

DESIGN & HEALTH

people who are commuting. “The use of technology is making some buildings more obsolete than others,” Badham says. “If your building can’t deal with the technological requirements of health in the workplace, it’s going to be obsolete.”

And developers are thinking about life beyond COVID-19. Nuno Fernandes, design director for EMEA at Tétris, the fit-out specialist, says sustainability was a large factor in how they thought about re-designing space for returning businesses and their employees.

“That might not sound like an immediate concern, but we thought it would be easy to put up Plexiglas everywhere, but it wouldn’t be sustainable,” he says. “We would rather come up with solutions that will last, so our approach was to find solutions that were good practice for our clients and would remain in place even after the threat of

contagion was gone.”

Instead of plexiglass, the firm is using sustainable screens and acoustic panels to create separation. “Rather than plexiglass, we use planter boxes with plants that purify the air,” says Fernandes.

Hot desking, which had become a predominant feature during the past decade, is off the table. “Hot desking is no longer an option for hygiene reasons, and there are questions if it’s something that will continue happening in the future,” he says.

“Right now you can hot desk, but only for the whole day and after that the surfaces will be sanitised.”

Above all, office providers are focused on keeping employees healthy. “We have invested in thermal imaging cameras across our portfolio so our customers and staff can measure their temperature as they enter our buildings,” says Jonathan

Weinbrenn, managing director of BESpoke, the flex space offering for large corporate occupiers. “We have also brought in a huge range of sanitisation measures as well, deploying fogging machines, similar to those used by the NHS and transport networks.”

Providers agree on one thing: once all these initiatives are in place, it will be harder to go back. Even after the COVID-19 pandemic is over, occupiers will expect health and wellbeing considerations to remain at the forefront of any service provision. It was a trend that was in development before the pandemic, and it has only gained strength.

“In this crazy situation, the first conclusion we came to was that a focus on health and sustainability, facilitated by smart technology, was the right way forward,” says Ruitenburg. “We were already on that route for some years.”

Offices now have a building standard for the COVID-19 era

The IMMUNE project looks to address the future health standards of offices

The IMMUNE project was born of our realisation that COVID-19 was not a freak event. The emerging expert consensus is that major epidemiological events are increasingly likely in future. It is not yet clear whether this phenomenon will cause a permanent shift toward homeworking, or how significant the shift might be, but a lot of work is dependent on human interaction.

It is also apparent that it is easier to protect people on public transport than in their work environment, making the healthiness of buildings the challenge for the basic functioning of the market economy and for the confidence factor that underpins it. Once we were clear on that, a building standard became self-evident and urgent.

IMMUNE is the first open-source standard for certifying the built environment’s capacity to withstand health challenges and to minimise the impact of pandemics. It is inspired by

technologies and procedures successfully applied in hospitals and ‘clean rooms’.

There are more than 100 measures combining technical solutions and facility-management practices, including:

- Quarantine rooms;
- Logistics for pandemic response including PPE;
- Built-in sanitisation technologies to prevent the spread of bacteria, viruses, and toxins;
- Bathrooms equipped with bio sanitisers – urinal and WC hygiene flushing systems;
- Ozone space and water treatment;
- Walls with antimicrobial paint;
- Rounded corners to minimise bacterial deposits in toilet cubicles;
- Crowded areas such as meeting rooms and cafeterias fitted with high-class air filters.

All measures must be implemented, monitored and maintained by a trained steward managing a dedicated facility management team.

The measures are submitted to an assessment-scoring index and points system for attaining three IMMUNE labels. There are: strong (equivalent



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of three stars); powerful (four stars) and; resilient (five stars). An accreditor, an institute or specialised building standard issuer, can award a label after receiving the compliance report from an authorised building assessor, an independent third-party company specialised in sustainable building design, development and certification. The assessor is trained by the accreditor to verify how the architectural engineering and design measures were implemented.

We put the cost of full implementation of measures at 2% of the initial investment’s value with, of course,

variations depending on the state of the building. That is perfectly realistic considering that owners and landlords of grade-A commercial real estate have been prepared to invest just as heavily in the greening of their buildings, more for prestige than for bottom line, as businesses’ energy costs are marginal compared with cost of personnel. In this case, we are talking about nothing less than a business’ capacity to keep functioning in a pandemic.

As president of the European Property Federation, I am aware of the power of the EU and of its ambition to be the world’s health and environmental leader. Our first goal is critical mass of big corporate landlords and tenants. On the heels of that there has to be EU impetus through regulation and standards. IMMUNE is what the EU’s policymakers are looking for, and they can take it to 450m people and beyond.

Liviu Tudor is founder and chairman of Genesis Property, founder and chairman of the Romanian Building Owners’ Association, president of the EPF, and initiator of the IMMUNE project