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PLUS Impact of COVID-19 on architecture & engineering firms and flexible workplace operators like Arcc Spaces

ISSN 2345-7066



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COPING WITH COVID-19 CRISIS

Architects, engineers, and construction professionals tell us how they are responding to the crisis.

The global building and construction industry has also been hit by the outbreak of COVID-19. Delays in construction projects and labour shortages are some of the many challenges that building and construction professionals are facing right now. At the heart of these challenges is addressing the safety of their staff and clients as well as ensuring that business continues with minimal disruption. In this issue, architects, engineers and designers tell us how they are responding to the COVID-19 situation and what kind of impact will it leave on their business and on the architecture industry as a whole.

Lambert Ma, Director, LWK + PARTNERS

Your firm's response to COVID-19

Our firm's response to the COVID-19 pandemic has been phased due to the constantly evolving nature of the situation. Flexibility is key to our approach by which we have adopted remote office in the first instance followed by flexi-hour work arrangement when the situation has become less volatile. Being a global practice, the timing and level of implementation vary from office to office depending on the office locale. But overall as a practice we have suspended business travels and encouraged using video conference as the prime means of communication with clients and collaborators in lieu of face to face meetings. We understand this is uncertain and anxious time for many people, it is therefore important to communicate and listen to the feedback and concerns of our staff in our response to the pandemic. It is also our duty as a practice to stay educated and proactive in implementing health and safety measures for the wellbeing of our staff in the workplace.

Changes in office working patterns

The call for social distancing as a means to hamper the spread of viral infections has affected how and where we work in response. Remote access and communication



Lambert Ma. Photo: © LWK + PARTNERS

capabilities are the two key areas of high demand in our effort to adapt remote office where we have to ramp up our facilities and support quickly. The ability to access to files and digital drawings is essential to staff working from home, which is achieved by cloud servers and private VPN network. The implementation of remote office has created a variety of disruptions to usual workflow. Certain staff have cited slowness and instability of internet services as a major drawback working from home. This results in their spending more time completing certain tasks. Remote office has also altered the normal teamwork dynamics in which an additional layer of communication such as phone calls and social network is needed to maintain the connectedness and synergy among team members.

Team leaders may find it necessary to adopt different managerial protocol in order to maintain the discipline and work pace of their teams. Video conferencing has been a popular alternate to face to face meetings. With the advent of more sophisticated telecommunication software, the results have been largely satisfactory to clients and collaborators alike. We feel that this is one possible area which will become habitual even after the decline of the pandemic.

Impact of COVID-19 on your business and the architecture industry as a whole

The outbreak has no doubt posed great challenges to the architectural industry as a whole but as a business

it has presented us a tremendous opportunity to rethink the accepted norm and traditional modes of working that may require a proper shake up. The disruptions caused by the outbreak does come with a positive aspect by which the transitioning of our business to a full-on cloud based and mobility enhanced infrastructure will inevitably be accelerated. Remote communication capabilities, cloud-based files storage and access and BIM applications are just a few ways that architectural offices should come to adapt and upgrade to meet the challenges of the modern era such as the pandemic crisis that we are now facing.

In an effort to stem the spread of the Coronavirus, mandated quarantine, banning of non-essential travels and closure of borders imposed by authorities around the globe have become commonplace. Border crossing especially in mainland China where we have a large number of projects has become a problem thus making restrictive working on remote projects in which meetings on location and site visits are required.

As a global practice with many offices and diverse teams, we have managed effectively to negate this "border" problem and thus render it "border-less" by relying on our local representatives in different offices to cater to the needs of being physically available to clients and projects. In moment of crisis such as this, it makes inter-office collaboration all more relevant and we believe we will see an increased effort in this to tackle the challenges ahead.