

IBM Global Real Estate: Optimizing space and safety for employees in the COVID-19 era

Business challenge

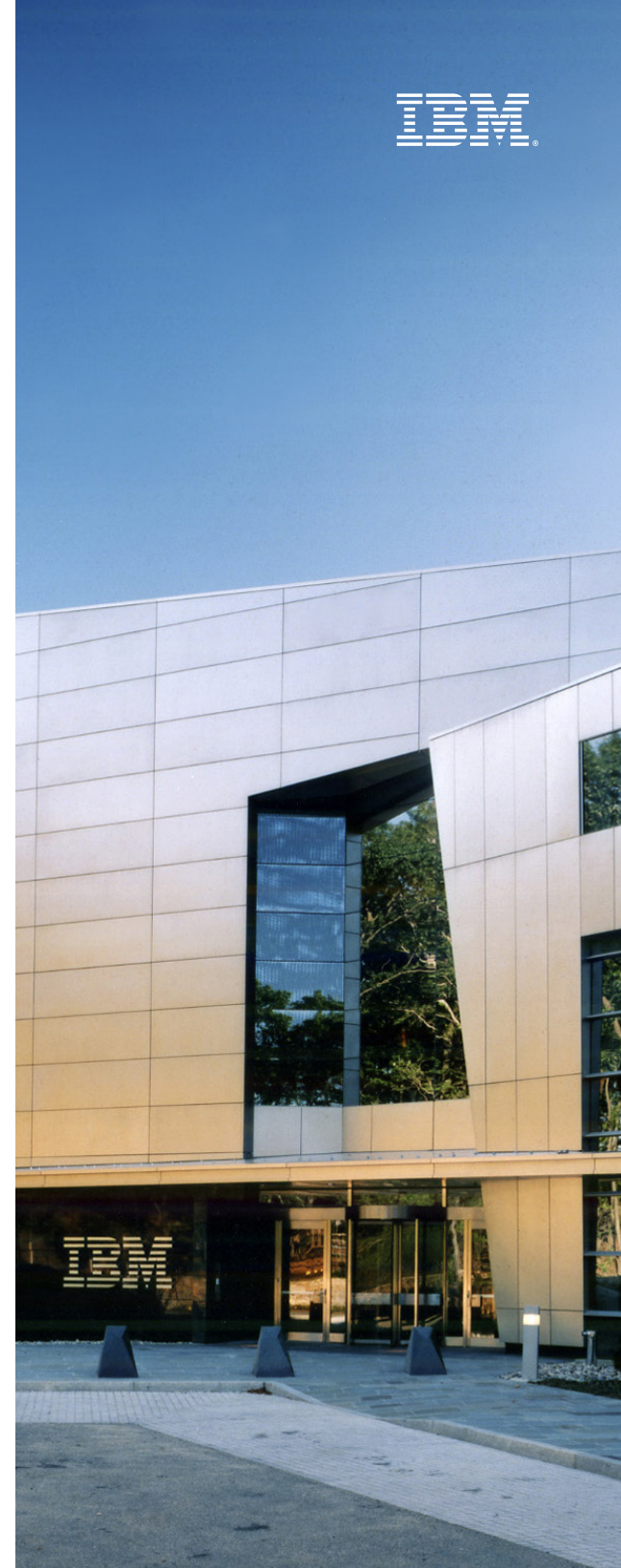
After 95% of IBM's employees shifted from the office to working from home because of the pandemic, the IBM Global Real Estate (GRE) team was ready with space utilization data to track usage and adapt to rapidly changing business needs.

Transformation

In March 2020, IBM – like many other businesses – moved its global, in-office employees in 1,300 locations to home-based offices. Yet the GRE group never lost sight of its main objective; employee well-being. That's why it relies on data and IBM® TRIRIGA® software, an intelligent real estate and facilities management solution, to power its decisions.

Results

- **Provides timely reporting on occupancy and usage** to manage compliance with company and local mandates
- **Controls costs** by delivering enterprise-wide visibility into all leases Supports social distancing and enhanced cleaning services with intelligent space configurations for returning workers
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The GRE team oversees approximately 1,300 office locations that cover 78 million square feet across 110 countries. With such a large, global footprint, the GRE group integrates new AI capabilities from the TRIRIGA solution to help overcome its challenge of creating a portfolio that addresses the needs of employees while helping to control costs and deliver the best value to the business.

Managing space in times of disruption

The GRE group manages 78 million square feet of space in 1,300 locations across the globe. The portfolio includes offices, labs, data and educational centers, and warehouses in more than 100 countries.

It's a very large, diverse footprint, and the GRE team provides the services needed, including space and facility management, lease administration, maintenance, and employee services and amenities.

Historically, the biggest challenge facing the GRE team was right-sizing its real estate portfolio and ensuring that IBM had the right amount of space for its employees, in the right places.

However, when COVID-19 hit in 2020, the GRE group had to adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. Suddenly, 95% of IBM's 430,000 employees went from corporate offices to their homes. The group needed fast access to critical enterprise-wide space utilization data to make this unprecedented move easier.

Understanding occupancy was a challenge, but the pandemic presented others, too: how to pinpoint and provide essential workers with the right personal protective equipment (PPE), how to manage compliance with numerous government mandates that varied by location, and how to get all that information quickly. In addition, the group needed visibility into its leases so that IBM could work with its landlords to control costs.

Fortunately, the team was a long-time TRIRIGA user. Before it implemented TRIRIGA, simple requests for data would take days or weeks, and there was no way of knowing if the information was reliable. Now, the team has an enterprise-wide view at its fingertips, improving data quality and reliability.

"IBM GRE needs to make strategic real estate decisions and design the future workplace," says Marianne Flores, Director, Global Real Estate Operations. "With TRIRIGA, we are able to dramatically reduce the time and effort required for data collection, data analysis and insights generation by 95% ... and the time-to-insights on occupancy from days to minutes."

As the team looks ahead, its next big challenge is planning for the return of IBM employees to the workplace. While the team has always focused on workplace experience, that experience will now center on occupant well-being.

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– Marianne Flores

The right solution for any circumstances

Even in the midst of global disruptions, the GRE team was ready with critical space utilization information. “We truly would have a really hard time navigating through this without TRIRIGA,” says Flores.

She notes that the solution was invaluable in helping the team make the critical decisions necessary for employees around the globe.

With TRIRIGA, the GRE team used wi-fi information to uncover more granular utilization data. Real estate is often the second highest cost for an organization, so under any circumstance, space utilization is a critical metric. In the midst of global disruption, that metric not only helps the team control costs, it also allowed it to identify if facilities were adhering to safety guidelines.

The technology also enables the group to drive more strategic discussions with its

business units and other key stakeholders. HR is one example, as IBM looks to reassure everyone that they’re coming back to a safe and healthy environment. “We want to give employees the comfort level that they’ll be safe,” says Flores.

The use of TRIRIGA also reduced the amount of technical proficiency required at a local level. “You don’t need boots on the ground to have the technical expertise because you can administer and manage it from a central location,” says Michael Domitrovits, Global Lead for Cognitive and IoT Solutions in Buildings at GRE.

Domitrovits says that even though the TRIRIGA solution is an IBM tool, the choice was predicated on selecting the best solution for managing the group’s business. “We did a market survey and determined what the best real estate management tools were available,” he says. “TRIRIGA brings a lot of them together. It works nicely with the other parts of the business, simplifies the process and helps you manage it at scale.”

Better cognition results in better decisions

Using the TRIRIGA solution, the GRE team can make quicker, more confident decisions. For example, having all of IBM’s leases in a centralized location will allow the organization to apply AI to gain a deeper understanding across the agreements, limiting the company’s exposure to risks, inefficiencies and losses—especially important during the pandemic.

Understanding what goes on in its buildings enables data-driven decision-making, and transforms how IBM operates, designs and manages its space. And as Flores notes, TRIRIGA’s ability to boost response time has been a lifesaver during the pandemic. “While my stress has been high, I’m sure it would have been that much higher if we didn’t have the ability to quickly respond to requests that we constantly get for data on our portfolio, our buildings, our space and utilization.”

“The best thing about TRIRIGA is the integration that it provides. It’s not just looking at space; it’s not just looking at our leases—I see the potential growing in the future for us as we deploy more globally. Regardless of the pandemic, it answers the questions, ‘do I have the right space, and am I paying for the space I need?’”

– Marianne Flores



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"It's no longer about mops and buckets," she says. "It's about using technology and how you manage your space." And while Flores knows it's also reassuring employees, now, "It is still going be about hearts and minds, but in a very different way." As the GRE team considers reopening facilities, she acknowledges that employees will want to know that they're coming back to a safe and healthy workplace.

Longer term, the GRE team will address changes to the workplace arising from the pandemic. For example, new space and floor plan designs will be needed to accommodate social distancing. In addition, there may be a need to balance the needs of employees who split time between the office and working from home. The team will also migrate from using data to understand utilization to applying AI and cognitive insights to drive longer-term space design.

Domitrovits says that by analyzing the data from the TRIRIGA solution, the GRE group learned more than just how to

manage IBM's space; it now has a better understanding of how space actually benefits people. Because, as he points out, there is a correlation between environment, productivity and, ultimately, a company's bottom line.

Flores notes that other businesses can benefit from using the TRIRIGA solution. "Our industry is changing so much to a more technology-driven one that it becomes essential to have a good platform for your data, your information, how you manage your business, and then have the ability to apply that AI and cognitive on top of that," she says. "It's essential to really managing your real estate portfolio efficiently and effectively.

Take the next step

To learn more about the IBM solution featured in this story, please contact your IBM representative or IBM Business Partner.



Marianne Flores
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Real Estate Operations
Integrated Solutions
Center of Excellence
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Solution component
IBM TRIRIGA Portfolio

