

Redefining the rat race through mobility

With the New Year in full swing, many South African employees are asking themselves whether working from home could ever be a viable option. The allure of flexible working is quite comprehensible, with the opportunity not only for personal freedom, but also increased productivity.



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According to a 2015 Citrix report into the flexible workforce, the mobile workforce could potentially add an extra R17 billion per year to the South African economy through the more productive use of available working hours - the equivalent of 0.4% of GDP.

The challenge in South Africa is whether businesses have the right mobility strategies and technological enablers in place. It is the area with ever-changing goal posts, which is directly impacted by challenges such as connectivity and outdated legacy systems which govern business operations today. Despite these challenges, market forces, changing work styles and transformational technology mean that no business can afford to neglect mobility. Or they do so at the risk of losing market share.

Learning from the best: global counterparts are ahead of the race

In order for South African businesses to buy into the benefits of mobility, they should be looking to success stories in other countries. One such region is the UK, where [recent research](#) from Citrix and London's The Work Foundation revealed that the very concept of work is changing. At present, they are on the verge of a flexible working 'tipping point' – whereby working away from the office will become more common than the traditional 9-5.

The research indicated that technology will play a critical role in enabling this pathway – allowing people to choose how and when they work. The report cited that two fifths (44%) believe that mobile working allows them to get more work done, 42% cited feeling more trusted and over a third (35%) said that mobile working is essential for their work / life balance and reduces time spent travelling.

Mobility can also provide greater opportunities for those who may struggle with traditional working hours. It can open the door to a career for the long-term sick or those with a disability which prevents them getting into the office each day.

The rise of the South African digital society

The rise of topics like mobility on the South African political agenda highlights how technology is beginning to transform all areas of public life. From instant access online education to digital healthcare IT, it is no longer just the engine behind great services. It is itself the means for delivery and improvement of critical services online.

In a South Africa, where digital is the new driver for innovation, the best ideas are born in coffee shops – and die in the boardroom. So challenging our traditional interpretation of employee mobility and unlocking our ability to #workhardanywhere is the key to unlocking its true potential.

With this mantra in mind, South African businesses can make the giant leap to a mobile workforce by considering the following:

- **Leadership:** Chief executives and board members should set an example with their own approach to mobile working and wellbeing. In doing so, they should set out to lead cultural change in which employees are measured on outputs rather than visibility - building trust across the organisation
- **A new approach to people policies:** Many workers and businesses believe that the adoption of mobile working would require changes to terms and conditions and performance management. These policies should be transparent and visibly agreed with staff, with focus on outputs and outcomes rather than 'presenteeism' and hours worked.
- **Careful planning:** The introduction of new technology and new ways of working takes time, careful planning and implementation. It is critical to ensure that individuals are comfortable with their technology and recognise individual preferences.

Ending the traditional demands of office facetime and employing a more flexible work culture can ensure that no one is prevented from securing a job and working productively. By re-imagining mobility, we can create more exciting and diverse workforces, accelerating opportunity and equality for everyone.

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