



2020

What Is The Case For Investing In Workplace Technology?



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Executive summary

The pandemic and global recession are forcing organizations globally to revisit long-held assumptions about workplace management and how work is done. Real estate and facilities executives need to plan for a new world of facilities management where workplace safety is paramount and remote working becomes an increasingly commonplace operating model.

This report provides strategic guidance to C-level and real estate executives on the frontline for guiding staff back to workplaces safely and rethinking the office's role in the long term. The report sets out four practical steps that organizations should take to refresh their workplace technology strategy to deliver value straight away and empower a more agile workplace in the future.

Organizations mentioned

Accenture, Bank of America, Baptist Health South Florida, Blue Shield of California, British Land, CBRE, Chicago Public Schools, Citigroup, Comfy, Credit Suisse, Dexu, Equiem, ExxonMobil, Facebook, Fujitsu, Google, General Services Administration, HqO, IBM, Lakewood Middle School, Lyft, Nationwide Insurance, Nike, Nuvap, OpenText, PwC, Rigado, RMZ, Schroders, Skyrise, Shropshire Council, Siemens, TCS, Thing Technologies, Twitter, Uber, University of Technology Sydney, VergeSense, Walmart, WELL, Welsh Government, Yanzi

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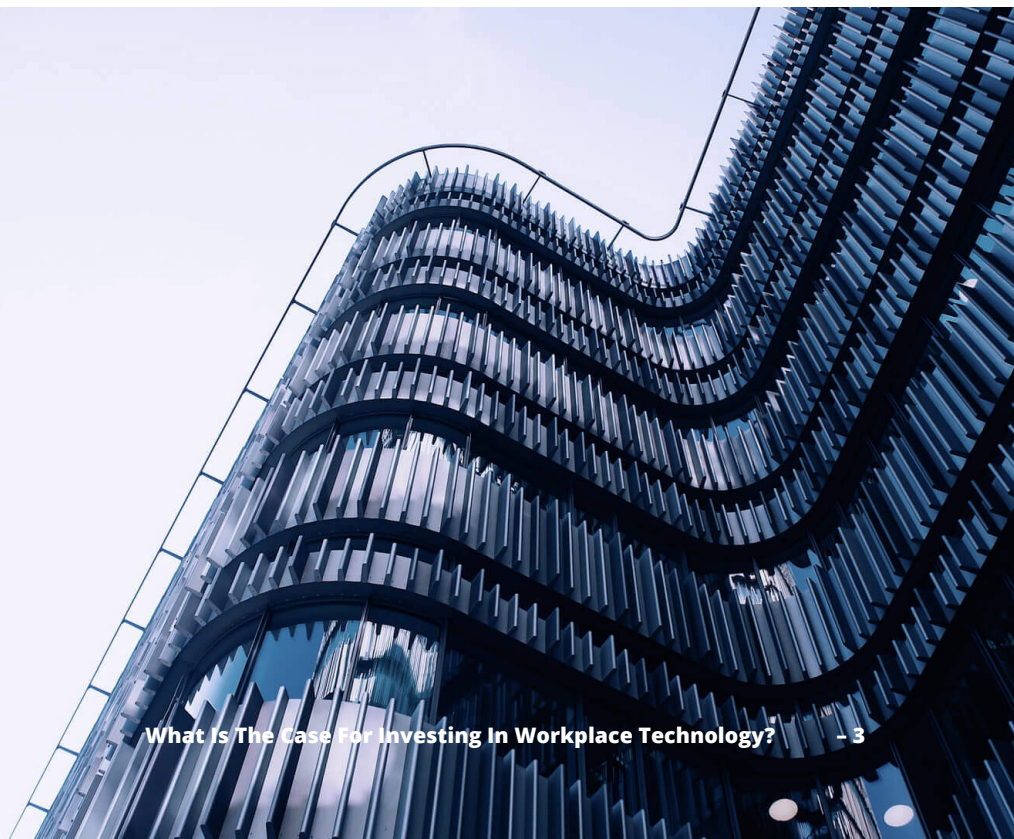
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What Is The Case For Investing In Workplace Technology?

COVID-19 has driven significant change across the business world, prompting firms to swiftly adopt new ways of working to enable business continuity and resilience in the long term. Organizations are now revising plans for how work will be done in the future and many are setting out strategies to shift operating models to a hybrid of remote and in-office work. The report is aimed at C-level and real estate executives on the frontline for guiding staff back to the workplace safely and rethinking the office's role in the long term. Organizations should use this report to add to their conceptualization of the future office and revise their workplace technology strategies for success in a post-COVID-19 world.

This report forms part of a Verdantix series that provides insights and actionable guidance on how to get value from real estate technology. In our 2019 study, we sought to understand the business case for investing in technology given declining costs, improved usability and better reliability ([see Verdantix What Is The Case For Investing In Your Real Estate Technology?](#)). One salient finding was that 84% of real estate executives have invested in technology in the past two years because it had reached a more suitable price point.

Research Methodology

To get an up-to-date view of the rapidly changing real estate sector and visions for the future of the workplace, Verdantix interviewed a panel of 10 experts and industry veterans. These experts represented a broad range of sectors including central and local government, financial services, media, oil and gas, and technology. We asked these respondents about new challenges that the real estate and facilities sector is tackling and how firms can use learnings from COVID-19 to inform long-term success. This report also draws on broader Verdantix research on smart buildings and COVID-19 management ([see Verdantix Responding To The COVID-19 Crisis In Real Estate And Facilities Management](#)).

Workplace Management Has Changed Dramatically Since The Crisis

The start of 2020 saw the COVID-19 pandemic force rapid change in the operation of offices, hospitals, retail stores, schools, and public sector buildings. As these facilities start to re-open, most executives agree that the impact of COVID-19 on real estate management will be lasting and transformative. Real estate and facilities executives need to plan for a new world of facilities management where:

- **Remote working becomes an increasingly commonplace operating model.**

The most significant long-term change our interviewees are anticipating is the acceleration of home working and hybrid working styles. Lockdown has shown businesses that employees can work productively from home and has bulldozed through the long-standing concerns held by risk-adverse IT teams about remote collaboration technology. There are also substantial financial incentives; firms can turbocharge space efficiency programmes. For example, in April 2020, the BBC announced the closure of most of its smaller UK support offices which it found are no longer needed due to remote working technology.

“2021 or 2022 will not go back to 2019. The way of doing work has changed and there is no easy way of going back.”

(Real estate manager, financial services)

- **Offices have transitioned from low-risk to potentially high-risk environments.**
The new potential risks at the workplace has driven firms to revise building management programmes with a 'safety-first' lens. For example, Australia-based landlord Dexus launched the 'COVID Safe Workplace' programme, aimed at keeping its tenants safe and feeling confident as they return to the office. This programme brings together social distancing protocols and additional cleaning services. Reflecting new levels of risk, some firms are asking employees to sign waivers before returning to the workplace to avoid potential lawsuits. The New York Stock Exchange is asking employees to sign waivers saying they acknowledge the risk in returning to the workplace, clearing the Exchange of liability.
- **Uncertainty becomes a new norm for many businesses.**
The continually changing pandemic situation and economic environment mean that all firms need to plan for a world of continuing uncertainty. It will not just be a case of avoiding a 'second wave'; firms need to get ready for many new clusters of infection in the future. For example, Apple shut down 11 sites in June 2020 in four US states following a spike in local infections. As offices and other sites re-open, agility needs to be built into all workplace management processes – from decisions around what leases to take on, to the allocation of workstations and space.
- **Social distancing reverses the trend for high-density offices.**
As social distancing becomes the new normal, real estate executives are adjusting their plans around workplace density, at least for the near-term. For the past decade, the trend has been to reduce space per employee. Some firms had been offering staff just 50 square feet of desk space along with access to communal areas. The incentive for density is cost savings, given that office space can cost \$10,000 to \$15,000 per employee per year in prime real estate areas. In the immediate aftermath of COVID-19, firms are reducing density by operating buildings at 10% to 50% of normal capacity. This requires new thinking by team leaders and space planners to ensure that the right mix of employees have workplace access and new capacity thresholds are not exceeded.
- **Building management gains executive-level interest.**
For some organizations, COVID-19 means new executive-level interest in facilities management. Firms that assembled 'COVID-19' task forces frequently brought in a representative from facilities or real estate. One example is the 10-person COVID-19 response team that healthcare firm Blue Shield of California put together, with the head of real estate working alongside executives in health and IT roles. We also heard from some of our interviewees that, for the first time ever, the C-suite wants visibility on space utilization metrics, so that they can understand true requirements for office space.

“You can no longer rely on the status quo in real estate. Successful facilities management teams will quickly adapt to the new world and stake out a leadership role.”

(Real estate consultant)

Real Estate And Workplace Technology Strategies Are Ripe For A Refresh

COVID-19 is forcing many organizations to revisit long-held assumptions about workplace management and how work is done. Now that most firms have adjusted operating procedures to support business continuity, the next focus is aiding a safe re-entry and creating a more resilient workplace in a time of uncertainty. This section of the report outlines the critical changes that C-level and real estate executives need to consider for building a safer workplace and supporting their organization in transitioning to a new operating model.

Firms Need To Make Buildings Smarter And Safer To Aid The Return To The Office

With many organizations keen to bring employees back together, the immediate priority for most organizations is getting staff back to workplaces safely and cost-efficiently. Real estate and facilities executives need to respond by:

- **Making occupant health and safety central to the smart office agenda.**
COVID-19 has forced firms to rebalance long-running priorities in facilities management. Occupant health and safety (H&S) has become the new focal point, taking precedent over other areas, including comfort and in some instances cost efficiency. The starting point for firms extending their H&S programme has been rolling out local government guidance; for example, malls in NYC are required by the city government to add high-efficiency particulate air (HEPA) filters to air conditioning systems when re-opening. Other firms are introducing new technologies to the workplace that monitor social distancing and facilitate the health screening of staff. For example, PwC is rolling out temperature checks on arrival, one-way footpath systems, colour-coded seats, and heat sensors at its offices to measure space usage.
- **Improving staff communication to inspire employee confidence.**
With workplaces slowly starting to re-open, employers will need to reassure staff that their buildings are safe with sufficient safety protocols in place. Similarly, education centres must actively communicate with students, teachers and staff. Some facilities teams have stepped up their communications to occupants. For example, a multi-national telecoms firm told us its facility management team is now sending regular emails to occupants, updating them on occupancy levels in buildings, which areas have been cleaned (verified by QR-code scanning by cleaners) and indoor air quality where sensors are already deployed. Firms find that proactive communication is a critical part of helping staff feel safe when returning to the workplace.
- **Delivering on the CFO's push for bold cost savings.**
With the global recession gaining momentum, real estate and facilities managers are once again under executive pressure to find new efficiencies and identify big-ticket cost savings. In PwC's 2020 COVID-19 CFO Survey, covering 867 firms, 83% of CFOs stated they are looking to facilities and capital expenditure as a cost cutting opportunity. Real estate teams should get on the front foot by gaining a top-level view into building costs and any quick cost-cutting wins. Our

"Our CFO is already now asking the questions; should we be spending \$10K per person on real estate? How far can we reduce our real estate portfolio?"

(Real estate manager, Technology)

2019 report found that most firms still have ample opportunities for cost savings in building management – from pushing for a new wave of energy savings to improving space utilization to open up cost savings in the millions. Firms with access to good quality and centralized space utilization data will have valuable insights for reshaping their real estate portfolio.

- **Consider the door-to-door health and well-being of employees.**

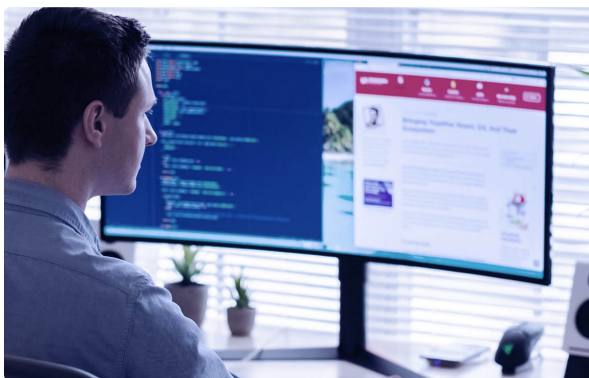
For some employees working in city centres, the biggest concern for returning to the office is using public transport. Firms that are keen to bring staff back to offices are testing different strategies to help employees feel confident during their commute. Credit Suisse is encouraging its London staff to drive to work because its Canary Wharf offices have sufficient parking to accommodate the small volume of staff returning in the early phases. Bank of America is paying for Lyft and Uber rides or reimbursing driving costs to discourage the use of public transport. Another common strategy is to offer staff flexibility in their commute times to allow them to avoid peak travel times.

The Workplace Must Evolve To Embrace New Operating Models

The immediate priority for firms in re-opening their workplaces has been making occupant H&S central to the smart office agenda and inspiring worker confidence with proactive communication. The crisis has also prompted organizations to rethink operating models and the way of doing work. In the future:

- **Organizations will move towards operating models based on more remote work.**

Following the pandemic, business services and technology firms have announced they are accelerating their adoption of flexible and remote working. For example, Fujitsu Japan is now offering its 80,000-workforce new flexibility to choose between remote and office-based work, enabling it to halve its office footprint (see Figure 1). Universities are also building out a capability to deliver lessons online as part of contingency plans. For example, in August 2020, the University of Notre Dame announced it is cancelling in-person classes and moving them online after seeing a surge in coronavirus cases.



“You used to have access to the best technology at work, but that has now changed, with more individuals purchasing better technology at home”

(Real estate consultant)

- **Businesses will offer staff access to physical and digital workplaces.**

Most of our interviewees agree that work will continue to shift from office buildings to homes and co-working space (see Figure 2). Rather than COVID-19 spelling the end for offices, some firms will rethink their role as being more a strategic place for collaboration, mentoring and socialization. A good model of this is ExxonMobil's Workplace Evolution 3 (We3), which provides staff flexibility to choose different workspaces that are best suited to perform various tasks throughout the day.

"Remnants of working model changes will remain in place for the long-haul. Work-from-home adaption will be baked in forever, at least to some degree"

(Real Estate Executive, eCommerce)



- **Work will be distributed with some staff working from home permanently.**

Some firms have announced they will take remote working a step further by having some of their staff work from home permanently. For some organizations, the incentive is cost savings, such as software vendor OpenText, which will close 50% of its offices and shift 2,000 employees to a permanent work-from-home status. In the technology sector, Facebook and Twitter have announced they will make specific roles remote permanently so they can tap into a broader talent global pool. With staff increasingly distributed across offices, homes, and co-working spaces, they will need access to high-quality collaboration and communication tools and cloud-based file sharing.

- **Retailers and restaurants will offer a digital experience at physical stores.**

With consumer shopping preferences changing rapidly, retailers and restaurants also are evolving their business models and in-store experiences. Nike is testing out a new concept store, 'Nike Live', that brings together physical and digital retail services at a store in Los Angeles. Shoppers can leverage an app to request products in a size and colour and reserve items for collection. Quick service restaurant Taco Bell has launched the 'Taco Bell Go Mobile' store concept, which allows customers to order ahead of time via its mobile app and collect food on arrival without personal contact.

1 • Many Organizations Have Already Announced The Adoption Of New Operating Models

	Organization	New Strategy	Key implications for the workplace
BUSINESS SECTOR	Fujitsu JAPAN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Technology firm Fujitsu Japan announced the launch of the “Work Life Shift” programme to enable 80,000 employees in Japan to primarily work on a remote basis while still having good access to the workplace. Fujitsu Japan plans to leverage remote working to halve its office footprint 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space rationalization Redesign business workflows for hybrid working
	Nationwide Insurance US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Insurance services firm Nationwide announced nearly 30% of its headcount will permanently work from home given the success of homeworking during the lockdown. The firm is pursuing this programme for cost savings; it will close most of its regional facilities while retaining four campus sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space rationalization Redesign business workflows for remote working
	Siemens GLOBAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Industrial manufacturing firm Siemens launched a new remote working model whereby employees can choose to work from for two or three days a week. This new strategy will provide employees with greater flexibility in working styles and support it in hiring new talent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Globalization of talent attraction Redesign business workflows for hybrid working
	TCS GLOBAL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IT services firm TCS announced the “25/25” strategy to permit 75% of its staff to work from home by the year 2025. TCS plans to rationalize the number of regional sites within its portfolio while retaining key campus sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space rationalization Redesign business workflows for hybrid working
EDUCATION SECTOR	Chicago Public Schools US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chicago Public Schools launched a new remote learning model so that students can learn from home from September 2020. Google Leaning will be used to facilitate file sharing between teachers and students. The school aims to facilitate a hybrid of in-person and remote learning in the future to enable social distancing at the school facilities. The school plans to deeply clean the building each day and clean high touch surfaces more regularly. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out of remote learning technology New cleaning protocols
	Lakewood Middle School US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lakewood Middle School in NYC increased its real estate footprint by installing eight new modular classrooms on-site for the start of the September 2020 term. It plans to install eight further classrooms in the near future. The new classroom space will enable the school to deliver in-person lessons with social distancing between students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expansion of real estate footprint Expand delivery of cleaning and maintenance across new buildings
	University of Technology Sydney AUSTRALIA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The University of Technology Sydney invested in online exam platform ProctorU so that students can take exams remotely given its inability to meet social distancing standards for in-person exams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roll out of remote learning and exam technology
PUBLIC SECTOR	General Services Administration US	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The General Services Administration (GSA) has been implementing several measures to enhance safety and health as it brings staff back to site in a phased strategy. It is reassigning desks to avoid seating staff face-to-face and adjusting the seating available on its space reservation system. It is also ensuring that cleaning teams disinfect high traffic and common areas until at least September 2021. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New seating assignments for social distancing New cleaning protocols
	Shropshire Council UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shropshire Council is reconfiguring parts of its headquarters building, “Shirehall” into bookable workspaces and meeting rooms for on-site staff The council plans to downsize its headquarters in 2023, moving into a smaller site in a more central location 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Agile working and new space booking technology New seating assignments
	Welsh Government UK	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In September 2020, the Welsh Government announced it will move towards a hybrid workplace model, where staff can work in the office, at home, or in a hub location. The aim is to enable 30% or more of workers to work remotely and offer staff greater flexibility in their work styles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Space rationalization Redesign business workflows for hybrid working Talent attraction

2 • Employees Will Work Across A Hybrid Set Of Workspaces In The Future

Digital workplace



Home offices support quiet and individual work

Regional & local offices



Commercial offices are hubs for collaboration and meeting clients

Flexible workspaces



Co-working offices provide flexible workspace based on demand

A New Vision: From Smart Buildings To Smart Workplaces

With employees and employers globally realizing positive benefits of home working during the start of 2020, long-term changes and cultural shifts for workplace management are already emerging. Our research and interviews highlight the need for a new vision of a smart building centred on the concept of a smart workplace (see Figure 3). A smart workplace:

- **Empowers hybrid work across offices, homes, and co-working spaces.**

In the future, the smart workplace will no longer be synonymous with physical offices. Instead, employees will have access to three complementary workplaces: digital workplaces, offices and flexible workspaces. Employees will use the digital workplace when they are running individual tasks and seek more flexible working hours. Staff will continue to have access to company offices which are rich with amenities; they will book workstations near to the co-workers that offer best collaboration opportunities. Finally, workers will have access to flexible spaces where they can book collaboration spaces or hot desks based on needs. For example, Citigroup has been looking to take on co-working space in New York's suburbs so its staff can avoid long commutes during the pandemic. To create a shared experience across these workplaces, firms need to offer staff consistent workplace apps and IT across all workspaces.

- **Makes the office a focal point for collaboration and high-impact meetings.**

With more individual tasks being done from home, many firms are considering repurposing their HQ and flagship offices as centres for collaboration. The Chief Executive of financial services firm Schroders recently stated, “The office will become a convening place. With more home working, the HQ needs to be a place for collaboration and offer opportunities that staff can’t get from home.” Many of the new-generation co-working spaces are designed to facilitate this type of work. For example, CBRE’s co-working spaces, under the brand Hana, offer tenants access to a mix of private office suites, conference and events space and a co-working space. Another good example is Accenture’s ‘The Dock’ research centre in Ireland, which is primarily a place for staff meetings and collaboration.

“The historic way of designing and configuring buildings was very much individual-led. While individual work can be done at home, homeworking cannot replace collaboration, teamwork and culture.”

(Real estate consultant)

- **Supports employee health and wellbeing.**

In recent years, the vision for a smart building has expanded from employee experience to becoming increasingly aligned with ‘healthy buildings’ marked out by good air quality and infection control strategies. Notably, real estate investor RMZ recently achieved the WELL Health-Safety Rating for Facility Operations and Management at 41 properties across India. It stated that new wellbeing ratings would help it meet the growing need to deliver high health and safety standards for tenants. We anticipate future smart buildings will contain more air quality monitoring sensors, contactless technology for building access and space utilization tracking tools.

- **Meets the changing requirements of new talent entering the workforce.**

Even though firms often have access to larger talent pools during a recession, organizations are still focused on attracting and retaining top-tier talent. Consulting and technology firms have often secured the best talent by offering competitive financial rewards alongside high-quality office spaces. As firms trim down their real estate footprints, they need to keep talent attraction in mind by retaining offices in sought-after locations and with high-quality amenities. Some firms are even pushing on with plans to take on more high-quality office space. For example, in August 2020, Amazon announced its intention to take over a 335,000-square-foot space in Manhattan’s Hudson Yards where it will hire data scientists, product managers and user experience designers.

- **Are resilient to future emergencies and shock events .**

Resiliency will be an increasingly central part of future smart buildings. COVID-19 highlighted that many facilities are unprepared for shock events such as further lockdowns or extreme weather. A resilient building is one that can be efficiently closed in the event of a crisis, then efficiently managed through off-site engineering teams using data and remote management technology. Real estate teams should look to build responsive disaster management plans and provide decision-making autonomy to local facilities teams, so they can quickly customize strategies to fit the local context.

“The downturn is a unique time to have access to the world’s best talent. Our business needs to work hard now to acquire the top talent, which will benefit us during the next upturn.”

(CEO, consulting firm)

3 • Envisioning The Future Smart Workplace

Tech to support smarter working & collaboration

Support **smarter working** with appropriate **collaboration** and quiet zones

New occupant-facing **KPIs**

Workplace services **app** to enhance **communication**

Mobile tech to support **hybrid working styles**

Single pane of glass view of **building data**

Responsive disaster management

Space utilization insights from **Wi-Fi analytics**

Contactless technology

Tech to support smarter healthier & safer spaces

Action Plan: Refresh Your Workplace Technology Strategy To Empower A More Agile Workforce

With organizations globally reviewing their workplace technology strategies, executives should use this opportunity to create a better experience for talent, reduce costs and build in better resiliency. A well-planned strategy will dispense of sub-optimal processes and bring in new successes established during lockdown. At the same time, with organizations still lacking a clear view into the longevity of COVID-19, technology strategies need to be agile to avoid technology investments with a short shelf-life. This section of the report outlines four practical steps that organizations should take to refresh their workplace technology strategy to deliver value straight away and empower a more agile workplace in the future. These key actions are also summarized in Figure 6 at the end of this report.

1. Address Critical Weakness In Your Workplace Technology

The first step in refreshing your workplace strategy should be making sure that you address the critical weaknesses in your technology strategy that prevents effective remote and hybrid working. The key steps for firms are to:

- **Address weaknesses in remote building management capabilities.**
The pandemic has highlighted that most firms do not have the tools in place to manage buildings in a crisis, with some firms using paper-based processes and rigid procedures to manage buildings. According to Verdantix survey data, 92% of firms do not have an IoT platform in place across all their sites, meaning they lack a remote or granular view into their building systems and assets (see Figure 4). Another challenge is that most firms do not have a workplace software platform or IWMS in place at all sites, making it challenging to consistently roll out new processes and controls at workplaces that do re-open – whether that is social distancing or new protocols for screening visitors. Firms should run a risk and impact assessment to identify critical investments and process improvements.
- **Accelerate the move from paper-based to digital for critical processes.**
Many facilities management processes are still dependent on on-site personnel and run using paper-based systems. It is not uncommon for engineers to use clipboards or for reception teams to track visitors using notebooks. With a move towards more remote working, firms should speed up the digitization of crucial data – to empower building management by off-site teams. Organizations have multiple options for digitizing this data – from IWMS platforms that can centralize all real estate and facilities data, to CMMS that firms can use to digitize specific maintenance processes (see Verdantix Green Quadrant Integrated Workplace Management Systems 2019).

“COVID-19 has made the property team realize that having digitized data is really important – you need that so that you can access the data anywhere and while off-site”

(Property Manager, public sector)

- **Make workplace processes more agile to respond to changing utilization rates.**
Many buildings are managed using rigid processes such as maintenance planned around calendar schedules. With building occupancy becoming increasingly in flux, firms need to ensure that that building services such as cleaning and maintenance can be easily updated based on demand. For example, a public sector firm told us it is closing off parts of its building during low occupancy to reduce energy and cleaning spend. More sophisticated approaches are based on bringing space utilization data into your workorder management systems to optimize cleaning and maintenance schedules based on building usage.

4 • **Most Firms Do Not Have The Fit-For-Purpose Digital Tools For Building Management In A Crisis**

92%

- of firms do not have an **IoT platform** in place across all their sites. They will lack a remote or granular view into their building systems and assets.

88%

- of firms have not rolled out an **IWMS platform** across all sites meaning they will lack a centralized and standardized view into their buildings portfolio costs.

80%

- of firms do not have **workplace management tools** in place across all their sites. They will struggle to consistently roll out new processes and controls at workplaces such as social distancing or new protocols for screening visitors.

Source: Global Corporate Survey 2019: Smart Building
Technology Budgets, Priorities & Preferences
(n=304)

2. Prioritize Investments That Aid A Safe Return To The Workplace

Another priority for firms is making sure they have the processes and technologies in place to support a safe return to the workplace. The key actions for firms are to:

- **Use space management technology to track building usage levels.**
The best guarantor of effective social distancing in the workplace will be controlling the total number of occupants that can enter a building (see [Verdantix Beyond COVID-19: Emerging Best Practices For Occupant Health And Wellbeing](#)). Most firms are capping building occupancy at 10% to 50% of usual capacity during the first round of workplace re-entry. To ensure effective social distancing, firms should leverage space booking systems to limit desk booking with pre-defined thresholds. Firms should also leverage space utilization data from sensors or Wi-Fi networks on an ongoing basis to continually track adherence to these policies or identify any bottlenecks in certain spaces that must be addressed.
- **Communicate a simple message to staff on workplace safety protocols.**
While there is often a lot of complexity sitting behind return-to-work programmes, facility managers need to convey a simple message to occupants on safe behaviour. A good example of this is Walmart; it has been asking its staff to remember its “6-20-100 rule” regarding healthy practices at the workplace. It states that 6 feet is the distance people should keep between themselves and others when possible, 20 seconds is the amount of time people should take to wash their hands with soap, and 100 is the temperature that someone should stay home with.
- **Empower occupants with real-time air quality and workplace density data.**
Employers should consider proactively reporting data on space utilization and cleaning to employees through a workplace mobile app. That data should also be brought into space reservation systems, providing staff the option to book spaces in quiet or busier areas. Firms could take this concept further by offering employees near real-time data on air quality through a workplace mobile app. A growing number of vendors – such as Nuvap, VergeSense, and Yanzi – offer low-cost easy-to-deploy workplace sensors, while vendors such as Rigado provide sensor networking technology.

3. Bridge The Gap Between Remote And Office-Based Working

Once firms have rolled out the priority initiatives to aid a safe re-entry to the workplace, attention should turn to laying the foundations that will empower an increasingly distributed workforce. The critical steps for facilities professionals are to:

- **Facilitate meetings based on physical and virtual presence.**
With lower total occupancy in buildings being the norm going forward, IT and facility managers will need to adapt workplace meetings to take place easily across on-site and off-site staff. At the US Pentagon, for example, strategy meetings in one room that were traditionally attended by between 40 and 50 members of staff now take place across three rooms, with videoconferencing in each space. This arrangement allows staff to address all attendees, and also allows for collaboration in smaller groups, without crowding into a single room. The practical step for all facility managers is to ensure that meeting rooms can facilitate both in-person and virtual events with good-quality screens and audio.

- **Ensure that staff have access to consistent workplace technology in all locations.**
Facilities and IT teams need to work together to ensure that staff have access to consistent technology both in office and when they are remote. It is the responsibility of the IT department to make sure staff have remote access to cloud workspaces to access data securely. Facilities managers have a role to play in ensuring staff can easily access IT services across hot desks and collaborative areas in offices. In addition, facilities managers should consider rolling out the same workplace apps to all buildings and co-working spaces to give staff a consistent experience when booking space across all work locations. Workplace apps are now available from an increasing number of vendors including Comfy, Equiem, IBM, HqO and Skyrise.
- **Keep in mind the change management activities for new ways of working.**
Bridging the gap between remote and office-based work is far from just a technology challenge. Firms have work to do in restructuring how work is done and redesigning processes around distributed teams. Our interviewees believe that success will lie in identifying which activities require staff to be physically together and which processes are most efficiently completed by remote workers. Team managers also need to initiate more regular and proactive communication to staff to generate a feeling of inclusivity.

“It will be both a cultural and technology challenge to achieve successful remote working in the long-term. Many roles have scoped around the traditional five days a week in an office.”

(Real estate manager, technology)

4. Increase Funding Prospects By Focusing Investments On High ROI Technologies

Bridging the gap between remote and office-based working will require firms to review their remote working technology and in-office meeting room spaces. A critical part of building out your workplace technology roadmap is creating a financially appealing plan that will garner positive attention from the CFO. To improve funding prospects, facilities executives should:

- **Focus investments on technologies that bring a high ROI.**
Given today's economic climate, your workplace plan should include technologies that will deliver a high and fast ROI. Otherwise, your proposed investments risk getting side-lined by competing internal projects that show quicker returns. One of the most compelling ROIs can come from software solutions that help firms to identify the opportunity to reduce the size of their real estate footprint or sublet space to new tenants ([see Verdantix The Business Case For Space And Workplace Management Software](#)). In addition, firms already using an extensive roster of legacy facilities management systems can often obtain a positive ROI when replacing them with single IWMS platform to digitize and centralize all data ([see Verdantix The Business Case For Integrated Workplace Management Systems](#)).
- **Weed out investments in technology with a short shelf life.**
As it is still unclear how long COVID-19 will be a pandemic and when a vaccine will be available for the mass public, firms should avoid buying into expensive technologies that could become quickly obsolete. For example, UK real estate investor and manager British Land stated that it would not invest in cameras that measure social distancing or whether occupants are wearing masks because it sees a short shelf life for such solutions. Smart investments will provide value today and in the long-term. A good example is workplace sensors for measuring space utilization or air quality; these help firms track workplace safety and provide granular data

to inform facilities optimization programmes. It is good practice for firms to trial emerging technologies tools aimed at COVID-19 management before making an enterprise-wide commitment (see Figure 5).

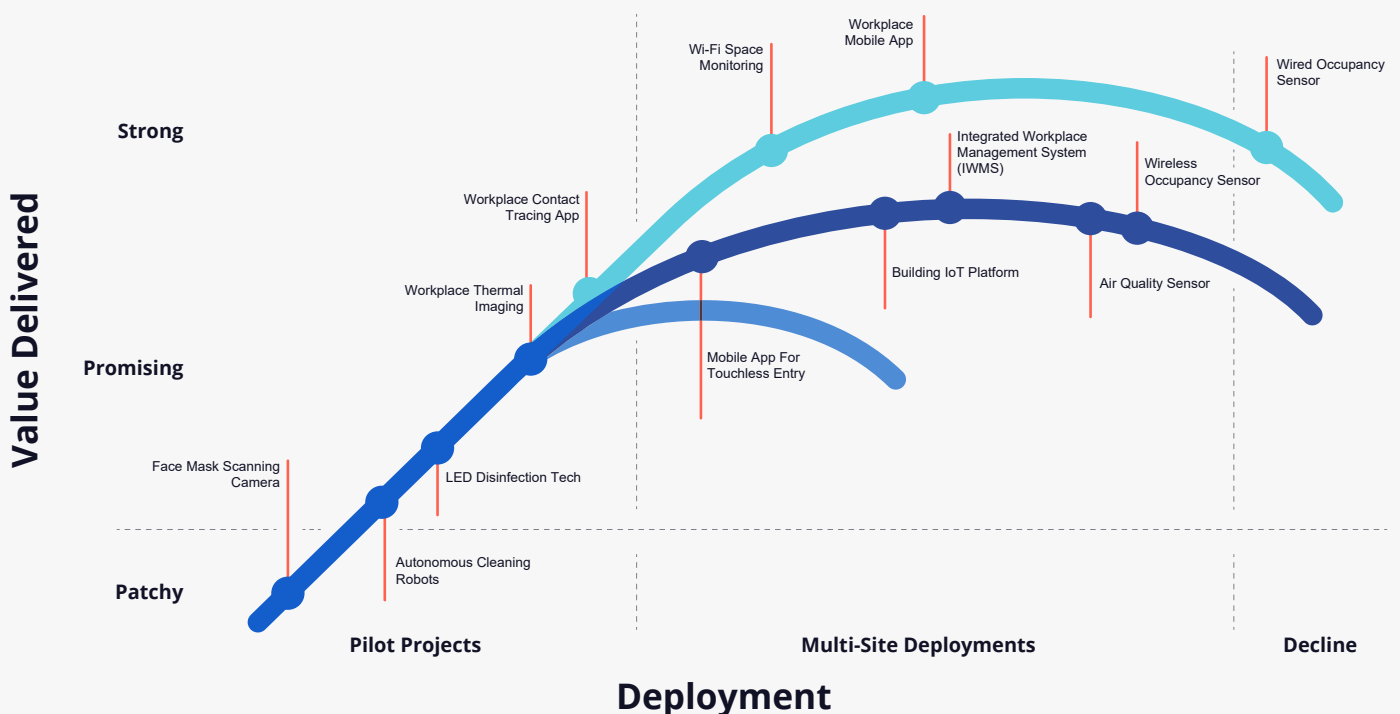
- Seek out opportunities for low capex technology investments.** .

With finance teams pausing and deferring capital projects, facilities managers are likely to have a higher success in gaining funds when pitching low capex projects. Firms should look at opportunities to purchase CAFM or IWMS as an operating expense through SaaS to spread out their investments rather than paying the full price upfront. There are also opportunities for firms to acquire space utilization data without capital investments, when investing in solutions that analyze Wi-Fi data or other existing sources such as badge swipe systems.
- Position workplace technology investments in line with the CEO's digitization plans.**

For organizations across a diverse set of industries, COVID-19 has sparked a new roster of digitization programmes. For example, in August 2020, Baptist Health South Florida launched a \$100 million project to expand its digital capabilities in areas including telemedicine and virtual care. Real estate and facilities managers should align their own technology projects in line with these strategic company goals.
- Explore investments in mobile apps that are cost-effective to deploy.**

Emerging workplace mobile apps are enabling firms to roll out software across the enterprise much faster and more cost-effectively. For example, IBM launched a workplace mobile app designed to engage employees with a centralized source for health and workplace re-entry information. This app forms part of IBM's Watson Works portfolio of products that helps firms quickly implement return to work strategies. Another area of innovation has been mobile apps that aid a contactless workplace experience. For example, Frankfurt-headquartered Thing Technologies now offers a mobile app that is a 'digital key', enabling users to unlock smart locks and turnstiles using their mobile phone.

5 • Maturity Roadmap: Technologies For Smarter And Safer Workplaces



1

Address Critical Weakness In Your Workplace Technology

- Address weaknesses in remote building management capabilities.
- Accelerate the move from paper-based to digital for critical processes to empower remote teams
- Make workplaces processes more agile to respond to a constantly changing pandemic and economic situation

2

Prioritize Investments That Aid A Safe Return To The Workplace

- Use space management technology to track building usage levels.
- Help employees feel confident about return to the workplace by sharing new data such as workplace density, air-quality and cleaning frequency
- Communicate a simple message to staff on workplace safety protocols; aim for a single message

3

Bridge The Gap Between Remote And Office-Based Working

- Facilitate meetings based on physical and virtual presence
- Ensure that staff have access to consistent workplace technology in all locations: home, office and flexible workspaces
- Keep in mind the change management activities for new ways of working; it is critical to redesign processes around distributed teams

4

Increase Funding Prospects By Focusing Investments On High ROI Technologies

- Focus investments on technologies that bring a high ROI.
- Seek out opportunities for low capex technology investments
- Weed out investments in technology with a short shelf life; prioritize investments in solutions that are extensible in response to changing needs such as space tracking technology, IWMS or IoT platforms
- Position workplace technology investments in line with the CEO's digitization plans to gain positive senior-level attention





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