

Survey shows what South Africans really miss about the office

A nationwide survey by one of South Africa's largest workplace consultancies has revealed what we are missing about the workplace - and the surprisingly high number of people who want to get back to the office.



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Linda Trim, director at Giant Leap, said the survey was carried out during stage 4 of the lockdown and canvassed the opinions of several hundred people across the country who normally work in an office.

Getting back to the office

“It showed that 86% of people wanted to go back to working in an office but would like to have the option of at least a day a week to work from home or other remote locations.”

She added that while remote work was initially very popular, as time at home wore on, people realised there was a complete lack of work-life balance. People often reported feelings of isolation and difficulties in carrying team tasks; many missed coworkers.

“The survey showed that 70% of people missed the general social interactions of the office while 85% said they missed the ‘colleague interaction’ while working at home.”

81% felt that it made general work communication much harder.

Interestingly, 70% reported that they were more sedentary working at home, which is one the risk factors of health conditions such as diabetes, neuroskeletal problems such as back and muscle pain.

Similar sentiment

The South African results are similar to findings by global design and architecture firm, Gensler’s recent US Work from Home Survey which polled 2,500 workers across the United States.

“It showed that only 12% of US workers want to work from home full-time, while 74% said people are what they miss most about the office. Most want to return to the workplace,” Trim noted.

She said that the survey showed that most want to spend the majority of their normal work week at the office, while maintaining the ability to work from home for part of the week.

Office quality

“Notably, the quality of the work environment workers left directly correlates to their willingness to in return. On average, the more satisfied a respondent was with their prior work environment, the fewer days they want to work from home,” said Trim.

When asked about the most important reasons to come into the office, respondents overwhelmingly chose activities focused on people and community, including scheduled meetings, socialising and face-to-face time.

“55% said scheduled meetings with colleagues, 54% said socialising with colleagues while the same percentage said impromptu face time were top reasons for coming to an office. Workers also listed access to technology and the ability to focus on their work as key reasons to come in,” Trim noted.

Trim said that South Africa would slowly get back to work and offices would again be the epicentre of the working world.

“But wellbeing is now paramount. We are increasingly being asked to design for distance while still enabling interaction. Workplaces have to be resilient to this and future pandemics and as they change will become better places for people,” she concluded.

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