

# COVID-19 & GCworkplace DESIGN



## DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK



### THIS DOCUMENTS WILL ADDRESS:

DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS FOR  
**NEW & ACTIVE** GCworkplace PROJECTS p.3

GCworkplace **WORKPLACE STRATEGIES**  
FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK p.8

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FOR GUIDANCE ON **EXISTING WORKPLACES:**

[Guidance and Practices for the Safe Return to  
Workplaces in Light of the Easing of Restrictions](#)



## INTRODUCTION

This document pertains to the physical space and interior design of GCworkplace in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides guidance and answers to popular design topics, design considerations for new and active GCworkplace fit-up projects as well as workplace strategies for future projects. The application of the considerations listed in this document depends on the nature of the project and the needs of the client. Considerations and guidance provided are based on information available today, and can evolve as new information becomes available.

Please note that the [Government of Canada Workplace Fit-up Standards](#) and associated tools to support the design of a GCworkplace, such as the [GCworkplace Design Guide](#) and [Space Planning Workbook](#), are still in effect as the current federal workplace design standard.

### GCworkplace DESIGN STANDARD

As we are living through the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become increasingly evident that our federal public service is adaptable, flexible and can quickly mobilize to continue to effectively serve Canadians. Combined with the instrumental role technology plays in allowing people to connect virtually from anywhere, the concept of work has shifted from 'where you go' to 'what you do'.

GCworkplace is the term adopted by the Government of Canada for workplace modernization. It is based on the implementation of Activity Based Working (ABW), which is a way of working that offers all employees **SHARED USE** to a **VARIETY** of workpoints, allowing them to **CHOOSE** the optimal setting to perform their tasks and functions. It **OPTIMIZES** office space and is based on the seven **DIMENSIONS** of creating a flexible, healthy, efficient, inclusive, collaborative, green and **TECHNOLOGICALLY ADVANCED** digital space.



## WHY FLEXIBLE SEATING IS STILL THE RIGHT APPROACH

Adopting a flexible **unassigned work environment** remains an effective accommodation strategy despite the pandemic. These workplaces facilitate the implementation of temporary physical distancing measures by allowing employees to choose the workplace setting that meets their needs and their level of psychological comfort. As well, the modular nature of these environments generally makes it easier to quickly adopt any required temporary modifications such as furniture re-configurations.

Since it is expected that the return to work will be gradual, it is more effective to maintain physical distance by having employees spread out throughout the entire workplace rather than have assigned seating that could create areas that are more congested than others. While physical distancing measures are still in effect, employees can select a workpoint of their choosing depending on their needs and level of comfort, for the duration of their stay for that day. As a temporary precautionary measure, it is not recommended to take advantage of multiple workpoints per day/shift, contrary to what is normally encouraged in these types of workplaces. Once the physical distance measures are lifted, employees will again be able to move freely around the office and take advantage of all the various work settings to support their needs and preferences, which ultimately contributes to their overall satisfaction and wellness.

### DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

For **new and active GCworkplace projects**, the following are recommended design best practices that are not only supportive of the eventual return to work but also good basic design practices. Generally, **no major changes** to the standard are required, however, if the project schedule permits, it is possible to adapt these considerations as required. It is also encouraged to **reassess occupancy** in light of an increase in **external mobility** (see following section on [Workplace Strategies for the Future of Work](#)). This could potentially allow for a reduced density in the workplace. **It is important to consider the short and long term impacts of any design decision.**

#### WORKPOINT VARIETY

It is important to continue to offer variety for each type of workpoint (as per the [GCworkplace Space Planning Workbook](#)) in order to create a functional, flexible workplace that can suit various needs and preferences. Although employees may choose to avoid using workpoints like the **Phonebooth** while social distancing measures are still in effect, this type of workpoint is an integral component of a GCworkplace fit-up, providing quick access to privacy for phone calls or video conferences. The Phonebooth can be a constructed room or a pre-fabricated product, in which it is recommended to have a built-in fan to ensure adequate ventilation.



#### WORKPOINT CONFIGURATIONS

Consider reorienting workpoints so they are not facing one another. Use a variety of workstation configurations like 'dogbones' or 'pinwheels' to provide more distancing/privacy between users and less direct face-to-face scenarios.

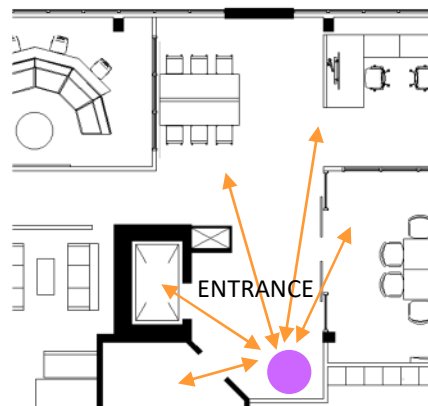
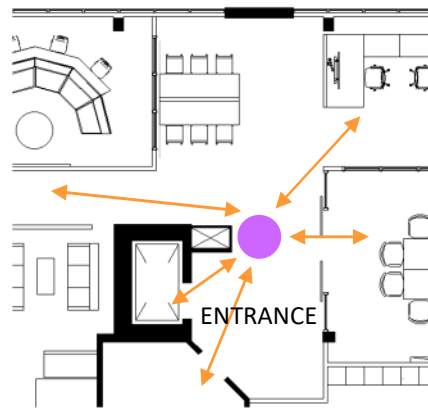


### CIRCULATION

Consider increasing circulation widths, more importantly in main and secondary corridors to ensure comfortable distance between users. This not only provides more distance between employees passing each other, but is a best practice for workplace accessibility.

### HAND SANITIZING STATIONS

Hand sanitizing stations are likely going to become permanent workplace fixtures. It will be important to plan these in as early as possible as to not create points of congestion. Common areas for these would be at main and secondary entrances, in kitchenette/lounge areas and in large meeting rooms. As well, as a general design best practice, creating an open entrance vestibule allows employees to enter a workspace with room to stop and sanitize their hands before entering the locker area or other workpoints.



### CLEANABLE SURFACES AND FABRICS

Specify fabrics and finishes that are bleach-cleanable and easy to maintain (please refer to manufacturer information on cleaning and maintenance). According to available research, antimicrobial fabrics and finishes are not necessary. While tempting to use antimicrobial products as a way to ensure cleanliness, it is recommended to use proper cleaning practices and maintain HVAC systems instead.

### ADDITION OF SCREENS AND PANELS

At this time is not recommended to introduce high panels or screens between workstations. The available research has not proven that panel dividers around workstations provide adequate protection. To err on the side of caution and to avoid providing a false sense of security, keeping a 2 meter separation between employees is the recommended approach while the required social distancing measures are in effect.

In a GCworkplace environment, where employees can self-select their workpoint, along with the gradual return to work, a minimum 2 meter distance between each employee is easily achievable. Panels or screens should only be introduced where a 2 meter separation is not possible, mainly in public contact scenarios between employees and clients. Where it is decided to add panels\*, these solutions should be applied with caution and only in locations that make sense long-term such as fixed or freestanding privacy screens that can help delineate space and provide cues for circulation (ex: between a workstation and main circulation path). It is also important to consider their potential environmental impact should these items be deemed unnecessary in the future.

*\*It is important to consider that additional panels in the workplace may impact air circulation and the effectiveness of the ventilation systems; these should therefore be implemented in consultation with facilities and HVAC expertise.*



- END OF SECTION -

## DESIGN STRATEGIES FOR THE FUTURE OF THE FEDERAL WORKPLACE

More than ever, the **GCworkplace vision** supports the modern, flexible type of workplace that will enable federal employees to keep serving the Canadian public. By considering the potential shifts in **HOW** employees will be working in a post-COVID-19 world, it is important to carefully re-evaluate what the workplace will need to support by questioning the status quo and re-thinking our workplace strategy as a whole.

Will a traditional workplace still support our new way of working?

Will our workplace be a place for collaboration, with many opting to work from home or alternate sites for individual tasks?

Will a co-working approach better support our employees by allowing them to select a site that is more conveniently located, perhaps closer to home?

Will we even need a physical workplace at all?



## WORKPLACE ACTIVITY ASSESSMENT

Workplace activities are being redefined. As a result of the pandemic, most employees have been propelled into remote work, some for the first time. The evolution of the workplace towards greater **agility** and greater **choice** will likely be amplified and accelerated as it has been proven that greater flexibility in the way, time and place where we work allows as much or greater productivity than being in the office at all times.

The increase in **external mobility** is likely going to remain an option for many employees in many departments. By allowing employees the flexibility of where they work on any given day, there will be a resonating effect on workplace design. When undertaking a new fit-up project, with the assumption that present restrictions will cease once a vaccine is available, it is in the best interest of each department as well as the Crown to consider the **long term** accommodation requirements and strategies for the next 10 to 15+ years.

The GCworkplace **Activity Profiles** provide three models for workpoint distributions based on three different profiles of employee interaction: The **Autonomous** Profile, the **Balanced** Profile and the **Interactive** Profile. These profiles demonstrate how the GCworkplace design concept can be adapted to different types of organizations based on their unique types of activities performed in the workplace, typical duration and frequency of these activities, patterns of interaction within and among teams, and overall functional and technical requirements.

Through functional programming, the selected Activity Profile must take into account varying levels of mobility within the workplace, as well as **mobility between the workplace and alternate work locations**.

**ACTIVITY PROFILES & INTERNAL MOBILITY**

Through functional programming, assessing a group’s **Internal mobility**, that is, moving between multiple activities and workpoints within the workplace throughout the day, will determine whether a design solution should lean more towards an Autonomous or Interactive profile.

**AUTONOMOUS**



**BALANCED**



**INTERACTIVE**



← LOWER LEVEL OF INTERACTION

HIGHER LEVEL OF INTERACTION →

The Autonomous profile is best suited to organizations with limited interaction among colleagues or teams.

The Balanced profile is best suited to organizations with moderate interaction, mostly within teams.

The Interactive profile is best suited to organizations with a high degree of interaction between colleagues and among teams.

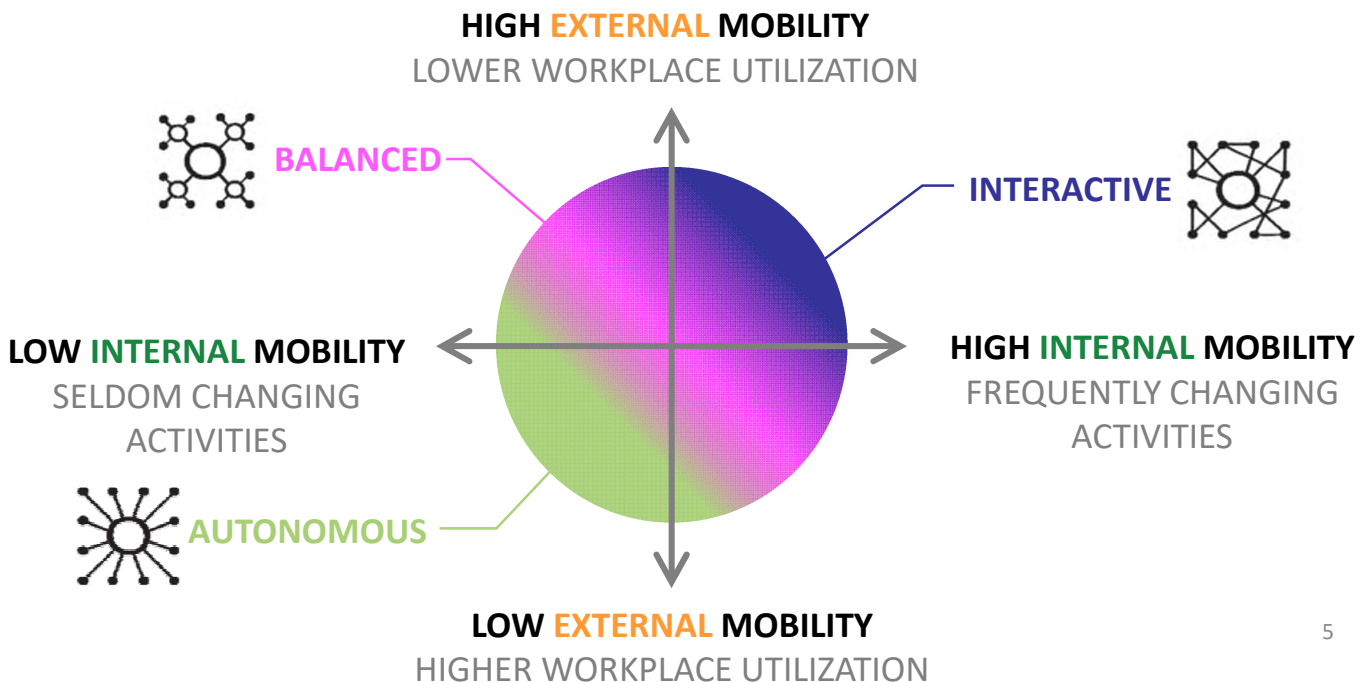
**WORKPOINT DISTRIBUTION COMPARISON**

ACTIVITY PROFILE →	Autonomous	Balanced	Interactive
Individual Workpoints	50-65%	30-50%	5-30%
Collaborative and Support Space	35-50%	50-70%	70-95%

## ACTIVITY PROFILES & EXTERNAL MOBILITY

With a potentially sharp increase in **external mobility**, referring to activities being performed outside of the primary workplace (whether telework, field work, external meetings, or through the use of coworking or alternate work sites), there will be an impact on the **recommended activity profile** for the primary workplace design. It is therefore essential to determine mobility levels, and what types of activities are being performed within or outside the workplace, in order to determine the optimal planning approach.

The following chart illustrates how mobility influences which activity profile is used:



## CASE STUDY: EXTERNAL MOBILITY IMPACT ON SELECTED ACTIVITY PROFILE

Considering that **external mobility** is likely to become a crucial factor in selecting the appropriate Activity Profile, which will inform the design of the workplace, here is an example of how a GCworkplace design could potentially differ.

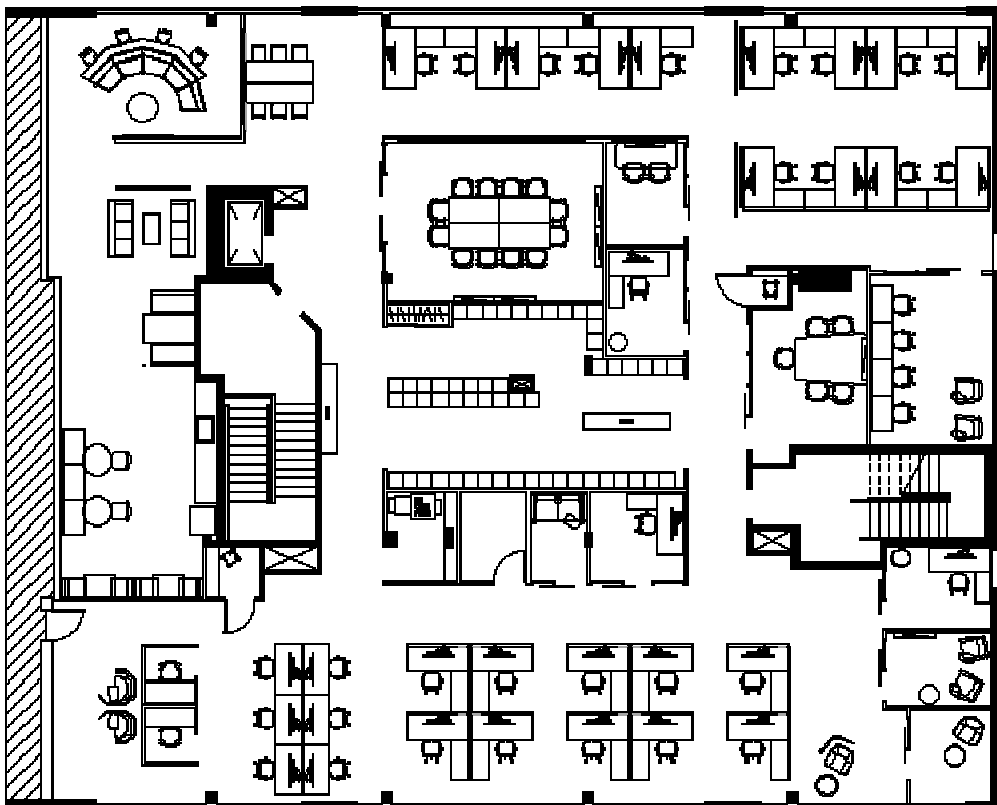
The plan below was designed for a client that was found to have, through functional programming, generally limited interaction among colleagues or teams. The design reflects the Autonomous Profile workpoint ratio quantities from the [GCworkplace Space Planning Workbook](#).

### BEFORE

(DESIGN BASED ON AUTONOMOUS PROFILE)

Individual Seats: 48

Collaborative Seats: 48



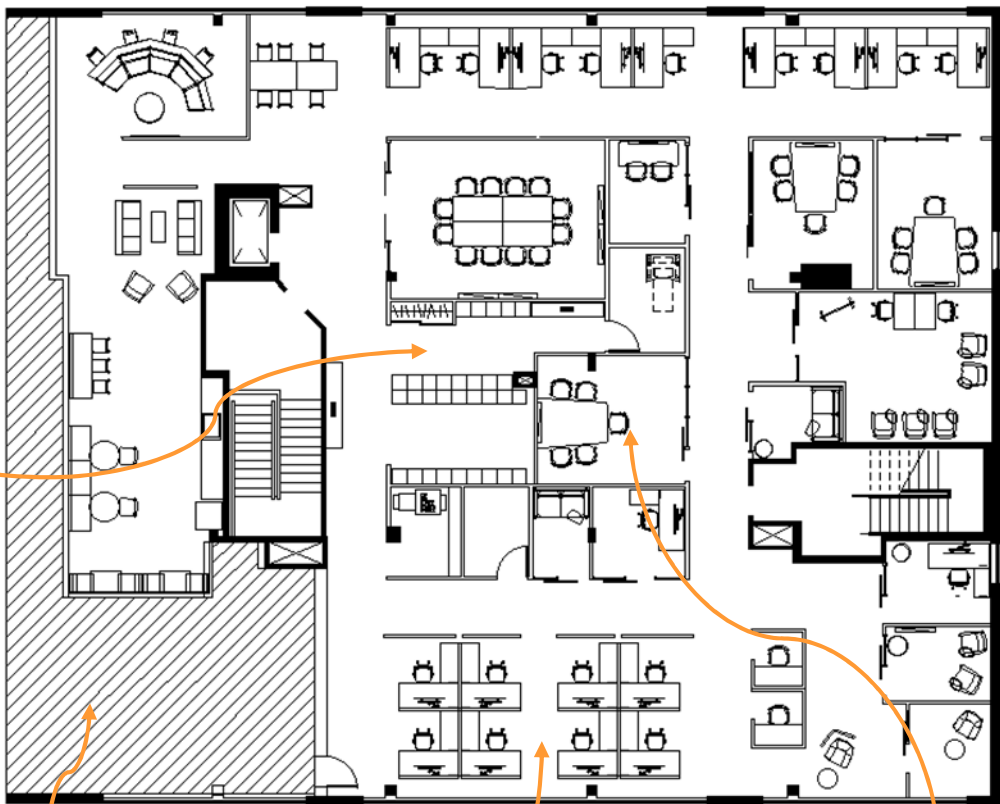
**AFTER**

(DESIGN BASED ON **INTERACTIVE** PROFILE)

Individual Seats: **37**

Collaborative Seats: **49**

FEWER  
AND/OR  
SMALLER  
LOCKERS



LESS OVERALL SPACE  
REQUIRED TO SUPPORT  
ACTIVITIES BEING DONE IN  
THE WORKPLACE

LESS INDIVIDUAL  
WORKPOINTS AS MANY MAY  
OPT TO USE ALTERNATIVE,  
MORE CONVENIENT  
LOCATIONS TO PERFORM  
INDIVIDUAL TASKS

MORE COLLAB.  
SPACE TO SUPPORT  
WHY MANY  
EMPLOYEES WOULD  
MAINLY USE THE  
WORKPLACE

**Embracing a New Reality**, HermanMiller

[https://www.hermanmiller.com/content/dam/hermanmiller/documents/covid\\_19/embracing\\_a\\_new\\_reality.pdf](https://www.hermanmiller.com/content/dam/hermanmiller/documents/covid_19/embracing_a_new_reality.pdf)

**Return to Work(place) Playbook**, Haworth

**What Will Tomorrow's Workplace Bring? More Elbow Room, for Starters**, The New York Times

<https://www-nytimes-com.cdn.ampproject.org/c/s/www.nytimes.com/2020/04/07/business/workplace-telecommuting-coronavirus.amp.html>

**How Should Office Buildings Change in a Post-Pandemic World?**, Gensler – Research & Insight

<https://www.gensler.com/research-insight/blog/how-should-office-buildings-change-in-a-post-pandemic-world>

**The new normal. What will it be**, Corenet, April 2020

<https://blog.corenetglobal.org/blog/the-new-normal-what-will-it-be/>

**Space Planning and space design in a post-pandemic workplace** - ioffice by Tiffany Bloodworth Rivers, April 14th, 2020 - article

<https://www.iofficecorp.com/blog/space-planning-post-pandemic>

**National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health**

<https://ncceh.ca/content/blog/physical-barriers-covid-19-infection-prevention-and-control-commercial-settings>

**Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety**

<https://www.ccohs.ca/>

**Leesman**

<https://www.leesmanindex.com/measure-employee-experience/>