

View of the office in 2022

In June of this year, an estimated 50% of the South African workforce was working from home full time which has fundamentally changed all our views on where and how we work best.



Image source: CoWomen from [Pexels](#)

Linda Trim, director at Giant Leap, one of South Africa's largest workplace design consultancies, said that before the Omicron variant, it appeared most South African businesses were keen to return to the office and had instituted two to three days back in the office each week.

"As we watch how the new variant develops, it's difficult to know what will happen but the last two years have taught us is that our ways of working and relating to the office have probably changed for good."

So what are the top trends that will shape the offices of 2022?

The workplace ecosystem

In 2022, offices will still exist, they will just have a new purpose.

Said Trim: "Rather than being a place where employees automatically report every day, offices will become corporate centres specifically meant to spur innovation and connection while developing team spirit."

Trim noted that offices will no longer be a single location, but an ecosystem of offices, homes and third places such as cafes and coworking spaces to support flexibility, functionality and employee well-being.

In the US Starbucks, for example, plans to practice "hoteling," with employees reserving office space only when they need to collaborate with others.

While its employees continue to work remotely, the coffee giant plans to redesign its headquarters: It will eliminate most private desks, renovating the extra space to foster cooperation and make it feel more like a coffee shop.

She cautioned however that although remote work may be here to stay, it could be damaging for employees, and employers, in the long run.

"Team-building, networking and the cross-pollination of ideas that come with in-person interaction will also be impacted after the pandemic. It could also deal a blow to progress made in diversity and inclusion efforts," Trim said.

Decentralisation

Next year the strategies behind corporate site selection will probably look different. Until recently, many businesses choose the "fewer and bigger" workspace model as in a limited collection of large offices.

"Following the pandemic however, some have begun to question this approach, since geographic diversity can help reduce the risk of disruption to business operations when crises occur," Trim noted.

Businesses are now prioritising decentralisation.

"As a result, our new experience of 'headquarters' will be very different from the one we previously imagined. Alternatively, some leaders are choosing to open a string of offices," Trim noted.

Amazon, for instance, is investing \$1.4 billion into offices outside of Seattle, including in cities like Dallas, Detroit, and Phoenix.

"A more distributed workforce will give businesses the opportunity to hire people from a wider range of backgrounds, locations and experiences," Trim said.

A hybrid, but not remote, workforce

A key lockdown development is the hybrid workforce, as employees split their time between their home and the office, rather than solely working at one or the other.

"South African employees seem to prefer a hybrid approach and business leaders are taking notice," said Trim.

A global survey of 80 companies by Colliers International, a leading real estate professional services and investment management company, showed that 86% of managers and decision-makers said they typically expect employees to work between one and four days at home from next year.

Hybrid workforce will be defined by flexible schedules and shared spaces so the offices of 2022 could be smaller.

Even once local restrictions ease and businesses open their doors again, many people working in professional services will want to continue working remotely at least part of the time. As a result, employees are at risk of advancing their intercultural

and global business skills at a slower pace compared to before the pandemic.

“One of the points of mobility is to get the diversity of the global employee base really producing the great benefits that we know come from having diverse teams, in background, culture, and getting people working side by side from various parts of the organisation. While remote working has been very functional, these are elements that are missing,” she added.

“If we avoid further lockdowns, it may be that South African workers come to the office two to three times a week. The shift could make the companies rethink their real estate footprint as there will be less demand for office space,” Trim concluded.

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>