COVID-19

Returning to the Workplace Employee Program

Methods to keep your employees safe, engaged, and productive.

Introduction

The global COVID-19 pandemic has changed the world. Our own understanding of its implications continues to change based on emerging information about the virus and government guidelines.

However, we can still devise flexible strategies to keep employees safe, engaged, and productive as they return to the workplace.

At TPG Architecture, our Strategy studio has identified three methods that every organization should consider in their plans to return to the workplace: employee programs, tools, and protocols.

Programs

By leveraging programs, organizations can build narratives and systems that holistically respond to employee concerns and workplace changes.

Tools

Organizations can optimize their existing workplace layouts and virtual workflows through tools to aid in employee safety and communication.

Protocols

Our worldwide efforts in flattening the curve are a product of protocols, intended to keep virus transmission rates as low as possible. Workplace protocols help reinforce behaviors that balance safety with daily operations.

Programs

Programs

Workplace Transition

Returning to the workplace is an opportunity for organizations to own the narrative and engage employees to adopt new behaviors and ways of working.

A Workplace Transition program is a holistic way to re-communicate an organization's vision for its future during and after COVID-19. Arming employees with information about what to expect for the first few months, new arrival & departure protocols, and government guidelines will help reduce anxieties over returning to the workplace.

Organizations should also consider equipping its employees with functional, branded, and thoughtful items to ease the transition into the workplace such as personal protective equipment (PPE) and personal utensils & mugs.

Programs

Remote Working

Remote working is currently a core mechanism of how organizations can successfully operate during COVID-19's office lockdown.

While this mechanism may have been born out of necessity for certain organizations, all organizations should consider making remote work a standard way of working for all of its teams even as employees begin returning to the workplace.

The short-term benefit is supporting employees in choosing to work remotely in case they feel more safe or unwell with symptoms at home. The long-term benefit is future proofing your organization in case new pandemics emerge and affect business continuity.

Programs

Flexible Hours & PTO

Flexible hours will become an important mechanism to allow your employees to work in staggered shifts due to reduced office occupancy targets, changes to transportation routes, or revised school schedules.

Finally, given that COVID-19 is first and foremost, a health crisis, adopting a more flexible PTO and sick day program is a compassionate response to employees who are more concerned with losing time to being sick than with taking the time to get better and keep the overall work community more secure and healthy.

Programs

Safety & Wellness

Consider adoping a wellness program that emphasizes employee safety and physical & mental wellness to ensure employees have the resources to make better decisions about their health in this uncertain time.

A holistic program that not only offers a wide array of services but also communicates your organization's commitment to employee safety & wellness will be a sturdy foundation for responding well to COVID-19.
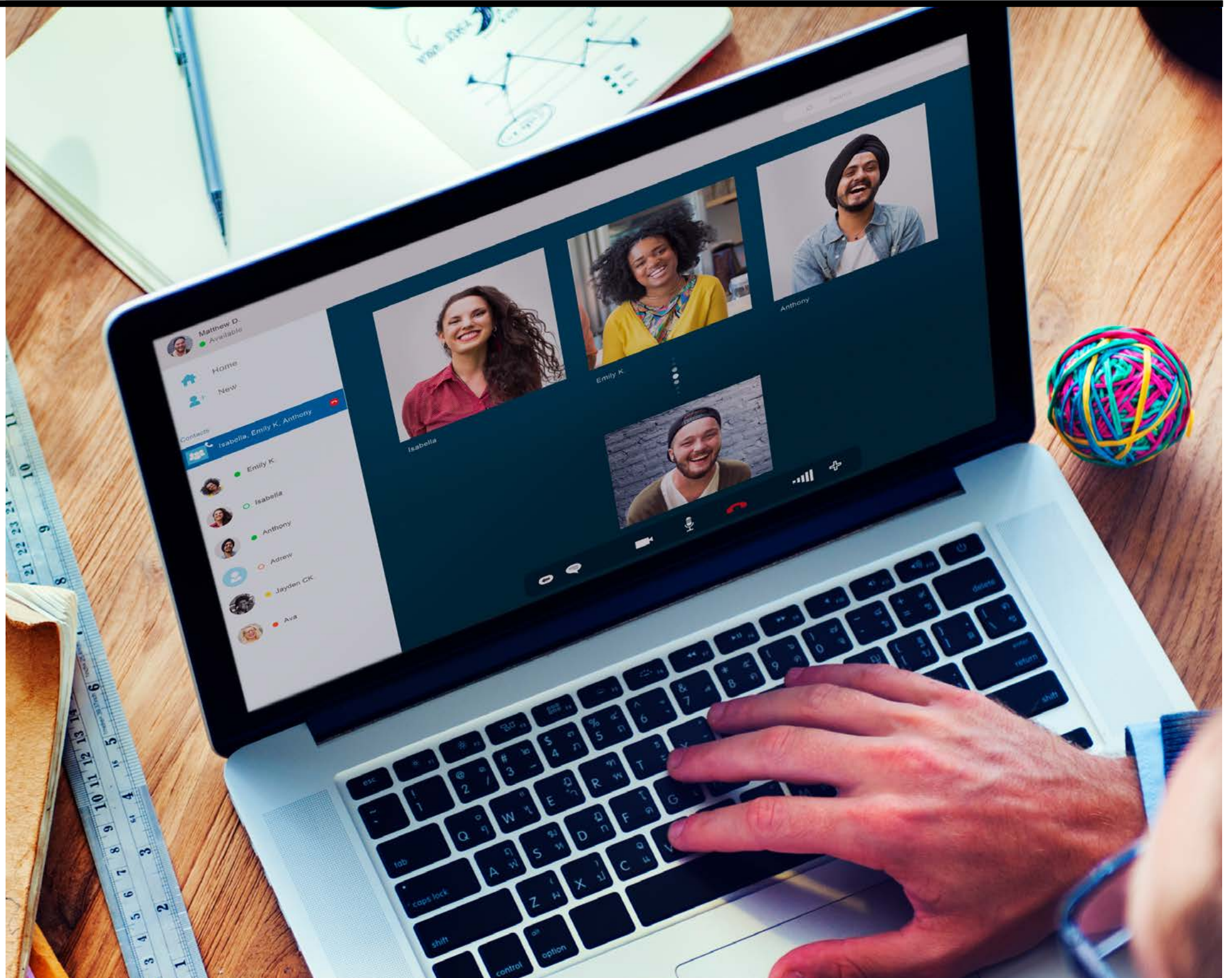
Tools

Tools

Technology Platforms

Organizations should leverage purpose-built technology and communication platforms that link employees working in different locations and support informal chats as well as company announcements.

Communication platforms like Slack or Microsoft Teams help create a virtual workplace that minimizes silos and information gaps.

Finally, organizations should consider two types of training for these technology platforms: general functional use and etiquette for different use cases (e.g. team meeting vs. client presentation). Equipping employees with purpose-built tools and sensible training resources will help maintain community and knowledge sharing.

Tools

Technology Equipment

With an increased population of remote employees and even remote clients, the physical workplace will require more widespread video conferencing rooms and noise reduction methods in the open environment.

Expanding the technology kit available to all employees to include a personal use wireless headset and an allowance for monitors or other basic equipment to outfit a home office will reduce friction and anxiety to support more productive work time.

Tools

Touchless Surfaces & Devices

There are many shared surfaces and devices in the workplace that become potential hotspots to consider modifying.

Installing motion and voice sensors or smart technologies linked to mobile devices will ensure your employees can still access the amenities and services that the form the basic experience of working in the office.

Examples of these surfaces and devices include coffee & tea machines, washroom faucets and soap dispensers, doors, lighting fixtures, or storage lockers.

Tools

Anti-Microbial Materials

The healthcare industry has championed the use of anti-microbial materials in its furniture and spaces to minimize the risk of infection.

Organizations may consider incorporating these materials into their workplaces to retain its look and feel after frequent and deep cleaning as well as to reduce bacteria and other germs from lingering on frequently used furniture and surfaces.

Protocols

Protocols

Reduced Density

As employees return to the workplace, organizations should take precautions on the total occupancy in their workplaces to reduce traffic bottlenecks in the elevators and maintain social distancing in the workplace.

Protocols

Reduced Density

Organizations can communicate and reinforce reduced density in the general work environment through a mix of workplace protocols and signage.

Examples include having employees always sit one chair apart from others in a meeting room, identifying 6 foot areas to stand when waiting in line for certain amenities, limiting employee movement to assigned neighborhoods or zones, creating separate visitor vs. employee areas, or temporarily pausing in-office visits by external guests.

Protocols

Reduced Density

These diagrams illustrate how organizations can reduce density in meeting rooms and shared areas in order to support employee safety during gatherings.

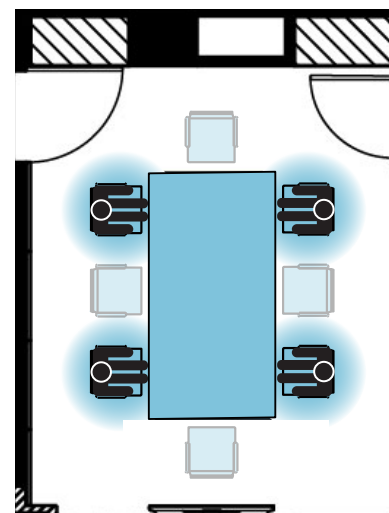**Multipurpose Rooms and Boardrooms**
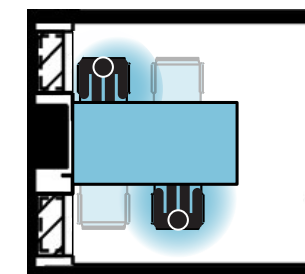
50% Occupancy Scenario
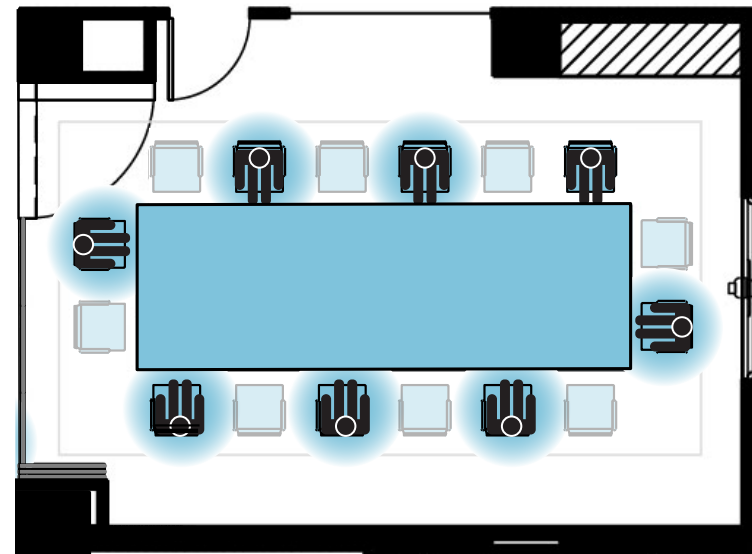
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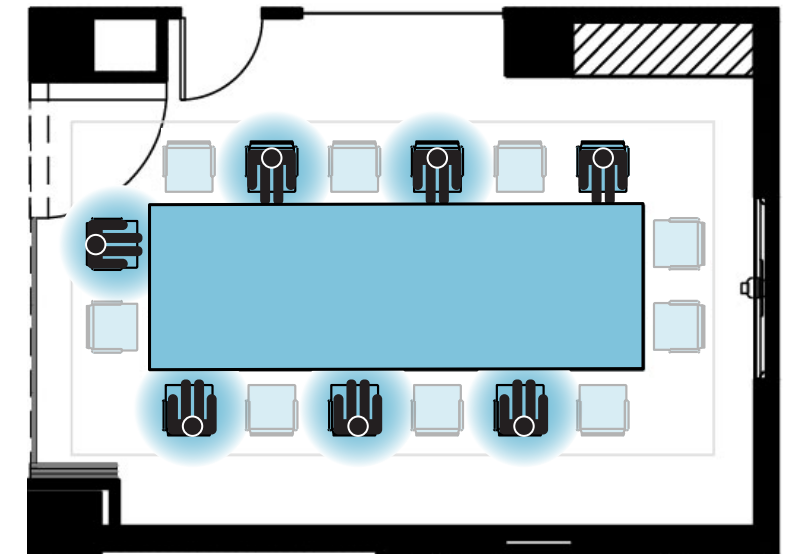
Small Meeting Rooms

60% Occupancy Scenario
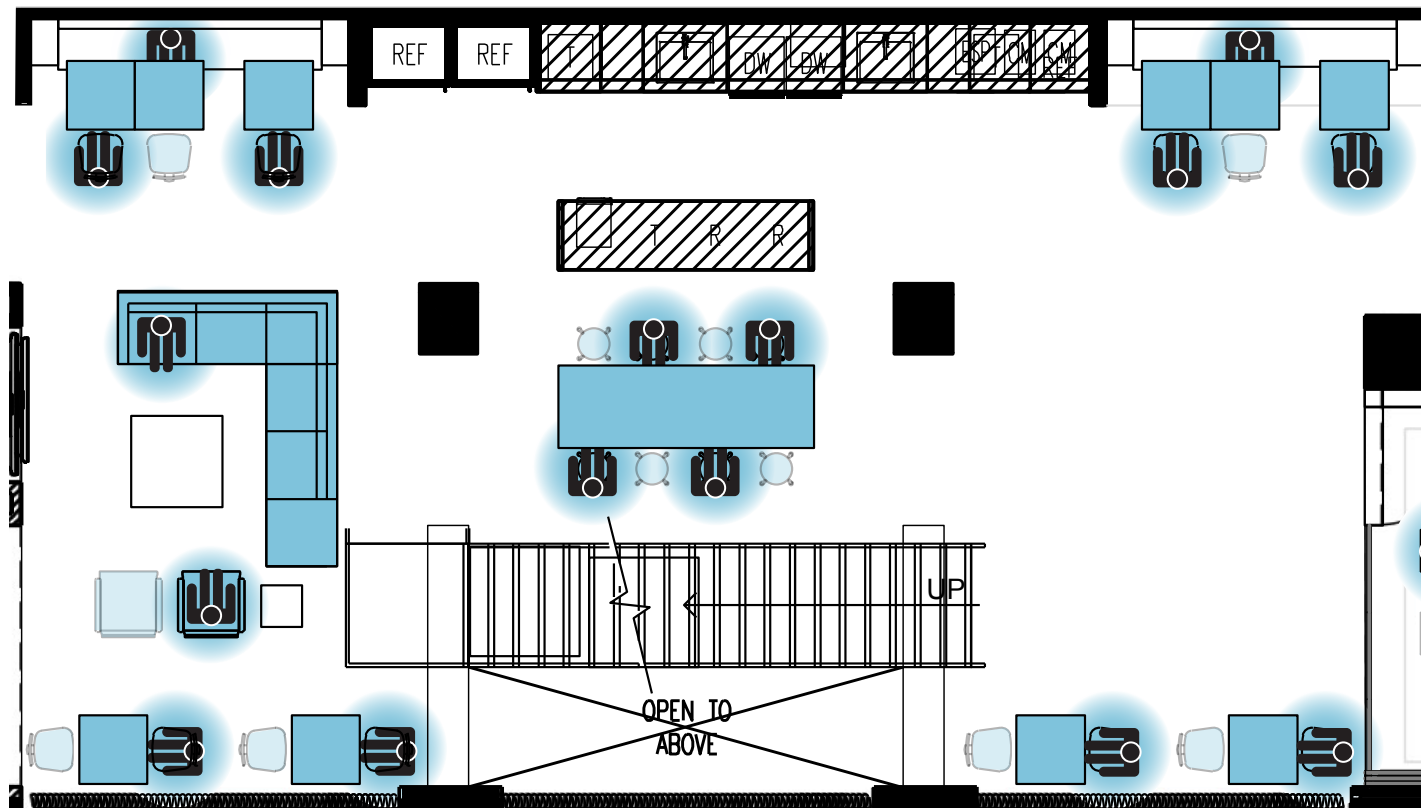
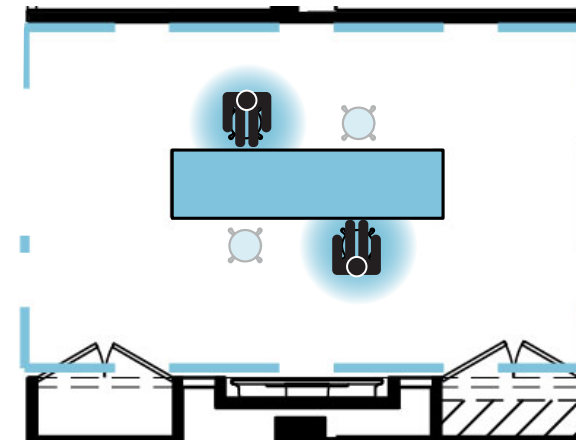50% Occupancy Scenario

Protocols

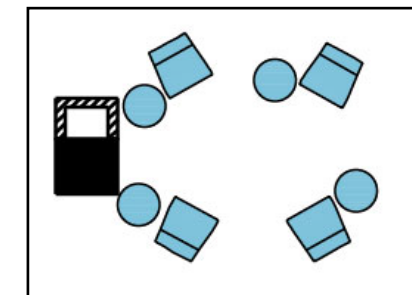## Reduced Density

Cafes and Pantries

50% Occupancy Scenario

Touch Points and Casual Seating Areas

50% Occupancy Scenario

Separate Chairs and Seating Areas

Protocols

Staggered Arrivals

Managing arrivals to the workplace will be critical for organizations in planning their return to the workplace.

Until government guidelines enforce a common set of practices for landlords to institute in their building lobbies, organizations should work with their landlords to understand what protocols will be in effect as well as what occupancy level the lobby and elevator system will be operating at.

Employers should help amplify the building protocols among its employees in order to facilitate compliance and increase safety.
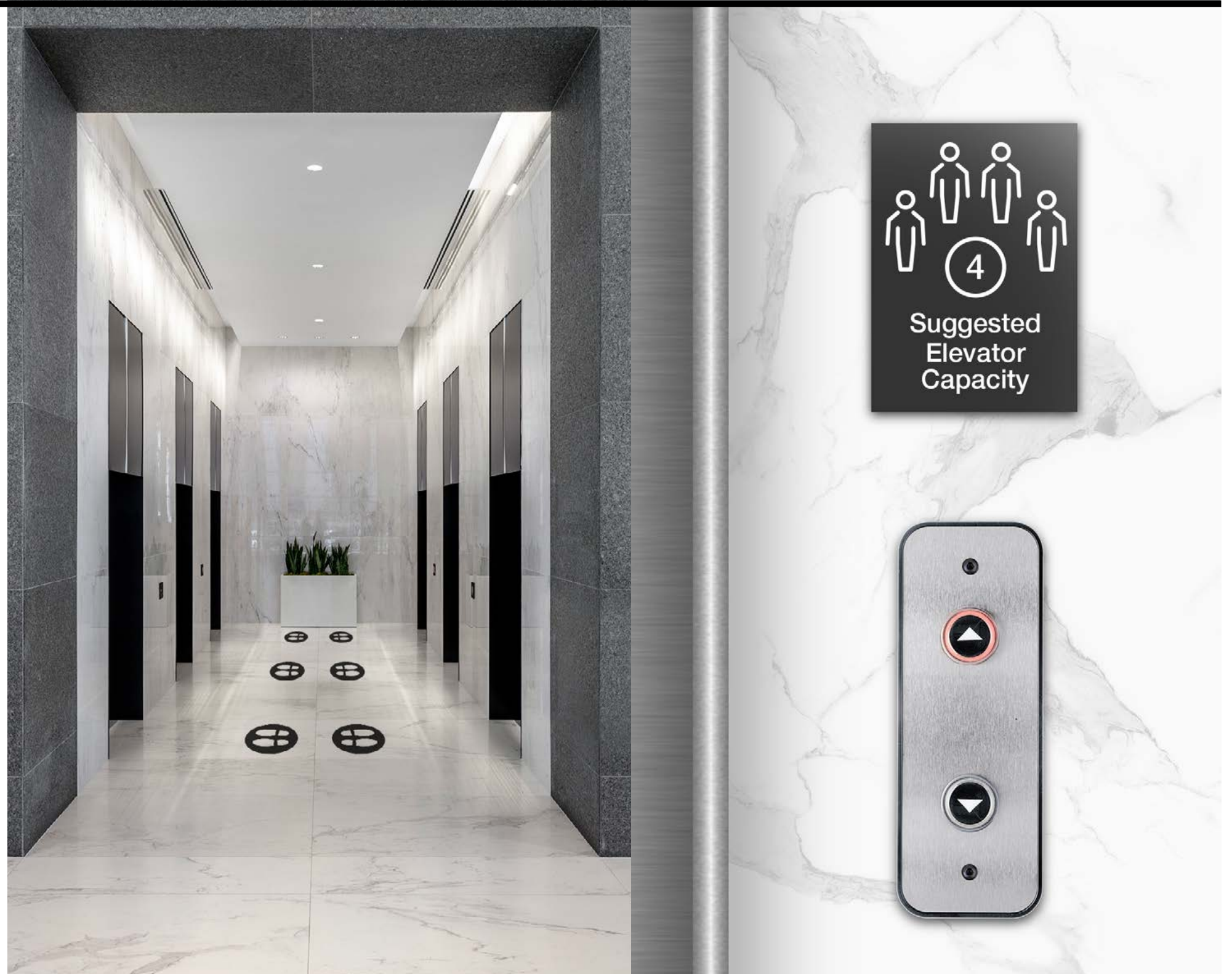
Protocols

Staggered Arrivals

Organizations who have limited support from their building management may consider converting their dedicated reception areas into a staging ground to help stagger arrivals into the workplace.

Protocols

Hygiene Disinfection

The hygiene and disinfection protocols in the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic will continue to be relevant for organizations returning to the workplace.

Strategically locating antibacterial hand soaps and disinfecting hand sanitizers with accompanying signage throughout the workplace will help remind employees to follow hygiene protocols.

Moreover, organizations should consider leveraging signage and company announcements to raise awareness around hygiene and set expectations for disinfection protocols.

Protocols

Receiving & Sending Mail

Many organizations rely on receiving and sending products, packages, and mail as part of their business.

These items represent highly used surfaces and materials that necessitate an adjustment to the protocols for receiving, handling, and delivering to employees in the office.

Examples of new protocols include designating areas to disinfect packages, reminders to clean hands after handling packages, and setting up contact-less routes to drop off and pick up packages.

Other Support Tools

Employee Care Kit

Provide a Care Kit of supplies and information, based on best practices for health and safety.

The kit may include (but is not limited to) the following items:

• Disposable Mask
• Disposable Gloves
• Pocket Sanitizer
• Information Guide (include tips, office health and safety protocols, local health regulations, and other essential information)

Internal Communication

Establish cohesive communication to convey ongoing information to staff.

For your internal "health campaign", we recommend developing a standard email header or graphic so all staff can easily recognize ongoing health emails.

Emails should touch upon these core subjects:

• Office-Wide Sanitizing Guideline
• Personal Workstation Protocols
• Office Visitor & Client Protocols
• Latest Local & Regional Health Regulations

Need Help?

Need assistance developing a strategy specific to your office? TPG is here to help:

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