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The Augmented Workplace: Features to Expect in the Post-COVID World

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Dr. Malini Saba, Founder & Chairman, Saba Group & Anannke Foundation

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Dr Malini Saba is a self-made Businesswomen and the founder & chairman of Saba Group & Anannke Foundation. Dr Malini Saba is an advocate for marginalized & with an aim to help 'one billion' people she launched 'Anannke Foundation' to serve as the umbrella organization for all of her philanthropic efforts and activities, which supports education, health, art and culture, livelihood generation and human rights. Dr Malini Saba is also an ardent philanthropist, psychologist, single Mother, fitness enthusiast, author, passionate culinarian, human & social rights activist and a global advocate for women and girls.

When we think about sharing office spaces and desks, the post pandemic mind recoils, aghast at the physical proximity we once shared with our teammates and colleagues. However, collaboration and communication, and therefore, productivity was at its peak.

With the roll out of vaccines, we are set to step bravely into the new world, a post pandemic world where we try to emulate the era gone by but in a safe as well as secure manner.

However, the pandemic inspired workplace trend and technology will continue to rule the roost as it has brought up a fundamental change in the way we work. From enabling remote working to cross platform connection, augmented workplaces, though picked up pace during the restrictions, will continue to be a preferred choice for many.

Here are some of the new and improved augmented workplace features you can expect when you get back to office.

Building Information Management (BIM)

The current digital landscape gives way to virtual reality that enables people to view the world and its elements from the safety and comfort of their private spaces. Building Information Management (BIM) is one such innovation that will help office and business owners create a virtual landscape of their workspaces for an effective representation as well as safety for their employees. For instance, a virtual walkthrough allows stakeholders to tweak their office design spaces more effectively in order to cater to emergency situations and have the flexibility to change it in case of last minute agendas (we have had a lot of those during the pandemic). The BIM allows designers to integrate technologies like IoT to make the office space more up to date and big data that can help craft work-life experiences.

Advanced Occupancy Planning

As mentioned, forethought and pre-planning is very important in the post pandemic world. When it comes to the back to office scenario, it is important to note that old space planning has no room in the post-pandemic world. Social distancing will continue to be a non-negotiable clause and design spaces have to accommodate that. One of the prime examples of an augmented workplace is the one linked to sensor technology that allows office-goers to determine their desks without entering the specific rooms. This reduces the need for interaction.

This sensor technology is also helpful for space designers and business planners to understand how they can optimize their workspace effectively in case of a renewed work from home policy in the light of the pandemic. Sensor technology can create meaningful data that can help companies take appropriate measures to ensure social distancing.

Ventilation and Air Filtration System

It has been mandated by WHO and governments to maintain a premise with maximum natural light and ventilation. This calls for an enhanced filtration system. HVAC systems are equipped to adapt to the new normal, ensuring that harmful and stale air is constantly replaced with a fresh supply which can help reduce the chances of transmission. The UV and HEPA (high-efficiency particulate air) filtration systems will be an important part of the physical workspace and would require the insight of an engineer to make it more robust and viable to cater to the current tall demands.

Voice Control

We are all by now, used to commanding Alexa and Google to regulate our home lights, sound and other electronic functioning. The pandemic and the 'no-touch' regulations will be giving a boost to voice-controlled office spaces as well.

High congregation areas like meeting rooms and kitchens that have a constant population influx will see the likes of voice controlled layout that will enable connectivity but without the touch.

Coffee makers in the kitchen and screen technology or dial-ups in the meeting rooms can be easily regulated by voice-control and help make a touch-free zone for all workers.

A little further into the future and the voice-controlled devices would prove helpful for scheduling meetings, maintenance tasks and so much more to enhance productivity. We are already doing that on a personal level with our smartphones, but the time is not far when office spaces leverage the technology to streamline their redundant tasks as well.

Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning for Maintenance Tasks

Maintenance is a non-negotiable aspect of any space, whether a workspace or home. In the post pandemic world, having a functioning workspace will usually comprise enhanced air filtration systems, maintenance infrastructure and hygiene parameters, in addition to the usual provisions.

AI and Ml technology can help office spaces be on top of their maintenance schedule and also predict further maladies, helping the operations task force aid the problem in real-time. Having a maintenance alert system in place will ensure utmost hygiene as well as safety, being in line with the stringent cleanliness rules in the post-pandemic world.

Smart Spaces

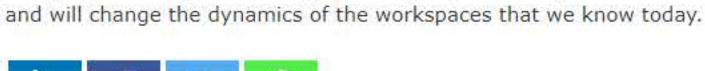Last but not the least, smart spaces will be an integral part of the post-pandemic office culture. As stated by their 'smartness', these workspaces will be controlled by smart devices, helping workers gather information of every space and an overview of the layout.

It will also allow viewers to check the social distancing protocols (or lack thereof), and also keep an eye out for the ventilation and temperature check to maintain an optimum work environment. This will reduce unnecessary contact and prove to be very helpful in the post pandemic dynamics.

Earlier, these technologies were often considered utopian or classified into the luxury category. However, with changing times, they are rising to the ranks of daily essentials and will change the dynamics of the workspaces that we know today.