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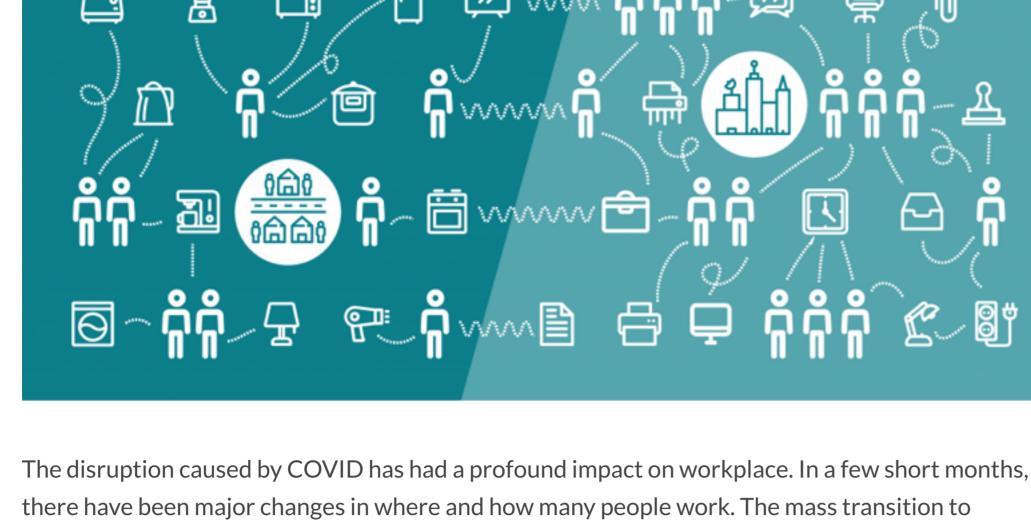
**WORK DESIGN MAGAZINE** EXPLORING IDEAS THAT SHAPE THE PLACES WE WORK

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## Workplace Interrupted: People, Technology, And Change by Amy Rosen and Matt Ezold

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questioned. We should first reconnect with the purpose of the workplace: to connect and support people in collaborative work. Before reentering the physical office, it's necessary to think through the benefits of doing so in the context of the COVID moment. Returning to a socially-distant workplace may not measurably improve employee experience, collaboration or performance over continuing to telework. The

telework has been challenging for many, but the impulse to go back to "normal" should be

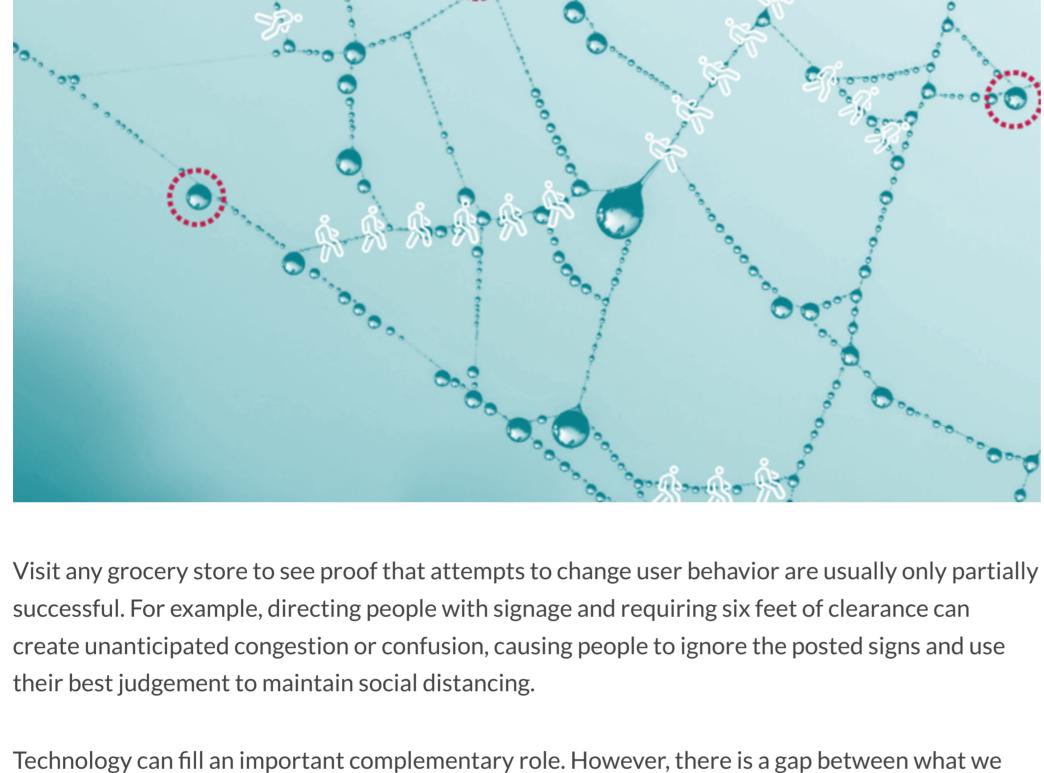
measures necessary to limit viral transmission could hurt company culture or intrude upon employee privacy. We have just witnessed the sudden emergence of something that looks much more like the future of work most of us imagined. Previously, large-scale telework was challenging for some employers to accept. Some feared a drop in employee efficacy or an important means of supporting the

culture and brand of an organization. Being "open-for-business" suddenly means being fully

distributed, and it is now clear that many more people could have been teleworking than did—they are doing it right now. Teams worldwide are learning how a distributed workforce can maintain or even improve culture, community, health, and organizational performance. Below, we explore three key questions about the current telework moment: 1. How can technology support workplaces that are both safe and high-performance? 2. Will this shift last, and should we want it to?

Technology in Service of Health

3. What can we learn about navigating disruption and change?



products and tools intended to support these efforts, including fine-tuning of AI and machine learning-based approaches. Contact Tracing and Al Platforms When paired with widely-available cameras and sensors, AI can create a virtual detection mesh

around and throughout a workplace. By merging building and user location data, such systems can

measures. While the effectiveness of such systems in protecting wellness is not yet clear, there will

likely be much more data available soon. Until now, due to a lack of interoperability standards and

low demand, most of these integrated deployments have been unique and proprietary. Expect that

enable building-wide contact tracing while also measuring the impact of social distancing

to change as early adopters drive standardization and demonstrate long-term benefits.

activity retroactively. As a result, it will be most effective when paired with programs that

encourage self-assessment outside of the workplace and offer increased sick time so that people

enough for new technology to become available. Over the next 6-12 months, expect an explosion in

can do and what we should do. The need to limit viral spread will persist for some time—long

At this time, we recommend that businesses make use of contact tracing platforms which are under development at the state or federal level rather than deploying their own. In addition to easing adoption, this will also alleviate some user privacy concerns that might cause people to choose outof-office work to avoid being tracked by an employer. It should be noted that contract tracing is not a complete solution. It can only capture a slice of user

Location data is another powerful tool. However, attempting to influence user behavior with location tracking technologies may have negative consequences. Users may be stigmatized as safety risks. We recommend tracking space usage instead of staff location or safety compliance (face mask detection, etc.); this is also more easily accomplished using existing building systems..

Working in shifts may allow for reductions in occupancy. However, it may require moving to

## unassigned desking so that teams can spread out as needed. This, in turn, requires an investment in booking systems to manage the dynamic assignment of seating. Look for platforms that have the

can choose to self-isolate when they suspect they may be ill.

Inform vs Enforce with Workplace Management Systems

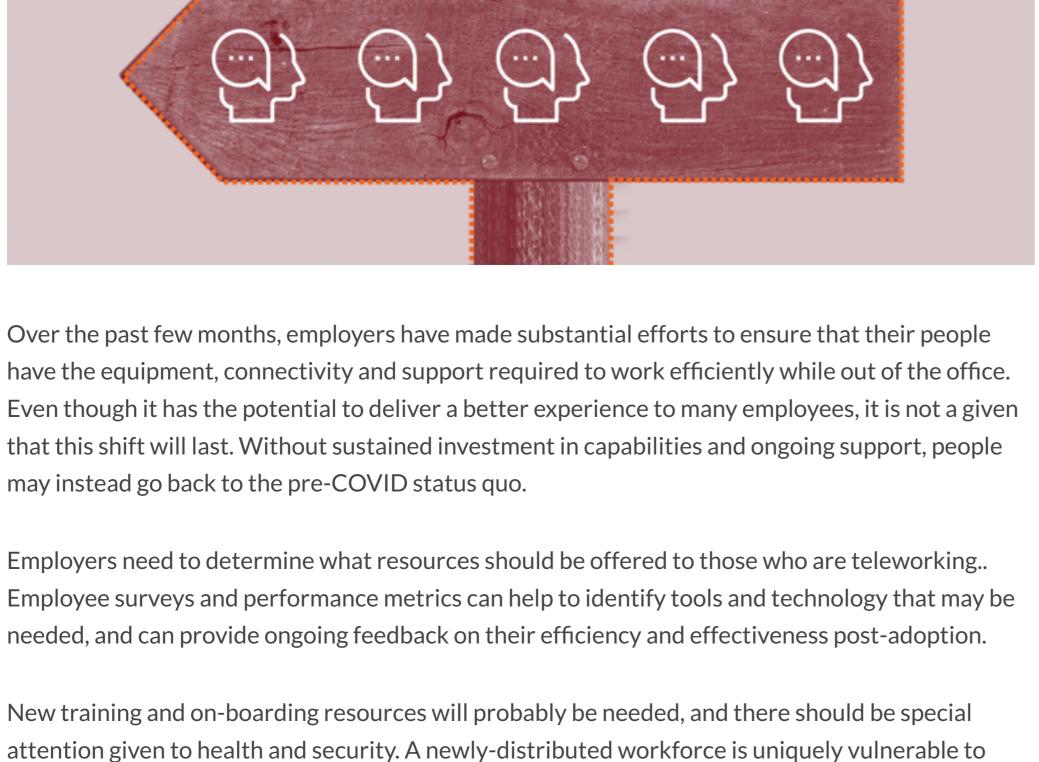
ability to incorporate distancing into allocations and that combine space management with team management. For example, room scheduling platform Robin has repurposed its interactive office map platform to include social distancing, and it also offers the ability to maintain. In a workplace focused on distance and not capacity, expect users to make last minute changes.

Spaces may be unoccupied but booked, or vice versa. Because of this, user booking information

hot-spots. Instead, consider using occupancy information already provided by most modern

should not be considered a reliable means by which to create cleaning schedules or map occupancy

lighting platforms, which provide a more reliable indicator of occupancy. Look to your existing platforms and providers for solutions that leverage systems already in place. For example, consider repurposing room scheduling occupancy indicators to indicate if cleaning has been completed since last use. By leveraging the RFID reader built into many room scheduling panels, cleaning crews would be able to reset room "clean" status as they go. Change That's Made to Stick



throughout the day and breaks from screen time, which will help reduce the potential for longterm negative impacts. Employers must eliminate the bias against telework that has existed to this point. Previously, those who were not physically present might miss out on important conversations or opportunities. Over the long term, the consequences of this disconnect can be significant for the individual and the

organization. Around this, we are hopeful; as a larger proportion of a company's people choose to

companies that navigate this transition effectively will be those who are learning how to transmit

A question of equity arises around who should come to the office. COVID poses a disproportionate

telework, there is a natural incentive to invest in making it as effective as colocated work. The

culture and social connection digitally, and who give distributed workers a level of power and

connection comparable to their in-office colleagues.

phishing and other malicious digital activity. Best practices around information security should be

shared frequently. In support of employee heath, it's important to encourage movement

risk to certain populations, and employers must address how and when at-risk individuals might need to come in. Changes in operations and support may be necessary to "level the playing field" and avoid placing at-risk populations in harm's way. For instance, vulnerable employees could return simultaneously while remaining isolated from teams with which they may not need to interact. Isolating individuals within the physical workplace may undermine the value of colocation. If

individual desks are fully isolated, it may be difficult for people to collaborate in the usual ways.

Generally, allocating spaces based on teams and taking the necessary steps to ensure a cleaner

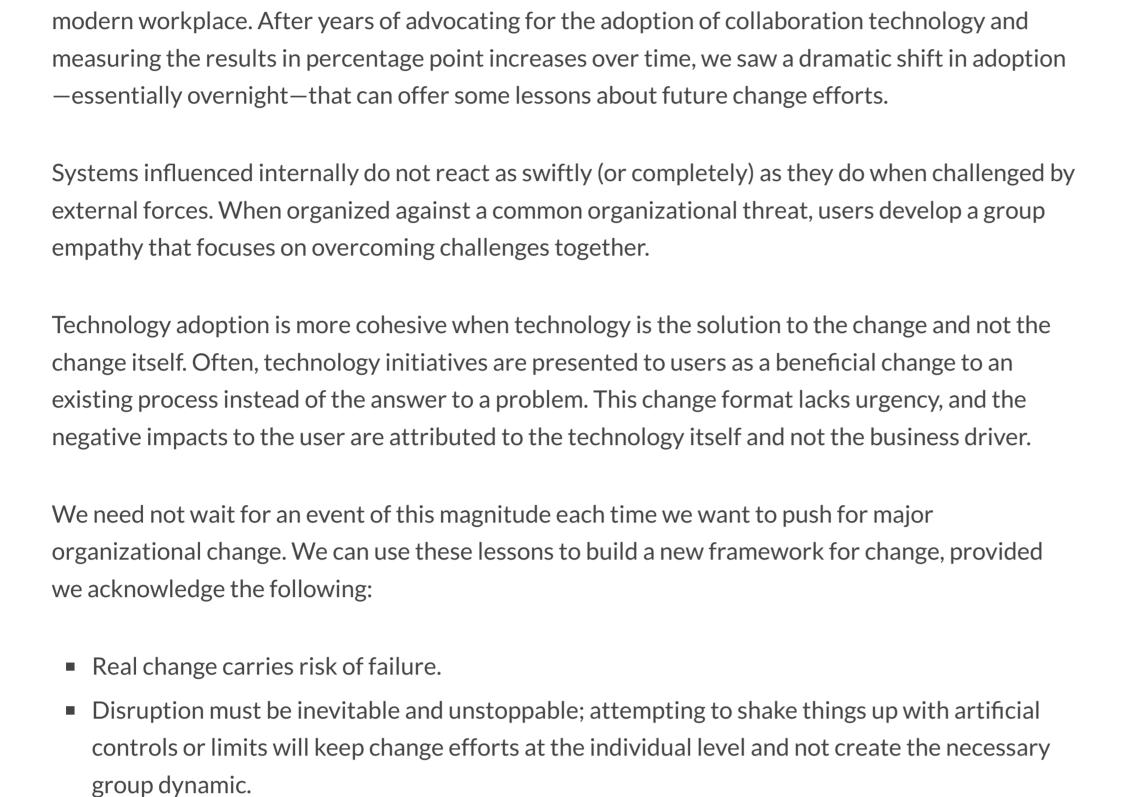
environment will result in more safety overall; but we must recognize that users can become upset

if restrictions are to be placed on their time, amenity usage and work areas. These changes must be

# This moment has ignited the most successful technology adoption program in the history of the

handled with care.

Disruption as Change Agent



Change may not go as envisioned. Avoid over-controlling the response. As members of the

organization determine what they value—which is a critical part of disruption-fueled change—

• Disruption can't be localized; it must be system-wide. For disruption to create lasting change, it

has to impact all facets of business and be complete enough to wipe away existing structures,

We have now seen that structural and policy barriers to change can be removed with the right

in the office. More of our shared assumptions about the conditions required for effective work

motivation. The COVID moment has called into question the assumption that work must be done

There is no better time for a rethink of organizational priorities. Disruption can be a powerful change agent when it rallies a workforce to respond to challenges. This can drive the evolution of both technology and organizations. When teams change in response to challenging times, they must examine their values. The result of this process is value-driven innovation.

the effort must be responsive.

at least temporarily.

must now be tested.

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workplace disruption

Disruption Fosters Triage

emphasis on wellness and comfort to a global rethink of where work can be performed, it is clear that the impact of this crisis does offer some silver linings. In order to ensure progress and resilience moving forward, we must emphasize that disruption can be a powerful force for change.

From opportunities to embrace new technologies in support of workplace security to renewed

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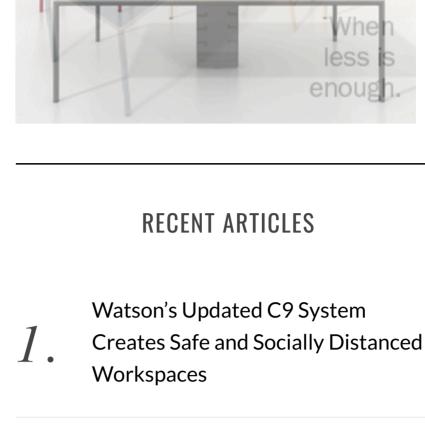
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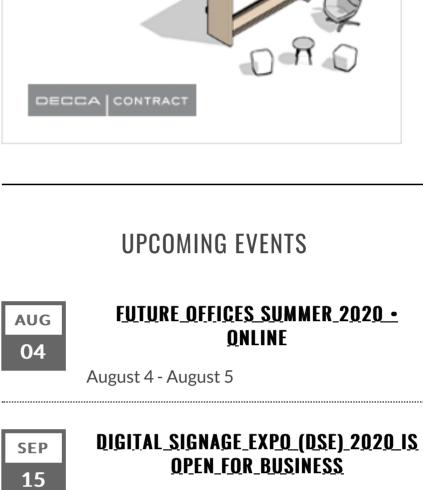
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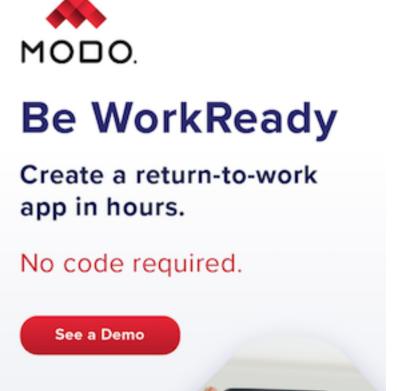
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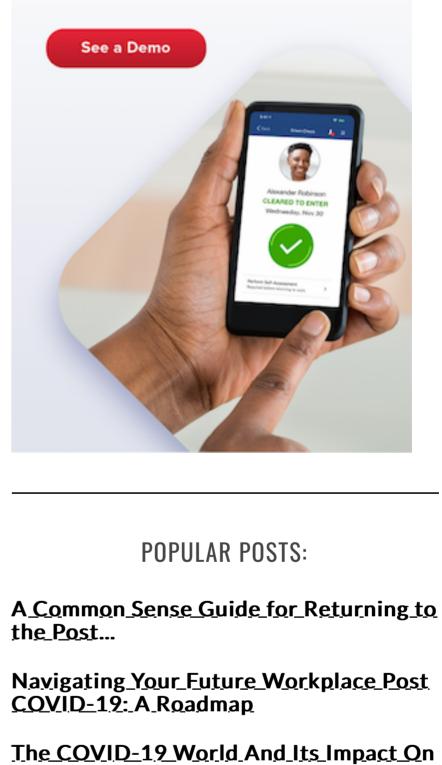
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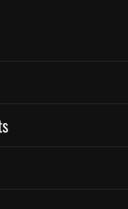
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