

Office v2021 - goodbye stainless steel, hello UV lights and apps

The coronavirus pandemic will have long-term effects on offices as the habits and routines developed of a century of work have vanished overnight.



Image source: [Pexels](#)

“While the office has an important future, the 2021 version is likely to be markedly different: materials, layouts and even how we interact with it will all evolve,” said Linda Trim, director at Giant Leap, one of South Africa’s largest workplace design specialists.

The office as a whole

Keeping the office as germ-free as possible will require material changes. Surfaces like unfinished wood, soft stone, and stainless steel can be breeding grounds for germs and bacteria and are on their way out.

“Offices might turn to furniture made of antimicrobial synthetic materials, plus metals like copper and brass for door handles and other high-touch surfaces.

“Other touchpoints, like keypads and control panels for lighting, climate control, and AV systems, will likely be replaced with

apps on employees' phones," Trim said.

Ultraviolet lights installed in ducts could purify air before it's blown out onto the office floor. Architects might even make tweaks like curving the place where the floor meets the wall. This can eliminate corners that collect filth and germs, a practice that some hospitals have been using for decades.

Larger-scale changes may also be coming.

Said Trim: "With more employees working remotely, some desk space could be converted into more thoughtfully designed open spaces. And companies will certainly seek out offices with more access to outdoor space both as a means of social distancing and a way of making them more inviting to employees whose alternative is to stay home."

From here on, the office will be purposely designed to be more than just a workplace: it will be a community place, a cultural place, a place of learning.

The workstation

For the sake of cleanliness, companies might have to reconsider the long-held tradition of assigned desks. Forcing employees to remove their belongings at the end of each day will allow for more effective cleanings that can't happen when desks are covered with clutter.

"An alternative to that approach is to keep the dedicated work station but implement a 'clean desk policy': Each employee gets a cubby or locker in which to store things at the end of each workday, and desk surfaces are cleaned each night. The employee is then the only one in that space. There won't be this introduction of another person sitting in that chair or touching those surfaces," Trim said.

Adding more separation between workstations - something being done out of necessity in the short term, might become a long-term trend meant to give employees more privacy.

The remote-friendly workplace

"We've long advocated for choice in the office: you can sit in a lounge space or small huddle room or the outdoor patio, depending on what allows you to do your best work."

Many more companies will update their office spaces so that the choice of workspace is not just a nice to have someday but it's rather a must have soon. These changes will also be a major factor in businesses being able to attract and retain top talent.

When we only come into the office a few days the quality at the office has to be exceptional. "It's no longer about having just a gorgeous front entrance. It is now about giving your team the best facilities and environs for a great sense of purpose and that are better by degrees than what they can get at home," Trim concluded.

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