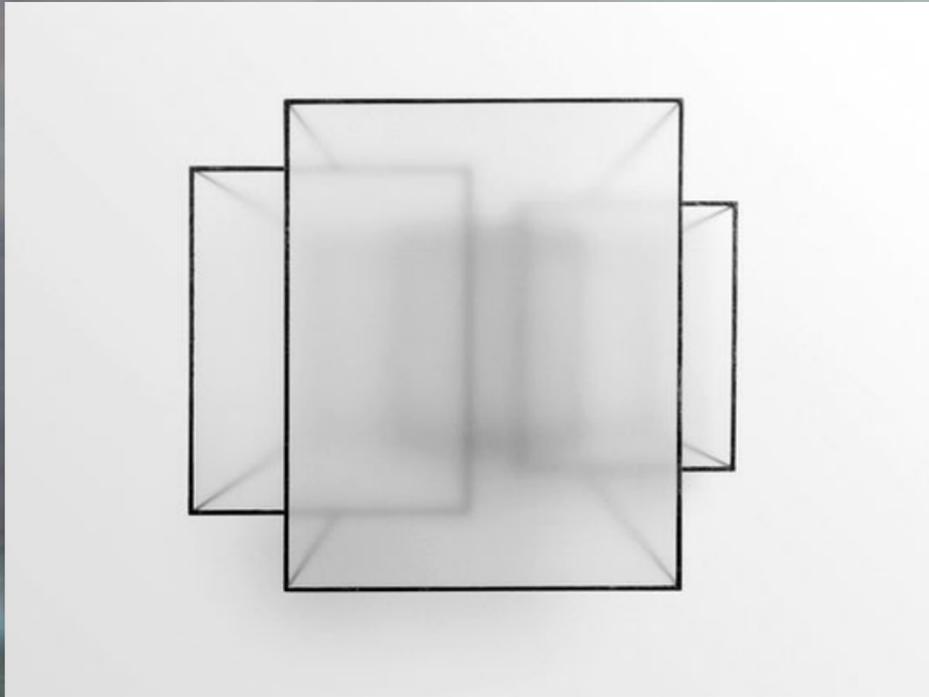




Your Social Way of Working



Changes to the office environment are picking up the pace now!

Since we're still obliged to work from home but are entering a period of slightly relaxed COVID-19 measures now – it's the perfect opportunity to critically assess how our offices are run. However, there's a powerful reflex to slip back into old habits. And that's why it's crucial that we identify and capture the benefits we enjoy today to encourage the sustainable development of office work. The current measures have resulted in limited office occupancy, with 20 to 50% of the offices unable to be used. To systematically implement a higher percentage of teleworking, the office layout and activities will be undergoing some fundamental changes.

Your office will experience a new way of working. What does that mean?

The consultation and strategy for working under COVID-19 measures are based on the 'CONIX RDBM Office Recommendations' participatory project, in which we assist organisations with transitioning to their new way of working. Our approach leads to new insights on how your business is run, determined on the basis of **people**, the **building** and **behaviour**. We want to help you on your way to a more sustainable future for your office environment!

The future?

The trend towards digitisation and different ways of working has been underway for some time now. Today, that process is rapidly gaining momentum and is revealing all kinds of interesting new solutions. It's the perfect time to tailor them to your company and translate them into a long-term vision.

Due to the large-scale impact, you'll see changes and developments in every field occurring that would have seemed impossible in the past. The examples and solutions for your office also, or primarily, stem

from other trade sectors. For instance, consider how restaurants and coffee bars have solved their catering issues, how the education sector is providing instructions and teaching classes now, how Facility Management is tackling hygiene and maintenance, etc.

EXP Realty is a U.S.-Canadian real estate agency that decided to develop a virtual digital office environment around 2 to 3 years ago, due to financial uncertainties in the real estate market. Today, they've got the advantage. The daily operation of their office environment remains uninterrupted by the crisis. This example proves that it's possible to push boundaries and that a brighter future is just around the corner!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EWM8WwXP-HQ>

We keep a close eye on current developments and start every consultation by discussing the pros and cons of the new, different ways of working. We look past the horizon and explain best practices and bad experiences.

Communication and staying up to date

In-house and external communication is more important now than ever. Regularly inquire about the state of affairs and current measures and keep employees involved. An implementable protocol ensures that employees stick to the required agreements more consistently and effectively and confront one another when that isn't the case. It's essential that your employees and customers feel confident that the working environment is safe.

Our goal is to create a 'safe' working environment that encourages teamwork, fosters the use of new technologies, innovates, and that accommodates everyone regardless of their personal preferences or personality.

People



© Fausto Melotti

Today is a unique opportunity to ask your employees about the pros and cons of mandatory teleworking and to find out about how they feel connected to your organisation.

Why, exactly, do we work in offices? Who needs to work in an office environment most? Is the point teamwork or just sharing the same workspace? Is it about coaching or control? For some, working from home isn't possible from a practical perspective, while for others, their personal social circumstances make it infeasible.

The solutions to these issues aren't the same anymore, and relying on old, ready-made solutions can lead to poorer employee satisfaction and loss of productivity.

Identify future opportunities and invest in the benefits of 'virtual work'.

- Schedule team meetings more often and organise coffee breaks in smaller groups.
- Meet in a virtual lobby 10 minutes before an external meeting and make time to chat afterwards.
- Ensure that employees have what they need at their home 'office' and that they can work ergonomically.
- Surprise employees with a (family) home office lunch once in a while.
- Update employees about the post-corona outlook.
- ...

Several different measures will be tested and fine-tuned in the coming period, and it's essential that the return to the office be carefully organised. Try to prevent feelings of exclusion and disappointment among your employees. Strategic decisions about the office layout, group size, phased return or reorganisation should be made in consultation with Human Resources. They're aware of employee potential, their contribution to the company and their personal/private circumstances.

The office layout can be revised based on these strategic decisions and a weekly schedule can be implemented. It remains important to determine who and why someone should be allowed to work at the office. It seems obvious that it's about teamwork, but the practice still tends to focus on the individual needs of the employee, regardless of their position or degree of independence. An example: 'Work that requires a high degree of concentration is better done at home.' This statement simply doesn't make sense for people with young children.

Who will work at the office? What can be shared? Which work is still being carried out at your office and why? These are all questions that will help you arrive at a workable scenario.

Assessing employee risk profiles for your organisation can be a decisive factor in the use of the office. Naturally, this requires careful consideration to prevent discrimination and ensure that privacy is respected.



Behaviour



1 Run II, 2020, Antony Gormley
2 Standing matter xvii, 2008, Antony Gormley

Adapting behaviour is an essential task in the return to office life. To ensure uniform application of the measures and regulations, signage and posters with clear pictogrammes are essential. Technical and software-related solutions to guide employees and assist customers are also needed, and dynamic office planning tools can help assign workstations based on social distancing regulations. That will help prevent unwanted situations and disappointment.

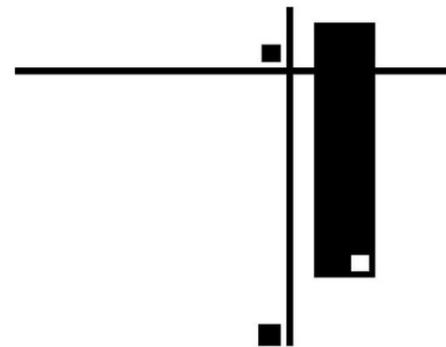
A clear office circulation plan should be implemented, using arrows where needed. The fact that a distance of 1.5 metres has to be observed at all times isn't a given and requires deliberate focus and effort.

The mandatory 1.5-metre distance rule can be successfully respected by rearranging furniture or cordoning off certain areas.

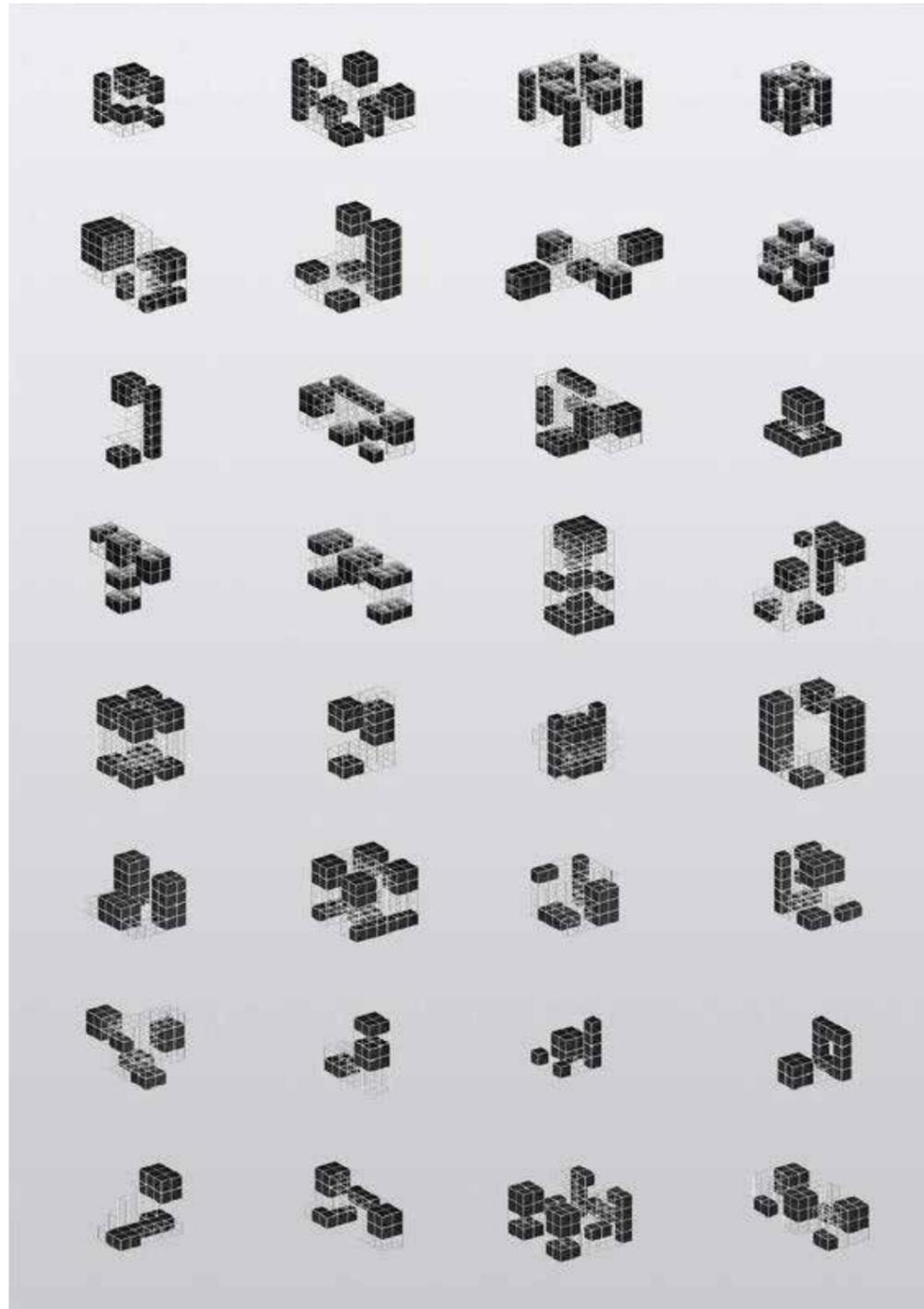
Where individual workstations have been assigned, the office layout can be adjusted to allow certain employees to continue working in the office together. Solutions involving 'sneeze screens' between desks remain awkward, but they're a great way to maximise office occupancy.

Now that we've gotten used to digital meetings and discussions, it's better that these remain digital for the time being. However, to boost the chances of success, it's essential to facilitate and provide digital meeting resources and training. Meeting room layout should mirror the office layout, provided that it satisfies the same ergonomic principles applicable to the office.

Switching off the reflex to slip back into old habits is no easy task. After all, employees have worked this way for years, and eight weeks isn't long enough to effect permanent change. To make the changes sustainable, you'll have to coach and assist the desired change with a 'nudge' here and there.



Building



The layout and maintenance of workstations affect the safety of the working environment. Rearranging the layout and organisational adjustments are necessary.

So, how do you create a safe workplace?

Contact surfaces

The risk of SARS-CoV-2 virus (leading to COVID-19) transmission via contact surfaces is extremely high. For that reason, ensure:

- a protocol that includes practical guidelines for informed and safe use
- provision of protection and disinfection resources
- hygienic use of door handles and knobs, cups, plates, keyboards, sanitary facilities, hand towels, hand dryers, etc.

1.5 m social distance

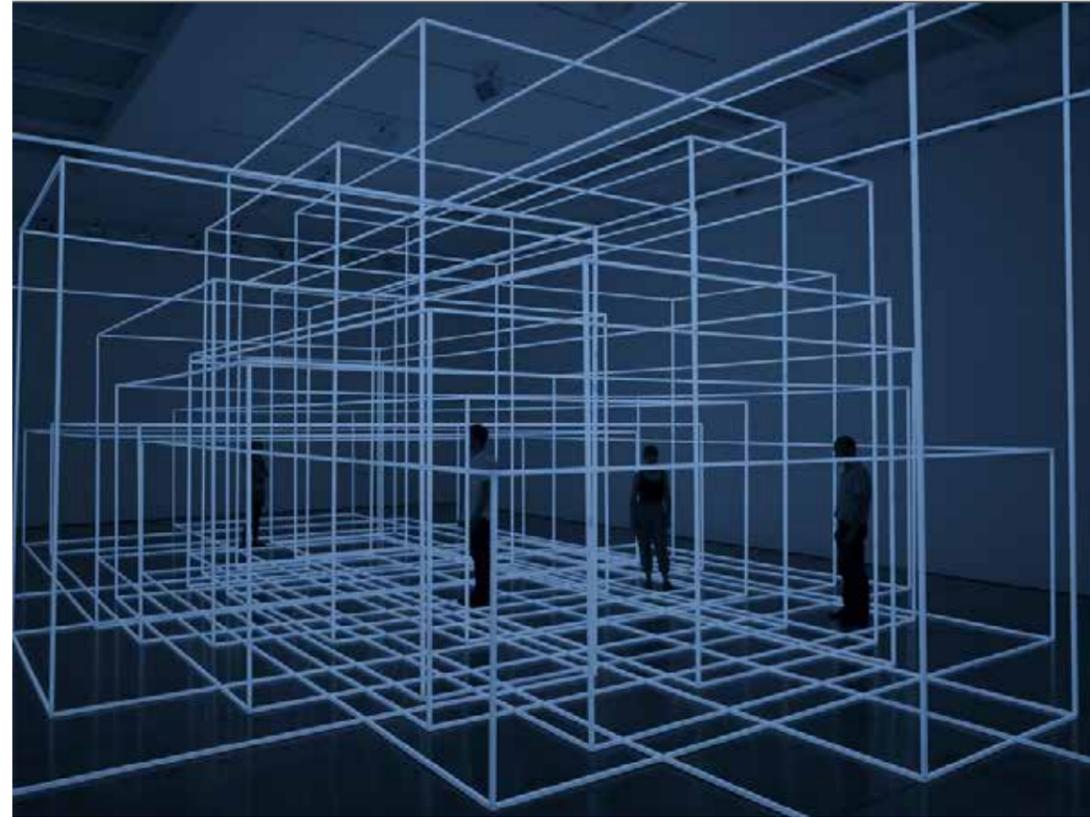
This applies throughout the working day, from the moment you leave home:

- commuting (by public transport, bike sharing, bike, car, on foot, etc.)
- route (front door, stairs/lift, entrance rooms, corridors, etc.)
- workstation (desk workstation with computer and printer, etc.)
- meeting rooms (reception desk, beverage provision, multimedia control, etc.)
- sanitary facilities (route and entrance rooms, etc.)
- canteen/dining room (seating, plates/cutlery, beverages, microwave, etc.)

Ventilation and cooling systems

It's clear that the devices used play a role in the potential spread of the virus, which is why they need to be properly studied. It seems obvious that systems intended for collective use pose a greater risk than individual units.

For that reason, ensure a cleaning plan that matches the office's planned use and carry out inspections and checks on HVAC installations.



Breathingroom II, 2010, Antony Gormley

Solution

Solutions have to be sustainable, which is why CONIX RDBM signed the 'Belgian Architects Declare Climate and Biodiversity Emergency' charter. This commits us to playing an active role in the fight against climate change. We are committed to ensuring that architecture and urban development have a positive impact on our living and working environments. We partner with our customers to strive towards a future system that is self-sufficient and always innovating. When it comes to making work possible during and after the coronavirus measures, it's the synergy between people, behaviour and the building that will make the difference.

A robust vision of the future will give your employees clarity and boost their confidence in your organisation. Monitoring compliance with the measures, reinforcing the common goal through repetition, solving practical objections and adapting to the new situation ensure lasting innovation and optimisation of the working environment.

Key points to remember:

- Build trust.
- Be aware of and recognise insecurities and potential fears employees might have about returning to the office.
- Listen and be transparent.
- Keep track of how well the new working environment is running.
- Make sure that employees feel safe and welcome.

We believe in creating added value for the future through:

- a better 'work-life balance';
- lower office costs by optimizing and reviewing housing costs
- benefiting from multiple, flexible options: mobility and office;
- digitising meetings, training and courses;
- making the world healthier by reducing travel.

We believe that change is an ongoing process and that flexibility is the key to a sustainable future.

Literature

Authors:**Mark Willems, Gisèle Vidts en Lien Bonte****Mark Willems – advisor / senior project architect**

Since starting his career in 1996, Mark has worked for 15 years at CONIX RDBM Architects as an Advisor – Architect. His graduation project led his professor to note that “Mark honours the word ‘human’”; the ‘human’ continues to be a constant presence in all his projects. By approaching assignments from the perspectives of usability and well-being, Mark finds added value for the buildings, spaces, organisations and their users. He characteristically questions demand and searches for the most appropriate answers. In his role with CONIX RDBM Advisors, Mark has led many companies, organisations and governments to ‘their’ new way of working. With a systematic and analytical approach in an open dialogue, chance opportunities have become the foundation for the solutions. As a versatile Advisor – Architect, he has extensive experience guiding projects in multi-disciplinary teams and working in co-creation teams to pursue the best result. “Fortunately, working in an office has been given a critical examination and this has created an opportunity to visualise a different future,” says Mark. Is the office still necessary? How do you keep workers connected with your company culture. Is your company ready for Your Social Way of Working?

**Gisèle Vidts – Marketing Manager**

Gisèle heeft een masterdiploma in de Gisèle has a master's degree in Communication Sciences from the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (1991). Her strengths lie in her straightforward approach to communication strategies. Connecting communication and the right mix of communication channels comes naturally to her. She believes in open communication and

monitoring to ensure well-structured, high-content written texts. She enriches her conceptual thinking in her professional area with information from other sectors. She writes ‘to-the-point’ and strips her texts back to absolute purity; this purity of communication, the clear message and contagious enthusiasm are the trademarks of her work. As well as this, she is fascinated by group dynamics and human behaviour in the work environment. This has prompted her to follow a number of coaching courses. From this connection with people, she facilitates internal work processes and guides the group.

**Lien Bonte – concept designer**

In our design studio, InDepth, concept designer and graphic designer Lien puts concept and storytelling first. She emphasises the power of the image in a broader context and in all its different layers. Educated in graphic design at the LUCA School of Arts in Ghent, she focused on typography/book design/conceptual thinking. She further specialised in ‘Workplace Typography’ at the Instituto Superiore per le Industrie Artistiche (Higher Institute for Artistic Industries) at Urbino, Italy. Her role as an assistant at the Galerie Tatjana Pieters gave her valuable experience in the art world. As a statement, Lien includes artistic elements in all her concepts. She brings them together in an aesthetic and functional manner. This cross-pollination results in total concepts with strong identities.



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