

The flexible workplace is here to stay, and this is why

By [Andrew Robinson](#)

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Regardless of whether the user is a millennial with multiple jobs, a corporate-free freelancer, digital nomad, savvy small business owner or large global corporate, they're all turning to flexible office spaces as their work location of choice.



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Globally, flexible, co-working and shared offices currently count for 5% of the office space market with an estimated value of \$26bn, having shown 15% year-on-year growth over the past five years. And there is no slowing down in the future with predictions that by 2030, its total market share will increase to 30%.

South Africa is no different from any other country in the world and is also witnessing the unprecedented uptake of this new way to work. So, what is the appeal of a co-working, or shared, office space that makes a hot desk so attractive?

The fact that co-working spaces offer flexible rental options makes them a cost-effective alternative to commercial workspaces.

Benefit of flexibility

They're called flexible spaces for a reason, so the offer of a hot desk for a day, or week, or hundreds of desks for a longer period of time is a valuable proposition for new, small businesses who don't know what their growth trajectory looks like and are in no position to commit to long-term rental agreements that lock them in for five to ten years. Similarly, for freelancers the pay-as-you-use option is often preferable to a coffee shop table.

The benefit of a flexible space for growth or contraction, and less onerous lease commitments, is no less appealing for larger corporates.

The amenities that come with a flexible rental option are often the real drawcard for tenants. The fact that WiFi access, printers and furniture come as part of the package is one thing, but that they're supported by IT technicians and facilities managers, thereby negating the expense of this kind of resource, adds to the attractiveness of the offering.

There is also 24/7 access – usually incredibly safe with biometrics or other similar services in place, receptionists, cleaning and maintenance crews, conference and meeting rooms with video facilities, stocked fridges, free coffee and unlimited printing. This all adds up to a significant saving on the cost-of-business line item.

In addition, some co-working spaces go above and beyond by catering for a healthy work-life balance by including yoga studios, dog friendly spaces, and other nice-to-haves. As a result, your average co-working space is more likely to deliver a more appealing working environment than any traditional office set up.

Networking opportunities

And it's not just the yoga that gets people talking. Traditional offices are quite isolating with different businesses all working behind closed doors, or marketing on the first floor, finance on the second, etc. Co-working opens the doors to meet a lot of different people. Good networking opportunities are presented, not just in the shared canteen or chill areas; most providers now host regular events as platforms to meet new people and connect with other business owners to build relations, get business advice and sell your services at the same time. Research by a recent entrant to the local flexible office market shows that in established geographies, more than 50% of their members do business with each other.

As a small business owner or a freelancer, it's beneficial to have a sense of community with like-minded professionals from various industries that provide mentorship to one another and an opportunity to grow their business.

For larger corporates, the easy access to a host of possible service providers to support their additional just-in-time needs is certainly appealing.

With upward of 35,000 different flexible work spaces globally, covering in excess of 1.5 billion square metres, co-working is the new normal. The disruptive nature of a flexible office solution is beginning to develop a reputation for innovation, collaboration and productivity, something the South African economy desperately needs for an essential up-tick. So, all that remains is for businesses – large and small – to work out which of the local offerings best meets their needs.

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