As we are slowly marching towards a potential lift of the lockdown on May, India Inc is poised to change the way we work, drastically. Although most of the strategies will depend on the severity of the socioeconomic shock, the buoyancy of the corporate world and the initiatives and guidelines the government will put forward. One of the assertions is, that all of us will be living in a different world once the pandemic is contained or nearly contained. When the lockdown was announced, the Indian government issued a notice wherein all organizations were to provide its employees with work from home options. This was to ensure containment of the pandemic while trying to make social distancing a habit amongst us Indians. As we are limping back to normalcy, social distancing is going to be the new norm and a mandatory spec in all office spaces until the outbreak is contained. Sooner or later known for -largest footprints of office spaces & employees in huge numbers, India Inc. will need to make physical, behavioral and psychological changes to ensure its endurance, though it is very early to assess the weightage of changes. Its application requires buy-in from stake holders, real estate decision makers and most importantly the users.

From a Workplace Design consultant’s perspective, here is a take on the situation and what changes would be good to see in India Inc.

- Whilst social distancing is going to be the new normal, it may be effective to take due advantage from wearable devices that record and analyze our daily routines, route maps and life patterns; our workplaces could integrate our personal technology to track movements to ensure zero crowding at workplace while assessing one’s emotions and productivity.

- Wellness has been of paramount importance as we approached this pandemic completely bewildered. Plenty of offices-initiated steps to ensure more social hygiene modes, such as bring on hand sanitization points from reception through dining and washrooms, UVGI filters in HVAC systems and standalone air filter etc. Post Covid-19 wellness would have a renewed focus, in creating safe and healthy spaces, adopting wellness principles. Employers must challenge their facilities team for new policies and protocols to have these spaces consistently maintained.

- Touch free faucets and soap dispensers are no longer considered as a “must-to-value engineering fad.” We may need to push the envelope further to smart variations like autonomous lifts, vending machines, healthcare grade material finishes, replacing biometric readers with RFID, to name a few.

- Even before the onset of COVID-19, choice seating had been a prevalent area of design – ample choices of workspace settings as opposed to sea of workstations were crafted to ensure efficient and healthy working. In the current scenario, there is more relevance and practicality, as larger firms who always had the worry of – more seat on the floor – may take this opportunity to have large number of seats replaced with more types or work points.

Of the many things that the lock down has taught us; some of us who always spent more time at our workplace than at home,
were forced to work from home, realizing the fact that most of our heads-down-tasks can be achieved from the comfort of our home, a step further, one is able to seamlessly connect with peers over multiple collaboration tools with zero to no impact on daily tasks. Strange as it sounds Dr Maltz’s still debatable observation of minimum 21 days habit forming may come to play, a large workforce of India Inc. may even get really comfortable staying at home and working, let alone the non-negotiable benefit of “zero commute in traffic jams”. Chances are high that the corporates may revisit their footprint considering these thoughts and really think, “what’s required?”

Office spaces will still prevail, but there is a potential to change the typical thought process from creating “large factory floors” to focus on some of these interesting trends:

- The office spaces are going to be a center of experience than square foot allocation for employees. Here we are looking at quality vs. quantity.

- Instead of a place to sit and work with continuous electricity and high-speed internet, now a potential employee would be taking the pain to commute to work for experiencing camaraderie, the organizational values, the business imperatives/drive which may take a backseat at home. Does the current architecture of the office space reflect the same? Time to ponder.

- More and more employees would come to the office spaces only to identify with the brand, the culture and feel the tribe they belong to. Like the “choice of work settings” you are providing in workplace, the work from home must be considered as an extension of those settings. Indeed, some of the large firms are already offering their employees a flexible work option.

Some silver lining of COVID19 isolations are, most of the work from home first timers are enjoying a work life balance, subject matter experts (SMEs) are getting more time to put their heads together to look at holistic ways to improve built spaces, corporates and occupiers have taken a pause to reprioritize and re-align their real estate strategies, pollution levels across cities have dropped down to minima’s, solid waste from cities have reduced. Strange as it sounds, there will be a different world post COVID19 and as always, we HUMANS will embrace it perhaps more profoundly. Should you need more information on wellness concepts or MEP provisions we are establishing across MMoser offices to deal with COVID19 please feel free to reach out to me @ Abironim@mmoser.com