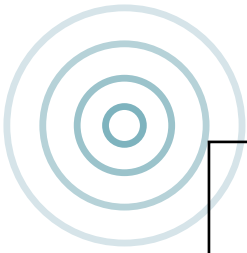
- readily available hand sanitisers near the entrance to every shared area;
- workplace disinfectants and hand sanitisers available in one point, easily accessible for the employees (a dedicated disinfection point assigned to each room or each group of 20 people in an open space) + additionally sanitising stations in each meeting room;
- disinfecting shared areas and buttons in the kitchen (countertops, coffee machines, microwaves, water dispensers, fridges) twice a day – to be done by the cleaning service;
- timers in bathrooms – to be used while you wash your hands (min. 30 seconds);
- UVC light bulbs in offices/UV lamps in the rooms;
- leaving parcels in assigned points near reception desks;
- ozone treatment of the office space;
- possibility to have one's temperature taken upon entering the office.



Advice

Of course, not all of these tips can be implemented in every single office, but reassuring your employees by providing relevant information about the measures taken is a vital step. Lack of such information may cause additional fear.





#BeSecure

Distance planning

Another key element of a safe work environment is distance. Distance has actually redefined our lives. In its extreme form we know it as isolation. Many people volunteered to self-isolate, because appropriate distance from any sources of infection guarantees safety. However, we don't know how much longer it will last. It's slowly dawning on us that it will be impossible to remain in isolation for an extended period of time. It is bad for our mental health, and for the economy, too. It is reasonable to plan our return to the "new reality", which we are yet to create. And distance will be the key concept in this new reality. In this publication we have assumed that safe distance is 1.5m – it is the mandatory social distance in many countries now. The solutions we are going to propose will make it possible to maintain such distance.



What are we afraid of? What are we concerned about?*

- *Isn't my desk too close to another employee's workstation?*
- *I'm afraid that sofas and separating panels between the desks will become a hotbed for bacteria and viruses.*
- *What if people stand too close to each other in the kitchen, e.g. while they wait for coffee, or when queuing for food?*
- *Can we meet with others in the office? How many people can be in a meeting?*
- *Where can I talk on the phone, since phone booths are out of use? I don't want to disturb others.*

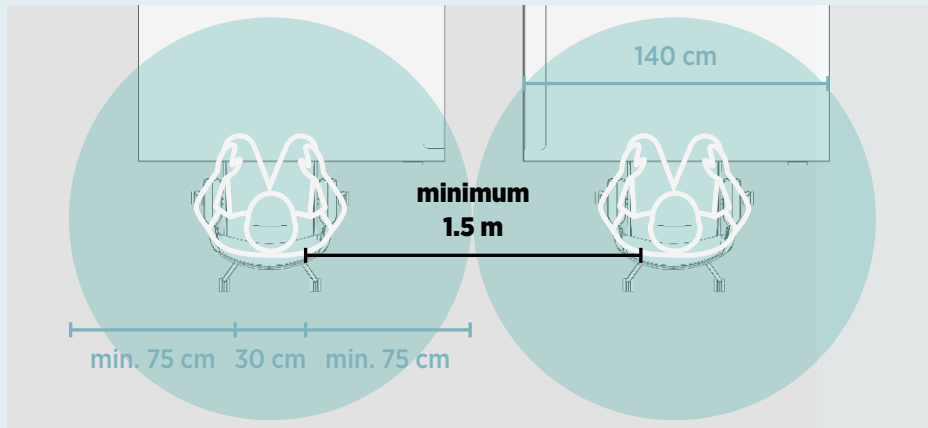
An office is a place where both formal and informal meetings are held. One of the reasons we are now going back to the office is that we need those meetings in order to work effectively. We actually miss the meetings, because they also had an important social function. In the times when interpersonal contact is limited, informal meetings are all the more significant. No wonder we are afraid that every other person we meet may be a source of infection. As a result, we are faced with the basic fear of contact. Fortunately, there are certain solutions we can use. **If you introduce a few basic rules and facilities in your office, you will easily create a safe and functional space, which will be a place for exchanging ideas and coming up with new concepts as a result of interpersonal relations.**

* Based on own study – April 2020



Recommendations:

- 1 Organise appropriate space for each employee who needs to work from the office (min. 1.5 m distance from others), so that everybody has their **safety zone**. You can:
 - implement a policy that guarantees safety zone to each employee – **minimum 2.5 m²**;



If some employees do not have a place in your office after these changes, **consider working from home, shift work or job rotation. Remember to define clear rules for any of these options.**

- introduce one-way traffic or moving along one wall, so that people avoid bumping into one another. If this solution cannot be implemented, use masks;
 - rearrange the office so that workstations comply with the mandatory norms;
 - introduce changes in the functional layout of the office.
- 2 In the most populated places make sure the separation panels are easy to clean.
 - 3 Define clear rules for using shared areas (kitchen, meeting rooms), e.g. assign seats in a chessboard pattern, remembering about maintaining proper distance.
 - 4 Assign a meeting room where you can meet with visitors. These rooms should be close to the main entrance to your office.

Glossary:

Working from home – introduce a rule that some employees work in the office and others from home. Ask whether the employees have properly equipped and arranged workstations at home.

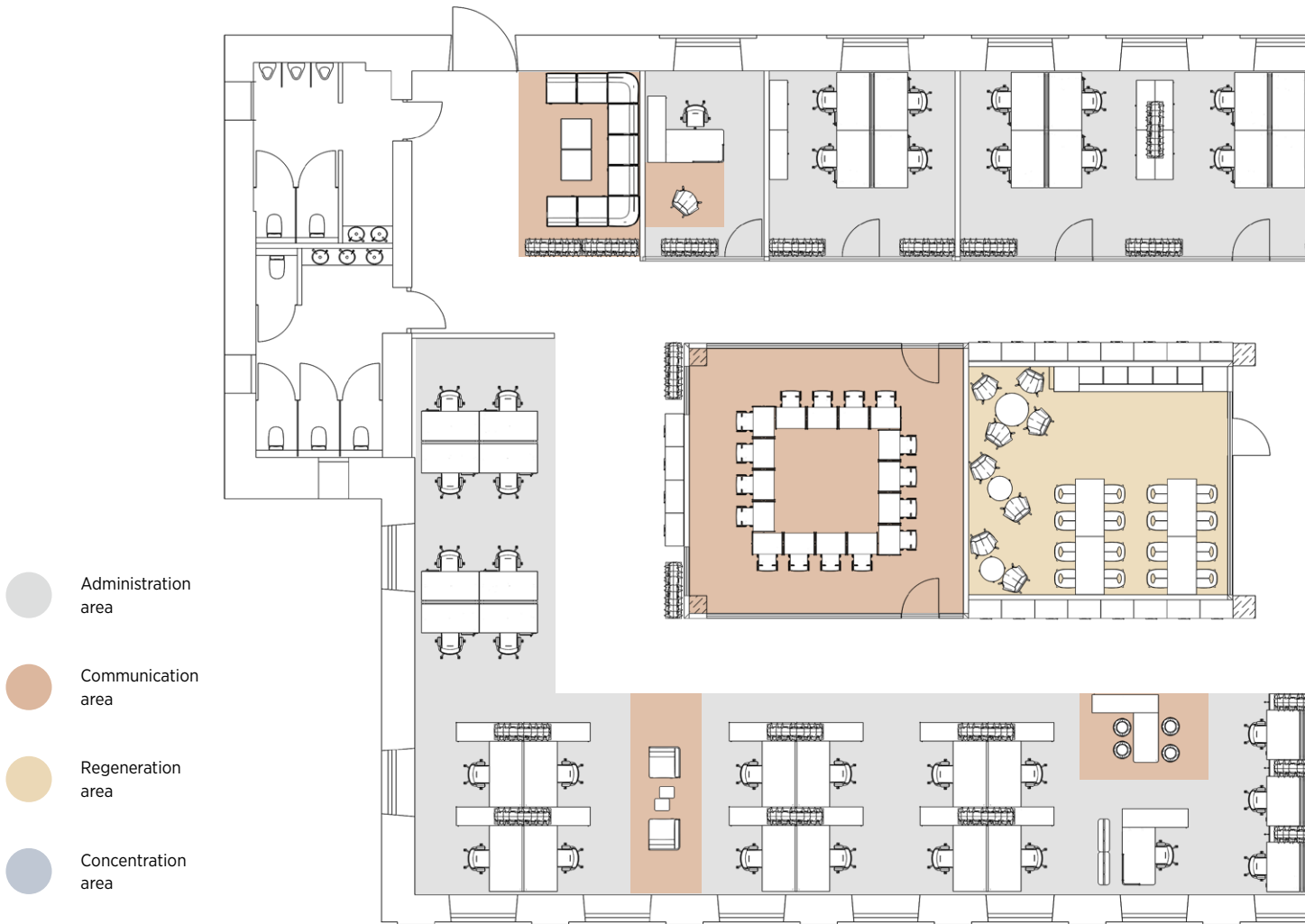
Shift work – introduce a morning and evening shift and include the time for disinfection before each shift, e.g. SHIFT 1: 5–6 am – disinfection, 6 am–2 pm – work, SHIFT 2: 2–3 pm disinfection, 3–11 pm – work.

Job rotation – divide your employees into two groups that will shift in the office, e.g. on odd or even days (make sure the office is disinfected between the groups). E.g. Monday and Tuesday – group 1, Wednesday – disinfection, Thursday and Friday – group 2, Saturday – disinfection. Or: week 1 – group 1, week 2 – group 2. Remember to disinfect the office on Saturdays!

Moving along one wall – routes marked on the corridors – e.g. walk only on the right.

One-way traffic – if architecturally possible, walk around the office along a circular route, e.g. clockwise.

Floor plan before changes



Area of the office:	914 m²
Number of available workstations:	82
Number of “lost” workstations as compared to the previous situation:	0
Number of available seats in meeting rooms:	36
Number of available open spaces for meetings:	39
Acceptable number of people in the kitchen:	26
Number of available seats in chillout zones:	11
Density [number of m ² of the office, including corridors and shared spaces, per employee]:	11 m²/pp

The view represents a **hybrid office model** (most often encountered in office buildings), which combines the functions of a zone office (based on open space and supporting zones such as: meeting rooms, chillout zones, focus rooms) and cellular office (where employees work in closed rooms). In this solution, every employee has their own desk as well as the possibility to use all of the supporting zones – informal and formal meeting rooms, focus rooms and spaces designed for regeneration (kitchen and chillout room).

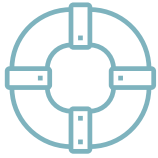


In the light of the new guidelines for a safe work environment, such an office will not be fully functional at the moment. In order to understand what steps need to be taken to adjust this space before the employees return, please have a look at the 2 scenarios presented below, both of which ensure safe distance between employees – minimum 1.5 m between workstations. We can quickly implement the newly imposed standards in two ways:

- 1 By excluding (locking out) those workstations that would reduce the minimum distance if used.
- 2 By rearranging workstations in order to guarantee safe distance of at least 1.5 m.

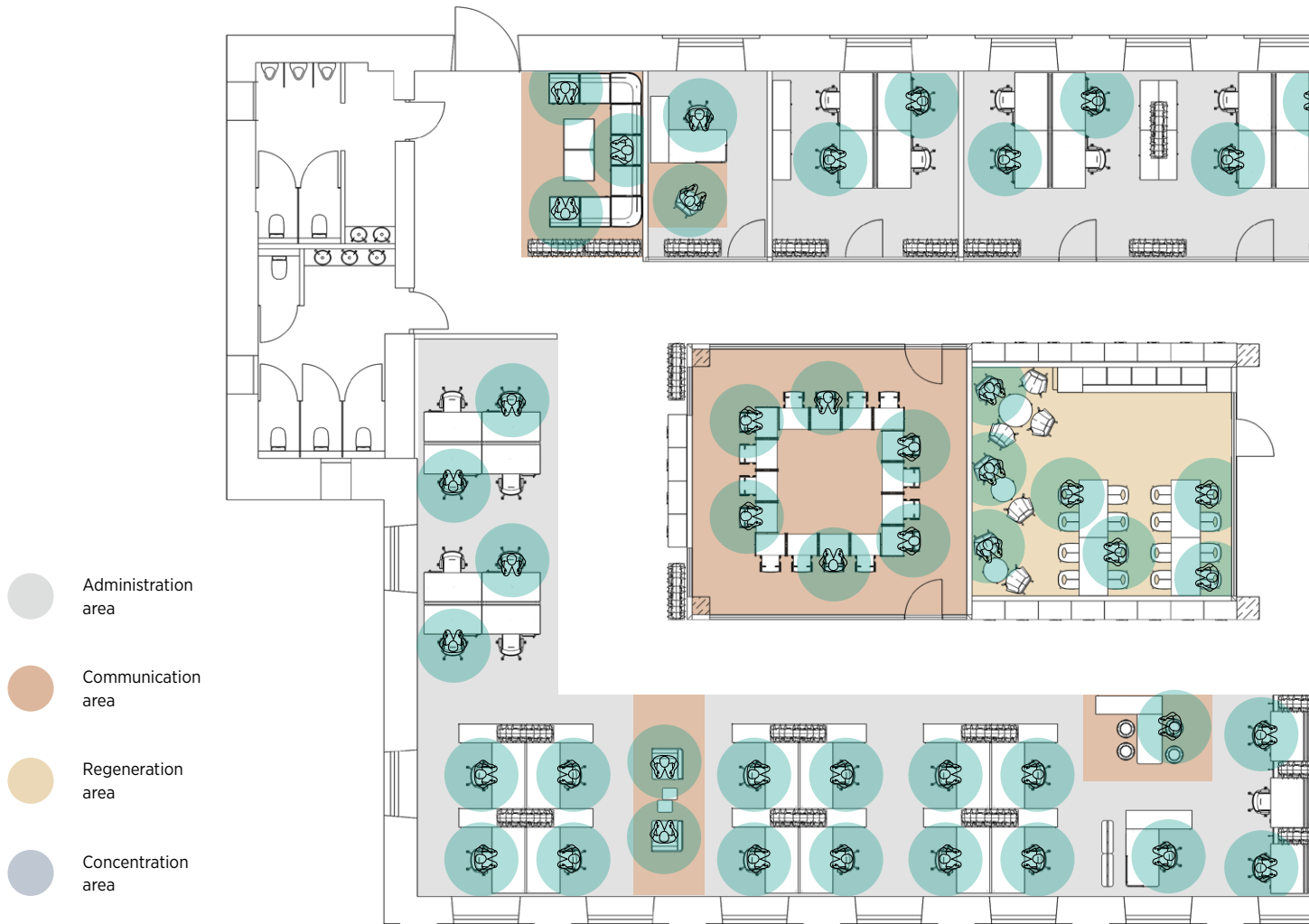
We would also like to present **the advantages and disadvantages** of both solutions. We hope this report will help you make the right decision and implement new rules within a reasonable time.

Of course, there is another way (where the whole office layout is to be reorganised, including walls and installations), but this would require considerable effort. Such a solution would be estimated individually for each office space – in this publication we will not address this possibility.



Sample solutions:

SCENARIO A: Locking out some of the workstations



Area of the office:	914 m²
Number of available workstations:	55
Number of “lost” workstations as compared to the previous situation:	27
Number of available seats in meeting rooms:	13
Number of available open spaces for meetings:	21
Acceptable number of people in the kitchen:	9
Number of available seats in chillout zones:	5
Density [number of m ² of the office, including corridors and shared spaces, per employee]:	17 m²/pp

The first suggested solution does not induce major interference with the office space. It involves locking out certain workstations so that each employee has their own guaranteed **2.5 m² safety zone around the desk**. When analysing individual office space, you need to indicate and clearly label those workstations that should not be occupied without compromising the safe distance – in other words, those workstations that are excluded from use. This also refers to seats or available spaces in meeting rooms or the kitchen.



On the other hand, such a solution means that the space would not be used effectively. In this variant, **each employee would enjoy a space 6 m² larger** than before. With the average European price for renting office space, which is **423 €/m²/year***, this would result in enormous expenses.

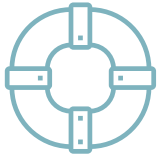
* *European Office Market. 2019 edition.*
BNP Paribas Real Estate. 2019.

ADVANTAGES

- + Quick and easy adjustment of the office space to match the current requirements
- + Low cost of the changes

DISADVANTAGES

- Excluding 27 desks will reduce the effective use of the office space
- Empty desks could make your employees feel insecure (visual reduction of mental comfort)
- This is a temporary and makeshift solution



Sample solutions:

SCENARIO B: New layout of workstations



Area of the office:	914 m²
Number of available workstations:	78
Number of “lost” workstations as compared to the previous situation:	4
Number of available seats in meeting rooms:	23
Number of available open spaces for meetings:	26
Acceptable number of people in the kitchen:	11
Number of available seats in chillout zones:	2
Density [number of m ² of the office, including corridors and shared spaces, per employee]:	12 m²/pp

The other solution we would like to present involves rearranging the workstations, so that there is a **safety zone** around each desk. Those workstations that cannot be fitted into the new arrangement without compromising safe distance would be removed. One of the chillout rooms was also rearranged to house more workstations. This is how we gain extra space that can be used for effective arrangement of desks or seats in the meeting rooms. It is worth noting that rearranging lockers so that they form an additional partition wall between workstations will not only guarantee safe distance but also bring about mental comfort due to the very fact of physical separation.

1

Separating sofas with plexiglass and panels, and making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special labels – belts

2

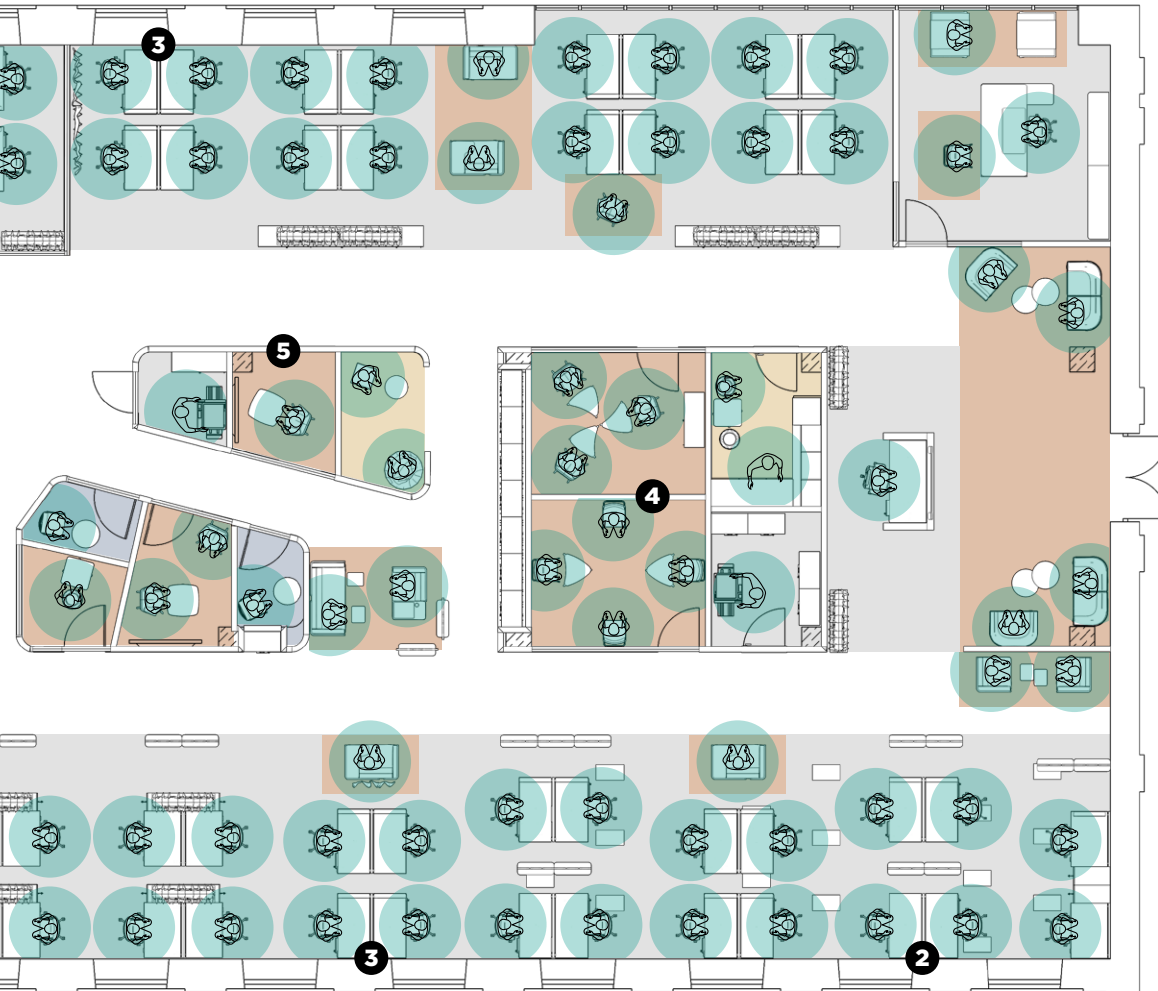
Moving workstations apart and separating them with lockers/plants/panels

3

Rearranging supporting zones as workstations

4

Replacing meeting room equipment and moving workstations

**5**

Refurbishing small meeting rooms as individual office rooms

6

Arrangement of chairs in the kitchen

7

Moving workstations in the class system

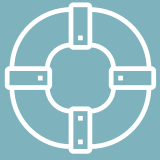
8

Replacing meeting space equipment and moving workstations

In the presented solution you only “lose” 4 workstations when compared to the original office layout. However, there are two major challenges:

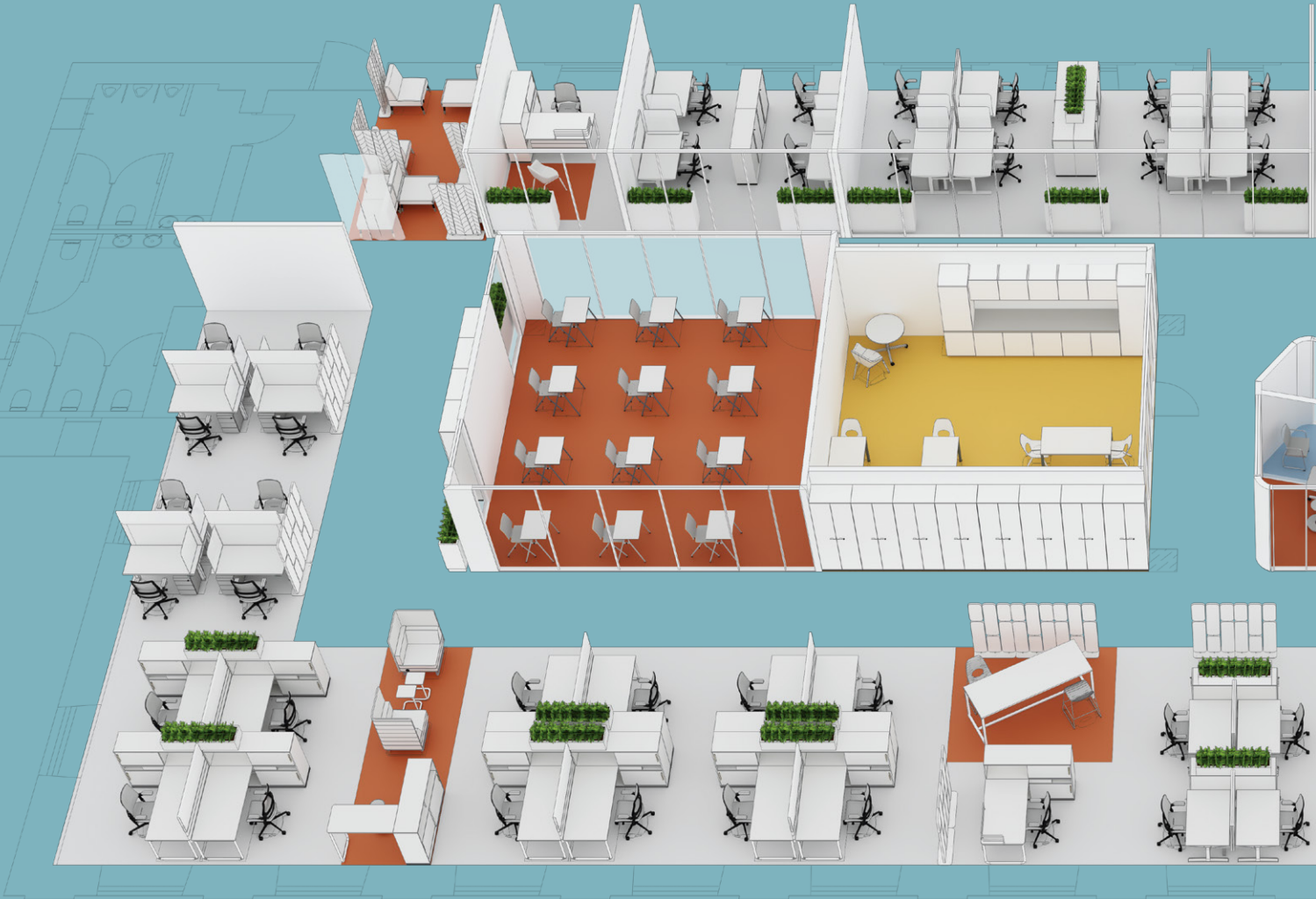
➤ What to do with the desks that need to be removed? You cannot exclude meeting rooms and use them as a storage space for office furniture, because each meeting room is valuable at the moment. You can either store these desks in a rented warehouse, which is an additional cost, or sell/donate them to the employees (e.g. to support their home office arrangement).

➤ Another thing is wiring – will every workstation have easy access to electricity after the rearrangement? Or will the office become a tangle of extension cords? You have to consider how to arrange the desks in an effective but also aesthetic way. Plus, you need to hide or mask the cables.

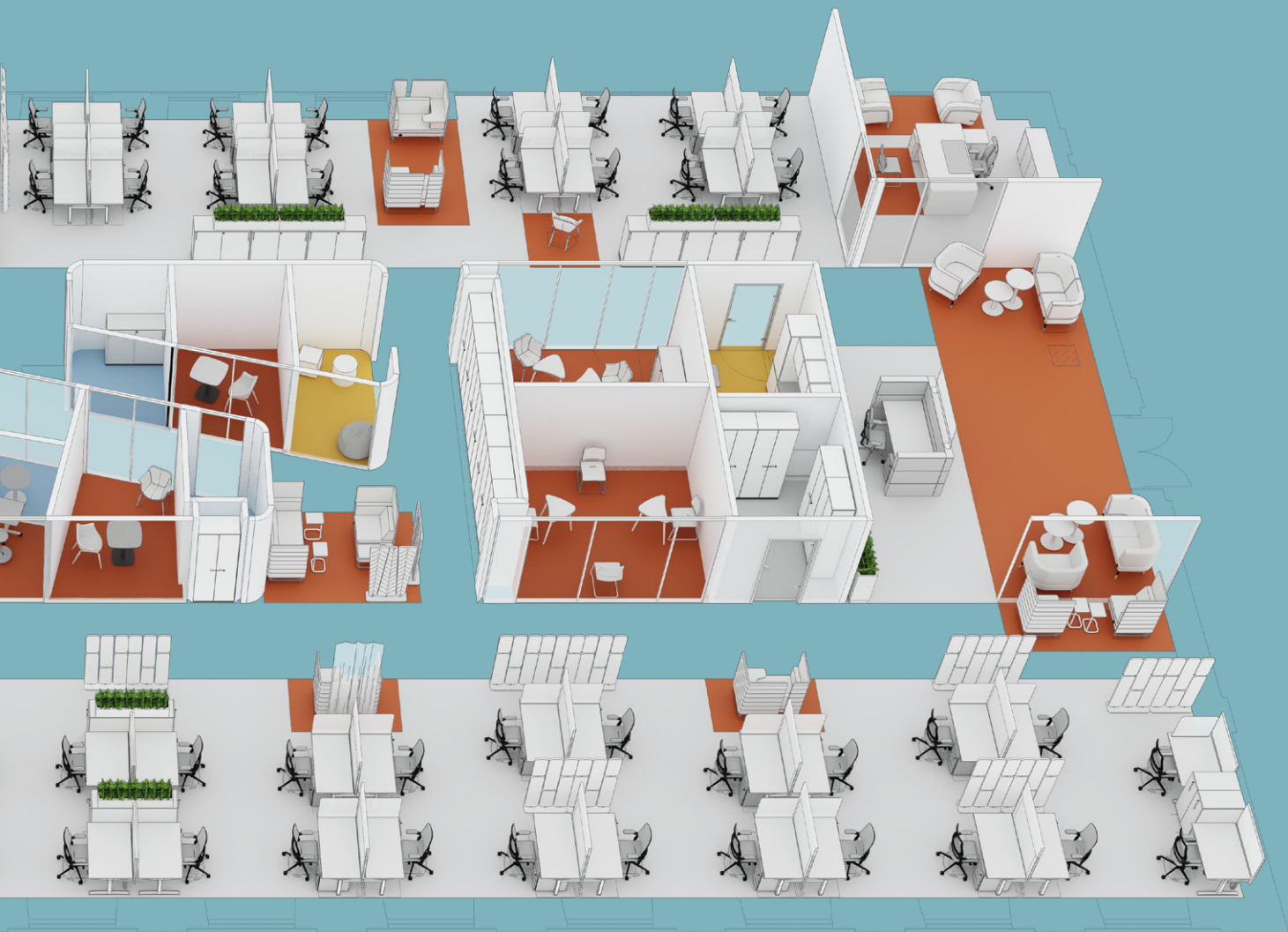


Sample solutions:

SCENARIO B: New layout of workstations



Despite certain challenges, this is the solution most often recommended by Nowy Styl. The key advantage of this rearrangement is the fact **that the resulting office layout is ready to welcome nearly all of the employees** and to offer access to supporting zones, whenever possible. This will make your employees feel secure and safe (I know where my desk is, I can always go back), and minimise the resistance and reluctance related to going back to a shared space. Besides, this is also visually more appealing and more of a permanent nature rather than a temporary solution. It is also an important argument in the event of recurring instances of pandemic.

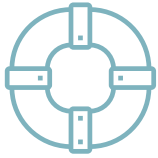


ADVANTAGES

- ⊕ Effective use of the office area – no space is “lost”
- ⊕ No empty desks
- ⊕ Flexibility
- ⊕ Long-term solution

DISADVANTAGES

- ⊖ Need to store, sell or donate extra/leftover equipment
 - ⊖ Risk related to excess uncovered cables
 - ⊖ Excluding 4 desks will reduce the effective use of the office space
 - ⊖ Need to purchase better furniture solutions for meeting rooms
-



Sample solutions:

Summary

	FLOOR PLAN BEFORE CHANGES
Area of the office:	914 m²
Number of available workstations:	82
Number of "lost" workstations as compared to the previous situation:	0
Number of available seats in meeting rooms:	36
Number of remaining available meeting places:	39
Acceptable number of people in the kitchen:	26
Number of available seats in chillout zones:	11
Density [number of m ² of the office, including corridors and shared spaces, per employee]:	11 m²/pp

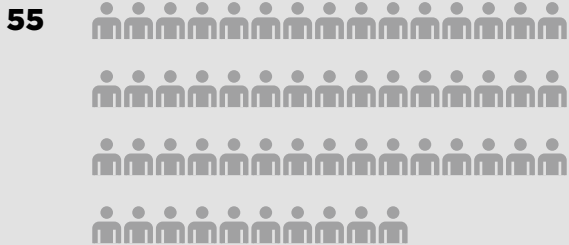
Legend:

available seats

"lost" seats

SCENARIO A: Locking out some of the workstations

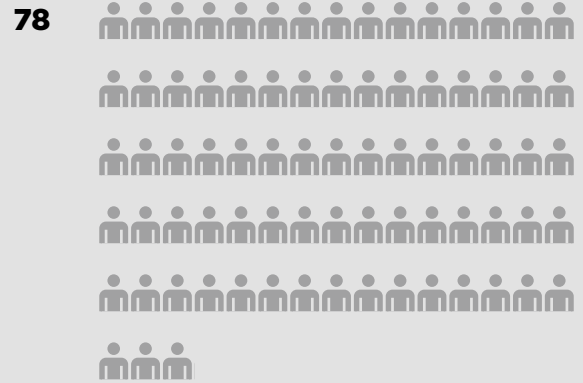
914 m²



17 m²/pp

SCENARIO B: New layout of workstations

914 m²

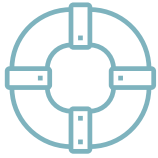


12 m²/pp



Advice

The ultimate layout of the office depends on multiple factors. Before you rearrange your office, it's good to get together and think about the company's priorities. What is the most important thing for you? Do you want to make your office a comfortable work environment for all employees, or would you rather focus on making it a safe space for meetings? Such analysis will facilitate numerous decisions and sometimes you may come across ready solutions to be implemented at a further stage.

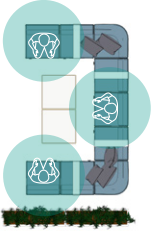


Sample solutions:

Two scenarios

Example

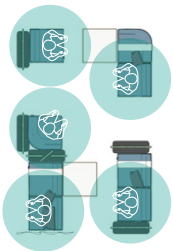
1



Communication area:

SCENARIO A

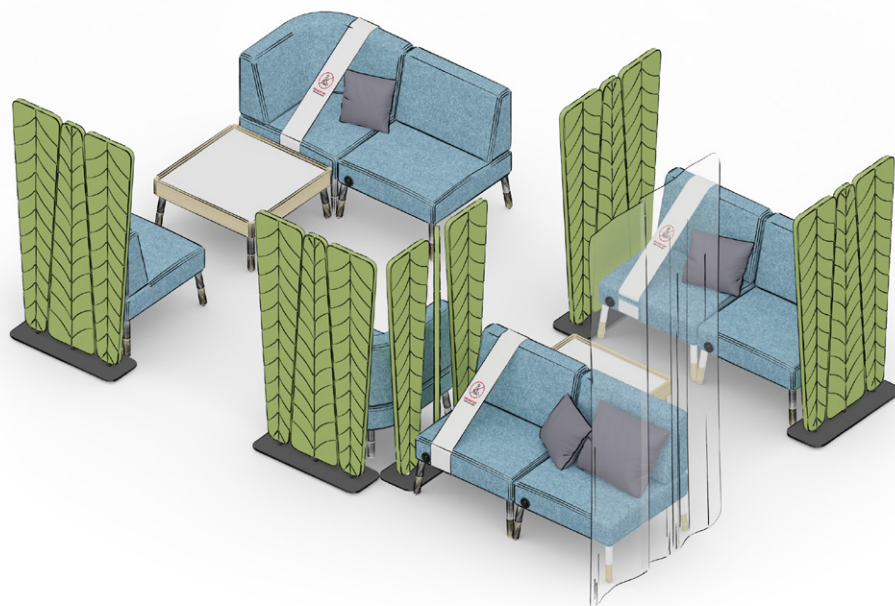
Making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special labels – belts.

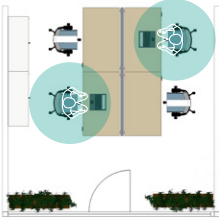


Communication area:

SCENARIO B

Rearranging the sofas so that it's impossible to sit face to face with other people. Additionally, separating sofas with plexiglass and other panels and locking out some of the seats with special labels – belts.

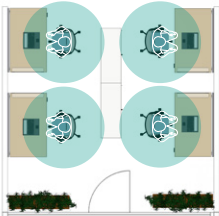
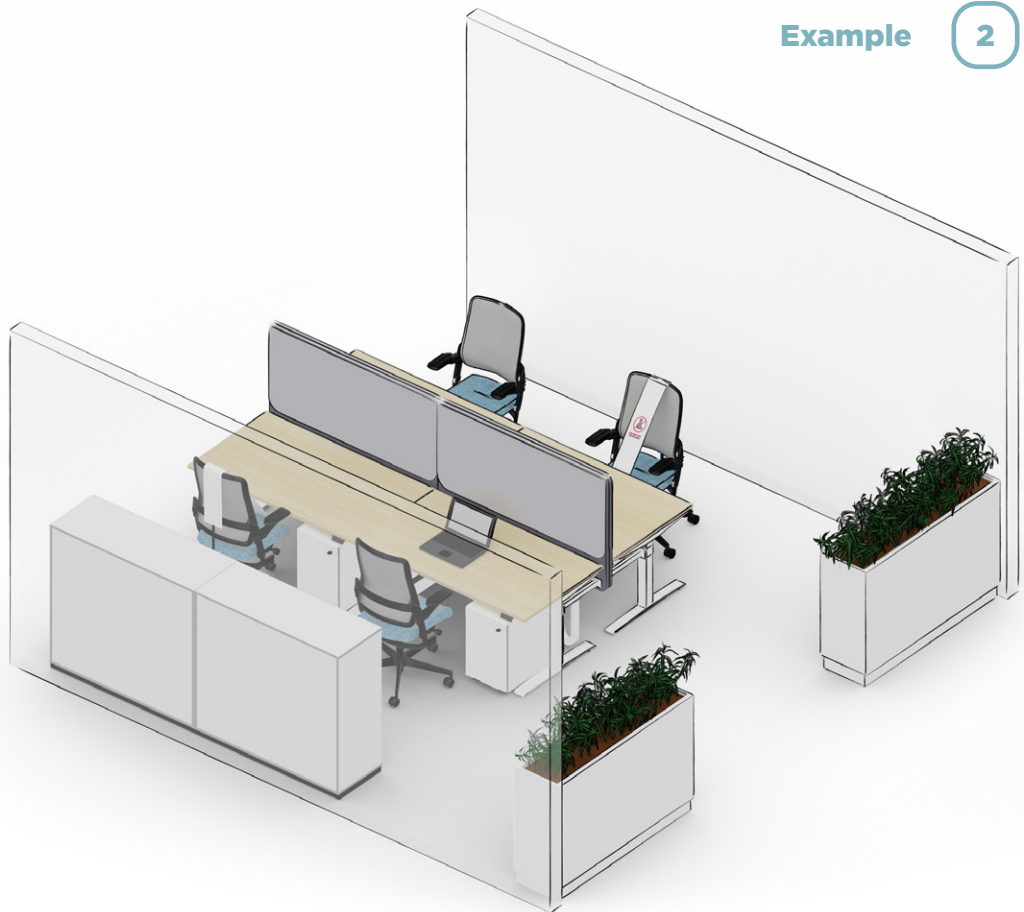




Administration area:

SCENARIO A

Providing plexiglass covers for the panels and locking out some of the workstations with special labels - belts.

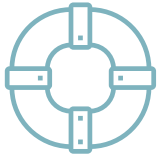


Administration area:

SCENARIO B

Moving workstations apart and placing them at the walls - so that employees do not face one another. Additionally, using lockers to separate the workstations. Providing plexiglass covers for desk panels and side panels.



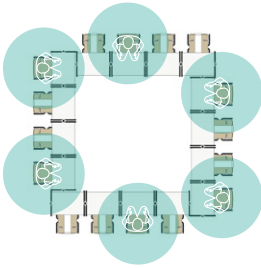


Sample solutions:

Two scenarios

Example

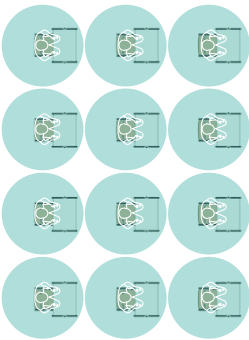
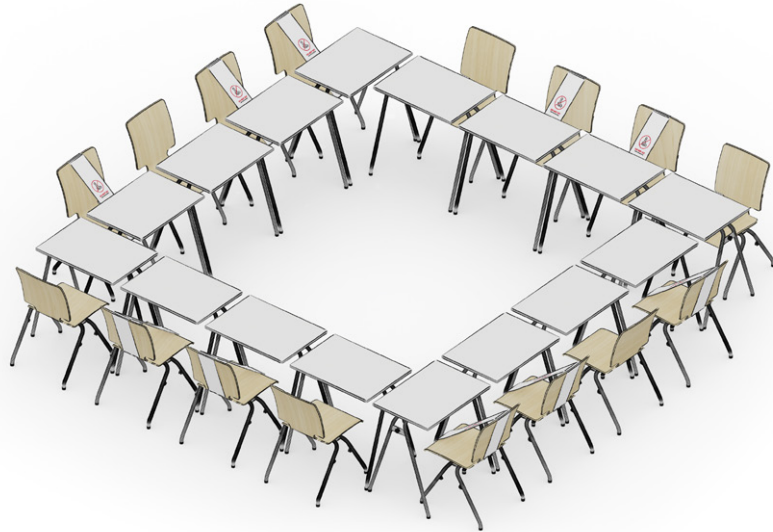
3



Communication area:

SCENARIO A

Making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special labels – belts.

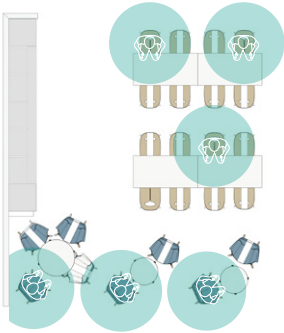


Communication area:

SCENARIO B

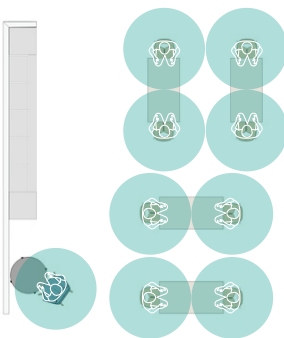
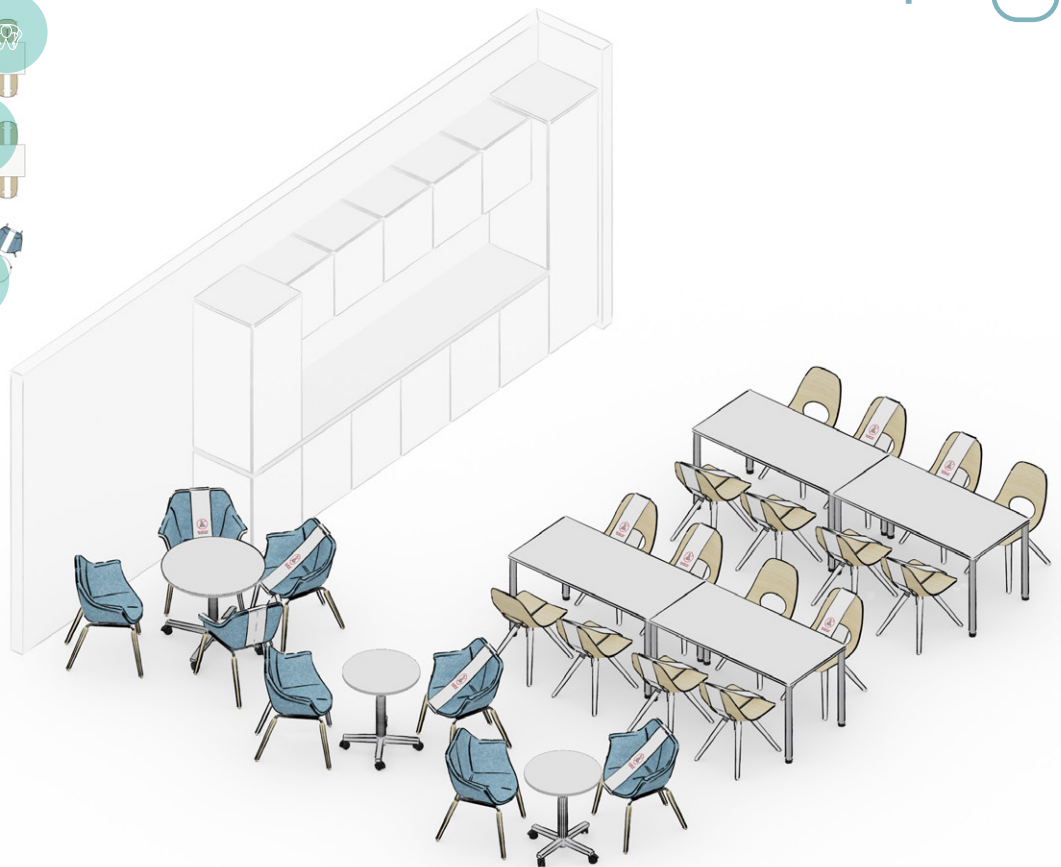
Moving seats apart.





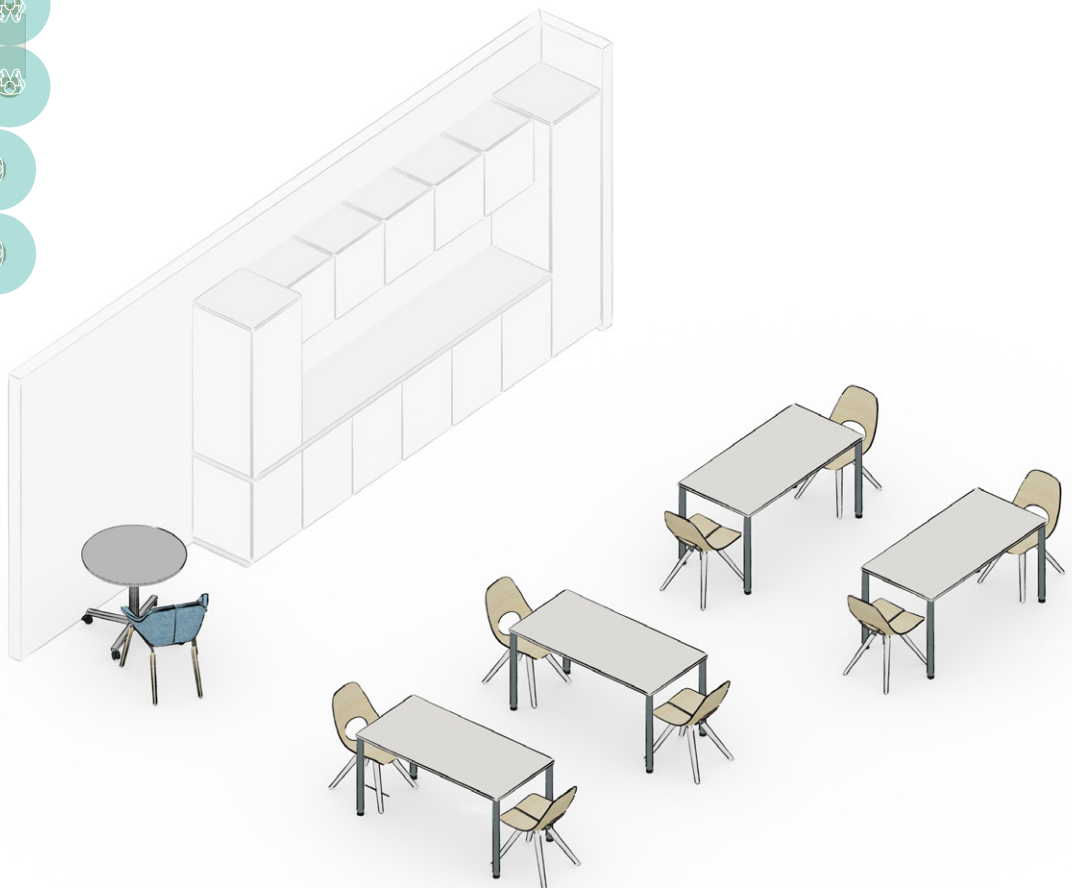
Regeneration area:
SCENARIO A

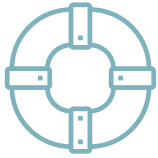
Making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special labels - belts.



Regeneration area:
SCENARIO B

Moving seats apart.





Sample solutions:

Two scenarios

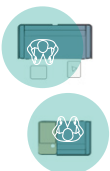
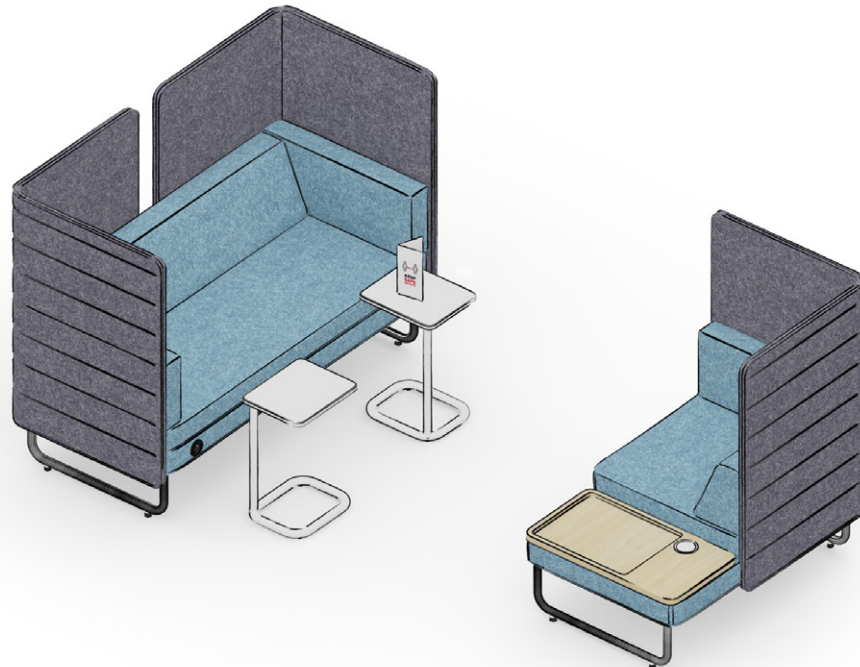
Example

5



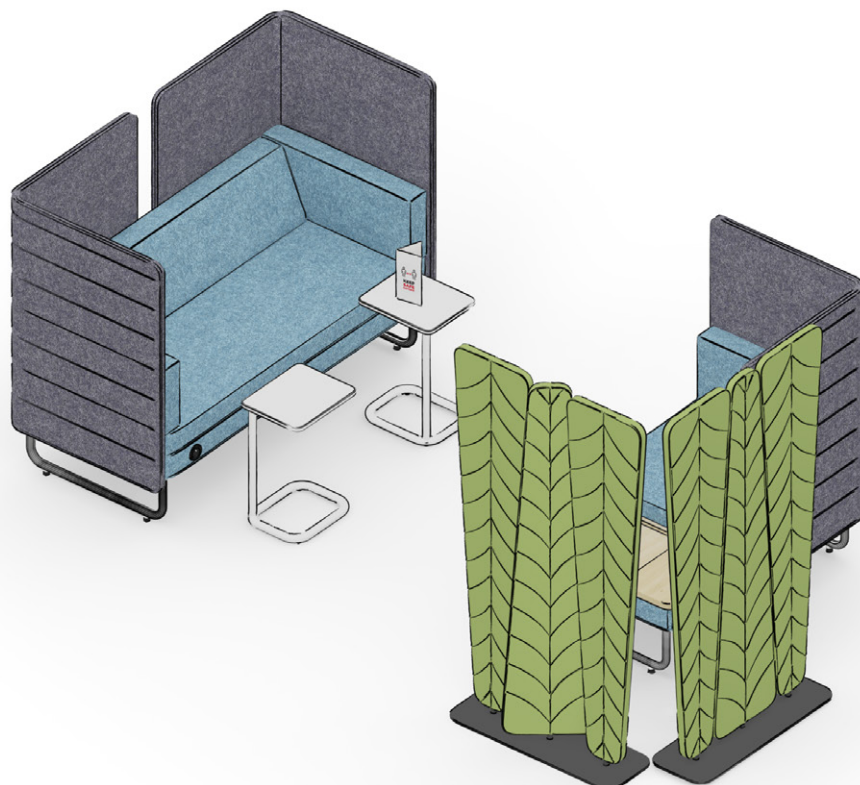
Communication area: SCENARIO A

Making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special stands.



Communication area: SCENARIO B

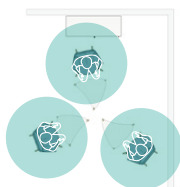
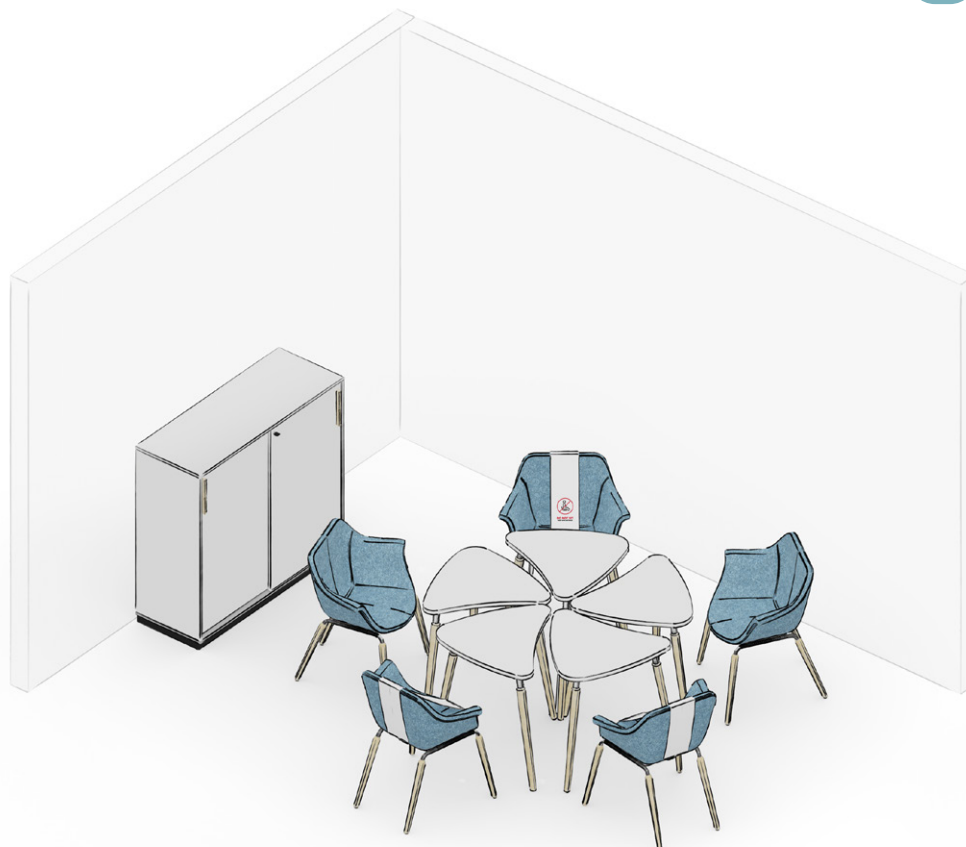
Making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special stands and providing panels as additional partition walls between the sofas.





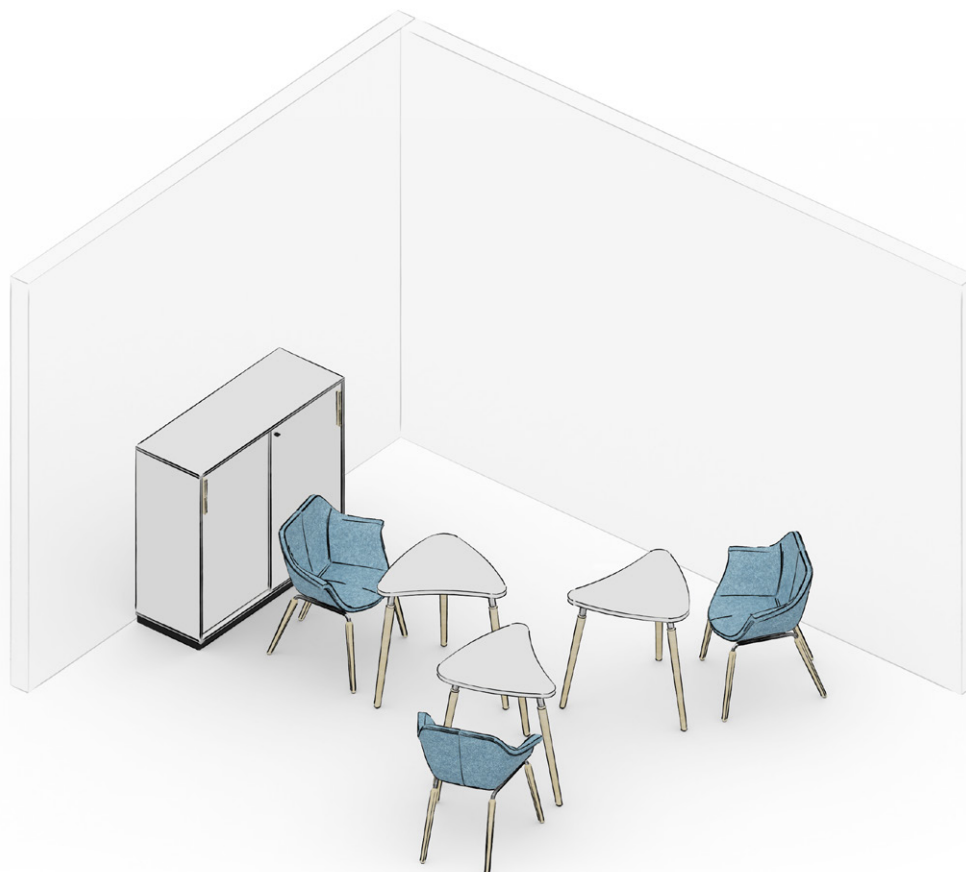
Communication area:
SCENARIO A

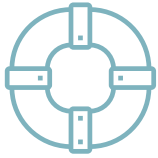
Making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special labels – belts.



Communication area:
SCENARIO B

Moving seats apart.



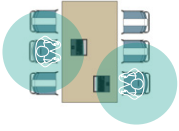


Sample solutions:

Two scenarios

Example

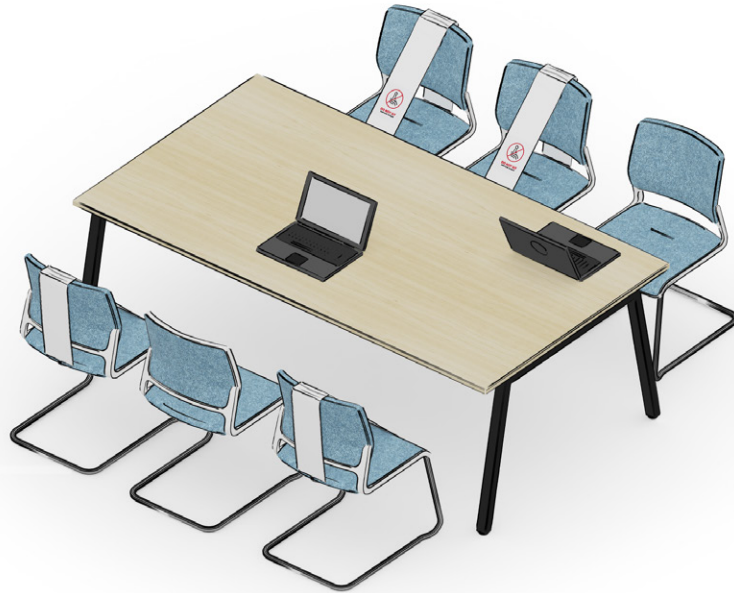
7



Communication area:

SCENARIO A

Making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special labels - belts.



Communication area:

SCENARIO B

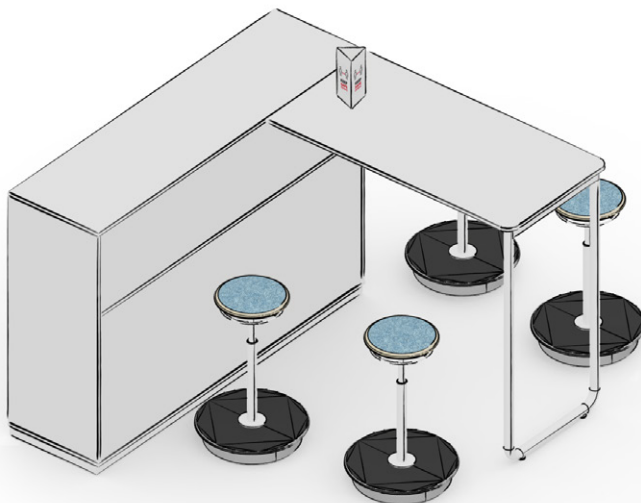
Replacing office equipment with products that will help you separate the seats and move them apart.





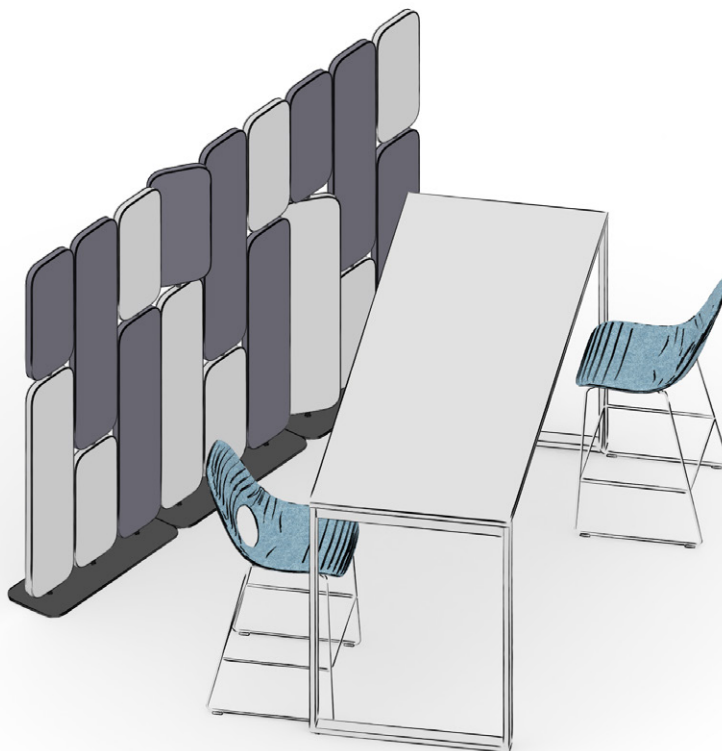
Communication area:
SCENARIO A

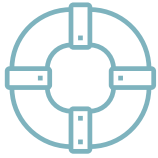
Making some of the seats unavailable with the use of special stands.



Communication area:
SCENARIO B

Replacing office equipment with products that will help you separate the seats and move them apart. Additional separation of the meeting space from the communication zone with the use of special panels.



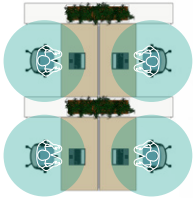


Sample solutions:

Two scenarios

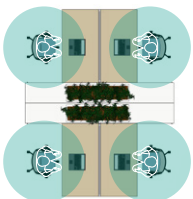
Example

9



Administration area: **SCENARIO A**

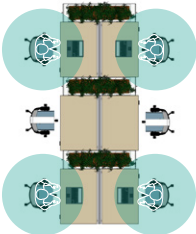
Providing tall plexiglass covers for the panels between workstations.



Administration area: **SCENARIO B**

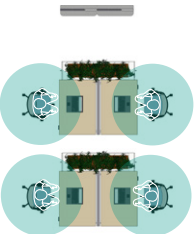
Providing tall plexiglass covers for panels between the workstations. Lockers used as partition walls.





Administration area:
SCENARIO A

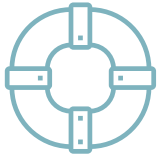
Providing plexiglass covers for the panels between workstations and locking out some of the workstations with special labels - belts.



Administration area:
SCENARIO B

Removing some of the workstations, moving the others apart and providing plexiglass covers for the panels. Additional separation of the workstations from the communication zone with the use of special panels.



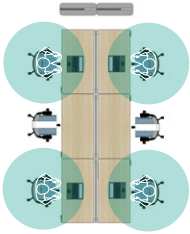


Sample solutions:

Two scenarios

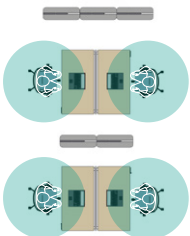
Example

11



Administration area: SCENARIO A

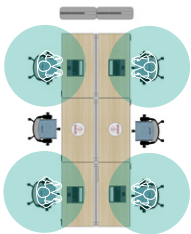
Providing tall plexiglass covers for the panels between workstations and locking out some of the workstations with special labels – belts.



Administration area: SCENARIO B

Removing some of the workstations, moving the others apart and providing plexiglass covers for the panels.

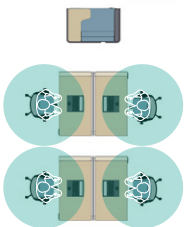




Administration area:

SCENARIO A

Providing tall plexiglass covers for the panels between workstations and locking out some of the workstations with special labels – stickers.

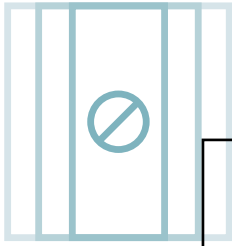


Administration area:

SCENARIO B

Removing some of the workstations, moving the others apart and providing plexiglass covers for the panels and side panels. Extra space will hold one more sofa.





#BeClear

Visual communication

Each person responsible for the office must face numerous challenges. How many people can be in the kitchen or a meeting room at the same time? How to distribute sanitising stations? How many people can be in the whole office? These are not easy questions, that's why a group of our workplace specialists will help you address any doubts that may arise. Regardless of the final decision, all the solutions need to be properly implemented. Clear labelling will definitely help the employees observe all the new rules.



What are we afraid of? What are we concerned about?*

- *I'm afraid to eat in the office after everybody has come back to work. There are too many of us and somebody may have touched something that has not been sanitized. Where can I actually sit down and where is it forbidden?*
- *Where do I find all the disinfectants to sanitise hands or furniture? Will there be enough of them? And how do I use them?*
- *What about the printer and photocopying machine? Many people use these devices.*

Although now it's easy to remember all of the new rules mandatory in this "new reality", with time we may get used to the situation. And then we will probably pay less attention to detail. Still, following the rules is crucial if we want to create a safe office, where everybody can work for an extended period of time. Clear and understandable visual communication will help us conform to the rules.

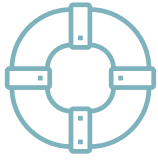
* Based on own study – April 2020



Recommendations:

- 1 Provide visible and clear labelling for:
 - safety zone around each workstation, i.e. the zone that shows the desired distance between employees;
 - sanitisation points;
 - available/unavailable seats in meeting room, kitchen, reception desk etc.;
 - safe distance in the queue to the bathroom, coffee machine, reception desk, canteen etc.;
 - places in the lift where you should stand so as not to be too close to other people;
 - safe places where you can wait to use the printer/photocopier.
- 2 Locate infographics with mandatory rules in frequently visited places.
- 3 Use pictures to communicate the maximum number of people (each person must have an area of 2.5 m² only to themselves) in a closed area (meeting room).
- 4 Locate a floor plan of the office with highlighted changes in a visible place.





Sample solutions:

- ▶ stickers and covers put on places that are not to be used (locked out);
- ▶ stickers on kitchen tops to remind people to disinfect the equipment before and after use;
- ▶ labelling individual workstations/zones;
- ▶ labelling placed on the doors to the meeting rooms and other shared areas – maximum number of people in the specific room;
- ▶ canteen – floorsticks showing the required distance between people in the queue;
- ▶ people counter in the kitchen.



Click here and see our “Safety Solutions”

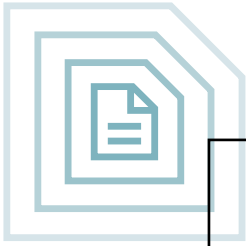


Advice

Labelling in the office is the new wayfinding, which is intended to ensure safety and is here to stay. That's why it's recommended to opt for such solutions that will be visually aligned to the image of our office and company. The labelling should be clear and transparent. It is also a good idea to train the employees and show them what changes have been introduced. One more thing you could do is record an instructional video and share it with all employees.



#BeOrganised



New workplace etiquette

What we want is to return to the office preferably as we know it from before the COVID-19 pandemic. We already know a lot has to change. New rules and safety procedures need to be introduced. But in order for the office to become a place of meetings and creative exchange once again, we have to be sure the employees are familiar with them and aware that these have been properly developed and implemented. A new office etiquette is then a crucial element of our puzzle. It was like that even before the pandemic – we have always encouraged our clients to come up with clear and transparent workplace rules.



What are we afraid of? What are we concerned about?*

- *Do I have to sit in a mask while I'm at work? Will my employer provide me with protective gear? Do I have to wear protective gear everywhere?*
- *I'm concerned about group responsibility – not everybody follows rules and I don't feel strong enough to admonish somebody with a strong personality or holding a higher position in the company.*
- *The rules about the proportion of working from the office and from home are unclear.*
- *I'm afraid that while I am working from home I won't be treated as an equal team member and my participation in a meeting/project will be disregarded.*

Our concerns and fears increase when we don't have clear and generally mandatory rules and norms. Ordering and clarifying the rules makes it easier for us to cope with the dynamic, or even chaotic, situation of pandemic. When employees know what the guidelines are, how to behave and what rules to follow, they feel safer and more secure. What is more, they can do their job much more effectively. Sometimes it doesn't take much to implement.

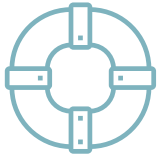
* Based on own study – April 2020



Recommendations:

- 1 Remember to prepare clear rules as regards working in a “new” office. Consider various needs and expectations (👉 see also: the rules for working out of office – p. 19).
- 2 Ensure good collaboration with the managers as regards promoting new rules and attitudes upon coming back to the office, so that you can all be safe – remember, you set an example for others to follow!
- 3 Assign people responsible for the “Welcome back... to the office!” project, who will be the spokespeople/ambassadors of the change. They will help you implement new recommendations, clarify the employees’ doubts and provide information on the project.
- 4 Analyse and prepare the organisation of work after you return to the office. Make sure you have sufficient workstations for everybody, remembering about the required safe distance of 1.5 m. If you can’t guarantee the required distance, introduce job rotation (shift work or appropriate management of home office policy).
- 5 In dispersed teams, make sure all the employees have the same working conditions (e.g. during the meetings everybody has equal rights to take the floor), ensure appropriate support and ergonomic workstations.
- 6 Issue clear recommendations on how to behave when somebody has symptoms of an illness.





Sample solutions:

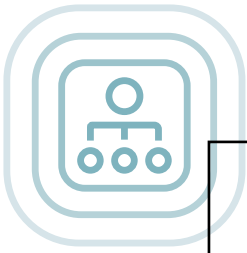
- ▶ air the rooms several times a day;
- ▶ do not switch off air conditioning in the rooms;
- ▶ in regeneration zones (kitchen, chillout room, canteen) define specific spaces to boost mental comfort (positive talks zone), where it's forbidden to talk about the pandemic;
- ▶ provide video call equipment for the meeting rooms;
- ▶ shift work – between the shifts make sure to sanitise shared areas;
- ▶ assign separate rooms for meetings with external clients; other rooms would be intended only for the employees;
- ▶ mandatory workstation disinfection before commencing work (sanitising the desk, armrests, other equipment – laptop, keyboard, mouse, phone) to be performed by each user;
- ▶ sanitising a new workstation after changing zones (meetings room, focus room, another desk);
- ▶ disinfecting the table top and armrests – this is the responsibility of the host before commencing the meeting;
- ▶ receiving guests:
 - preparing a guidebook for guests – how to move around the office, what the rules are (sending an e-mail before the meeting or providing a written set of rules to be read and signed at the reception desk);
 - disinfecting IDs/ shared access cards;
 - simple questionnaire to learn about the health of your guests and journeys they made;
 - masks for guests (equipment intended for ozone treatment).



Advice

The rules in your company will depend on numerous factors. Whatever solutions you pick, when defining the rules, remember to consider the perspective of each employee – everyday challenges, working style and duties related to each position. Make sure you involve your employees in the process – their ideas may prove crucial for your organisation. Finally, ensure all of the arrangements are generally accessible and known to all the office users.





#BeSupportive

Supportive management

The need to maintain proper distance between individual workstations may be a challenge – some workstations may have to be locked out and excluded from use. In this situation it might turn out that there is not enough space in the office for all employees. Then it is necessary to manage work organisation, define certain rules to be followed and prepare employees for the new reality. If you explain the reasoning behind such decisions and present the next steps, you will definitely gain extra recognition among your employees. This is how you build confidence, trust and a sense of security among your staff.



What are we afraid of? What are we concerned about?*

- *I am worried about the current situation of our company – everybody around me has problems with work and employment. Will I keep my job? Do I have a reason to worry?*
- *I'm afraid of returning to the office without a clear reason for it (e.g. there are no meetings).*
- *I'm afraid everybody will stick to the rules only at the beginning and then they will all go back to the old routine.*
- *The information includes recommendations rather than instructions: I don't know what to do. Not everybody follows these rules or they interpret them differently.*
- *I'm afraid that after this break we will no longer be a single group. We will no longer be so in tune with one another and the communication at work may get worse.*

In difficult situations it is important to communicate all the information clearly to your employees. Constant information chaos is not a good thing. The employees will appreciate individual approach when they are informed of the actual situation, provided with specific details and if somebody clarifies their doubts. Ambiguity and vagueness boost the feeling of fear, and then it is really difficult to organise effective and satisfying work.

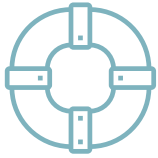
* Based on own study – April 2020



Recommendations:

- 1** If possible, talk to each of the team members individually. Ask them how they feel about going back to the office. If there are any concerns or doubts, try to ask where they stem from. Try to agree on solutions. Explain to your employees why the company has decided to bring them back to the office.
- 2** Present safety rules in a clear and transparent way. Explain the reasoning behind the rules. Check whether the employees understand the rules. Ask whether they have any doubts. If so, clarify them.
- 3** Remember: it's not enough to announce the standards. You still have to implement them. Make sure your employees follow the safety rules. Provide feedback on a current basis.
- 4** Set an example as a manager! Be the model for your employees – show them how to return to the office safely. As a leader, you need to be motivated yourself. Do not hesitate to ask your colleagues for help, both as regards substantive issues and any doubts or fears.
- 5** Remember about integration – take steps to bring the group closer together, especially if your team is totally or partially dispersed. Numerous changes imposed by the “new reality” may impact the integrity of the team.





Sample solutions:

- online weekly team meetings if the team is dispersed – such meetings do not have to be 100% formal;
- guidelines for the employees: “How to work from home?” focused on self-organisation of the work, IT and equipment;
- clear Home Office rules shared with the team by the manager;
- video meetings when the manager answers any doubts or a generally available FAQ list;
- one person assigned to send messages to all employees in order to ensure consistency.



Advice

Effective management is crucial in times of fear and uncertainty. Remember, it's a time when any shortcomings will be particularly conspicuous. Thanks to generally mandatory clear guidelines you will be able to coordinate the work of your team effectively and maintain business continuity. In order for managers to be able to support their teams effectively, decision makers need to engage in transparent actions and share clear information. Specific and reliable information from the superiors is necessary if you want to introduce changes among the staff.





#BeEquipped

Preventive products

Office equipment has always been an important aspect. Should office space be more representative, functional or trendy? In times of epidemic uncertainty office equipment is increasingly significant. We start to notice such aspects as easy cleaning or the possibility to rearrange products, which makes functioning easier in the times of dynamic changes and considering the need to adjust the space to new norms. Antibacterial materials are becoming a priority. They help you keep the office clean and safe.



What are we afraid of? What are we concerned about?*

- *I'm afraid that some furniture cannot be properly sanitised, e.g. the acoustic panel between the desks.*
- *I'm afraid somebody working next to me will start coughing.*
- *I'm afraid of having to open the doors frequently - not all handles can be opened with an elbow!*

The last element of our puzzle is a clear reference to the first one, thus making a complete picture. It is vital to guarantee hygienic conditions, but relying on cleaning service may not be enough. In order to facilitate the cleaning and disinfection process, we should make sure that our surfaces are made of top-quality materials, which will support our health and safety.

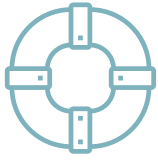
* based on own study - April 2020



Recommendations:

- 1 Make sure your office includes products that are:
 - made of antibacterial materials;
 - easy to clean.
- 2 Provide additional divider panels between:
 - the employees' desks, especially when people are facing one another;
 - desks and communication routes;
 - seats in the reception area.
- 3 Make sure people can move around the office without touching anything.





Sample solutions:

- ▶ plexiglass panels near the desks/reception desk;
- ▶ standalone plexiglass walls;
- ▶ belts and stickers to label locked out spaces;
- ▶ plexiglass caps on upholstered panels;
- ▶ antibacterial coating on table tops;
- ▶ upholstery that is easy to clean;
- ▶ contactless light switches, toilet flushes, soap, liquid dispensers;

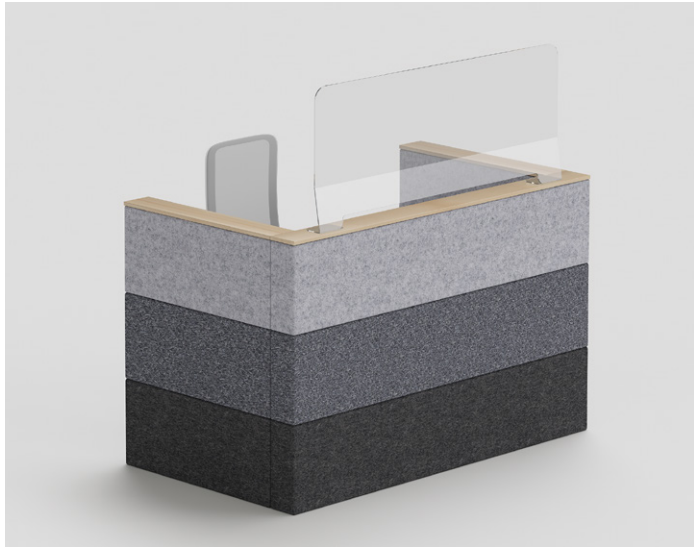


[Click here and see our “Safety Solutions”](#)



Advice

Choosing proper materials can significantly improve workplace safety. In the new reality you need to focus on different aspects of interior design than previously. Make sure the surfaces are easy to clean.



We are here for you!

External consultants' support

So far we have helped arrange thousands of offices around the world. Every day our experts in numerous fields – from designers and constructors developing comfortable, convenient products that will protect your health, to workplace specialists who research working conditions and employee satisfaction – talk to clients, listen to their needs and then analyse them. This is how we chose the best solutions and then developed comprehensive projects to support our clients in the process of office change management. At the end of such projects, we observed together with our clients how a new office increases the employees' comfort and satisfaction, thus releasing their potential.

We know that the current situation also involves new challenges. We want to use our extensive international experience gained in multiple sectors to offer the best support we can to our clients. That's why we try to anticipate their expectations and offer our help in the following areas:

➤ safety audit

we will help you plan and effectively implement your own "Welcome back... to the office!" programme; we will show you step by step what measures need to be taken in order to address the needs of all stakeholders;

➤ distance planning

our architects will prepare an office rearrangement design, adjusting our recommendations to your individual circumstances, so as to create a safe and ergonomic office for your employees;

➤ safety solutions

we offer product advice related to improving workplace safety and hygiene: extra hygienic products and we have launched a new line called **Safety solutions**.



20

members
of Workspace
Research
& Consulting
Department



450

space planning
projects a year



5800

surveyed
employees



350

interviews
with managers



Over

150

hours of
workshops



4500

questionnaire
forms
completed
by employees



140

substantive
publications



Over

52

hours of public
speaking



10000

employees
working
in new offices





Feel free to contact us

Our commercial team is here for you. We will happily present the latest solutions, share our knowledge and answer any questions. If needed, we invite specialists from other fields, who will help you arrange your new work environment.

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