'Agile workspaces' are trending in workplace design

Modern agile workspace trends include support spaces which allow staff the freedom to select work settings that suit the tasks at hand.
As technology continues to disrupt global workspaces and companies strive for higher productivity rates, the creation of "agile workspaces" is emerging as the main shift in today's ideal workplace design.

Companies are also looking to retain top skills, so need to offer more than just a monthly salary and financial perks. Explaining modern agile workspace trends, Dale Friedman from Paragon Interface says this includes support spaces which allow staff the freedom to select work settings that suit the tasks at hand.

There should also be a level of privacy. "These can range from cellular zones for privacy to team collaboration areas which are geared to allow creative flow."

However, one of the largest restrictions on agile working is senior management, many of whom believe employees working in lounge-type settings or coffee shops are not really working.

"But this is often where staff are the most productive. If the steer comes from the top that staff have the freedom to work in whichever spaces suit them, staff are happier and more focused, which leads to better productivity and staff retention."

Having facilities within buildings, so staff do not need to leave during the day, is a concept that Paragon Interface encourages clients to consider, Friedman says.

"One of the simplest ways to try help settle ideas with clients is to visit our recent successful projects within South Africa, and exhibitions and offices around the globe, where they can see that the ideas are current, factual and, in reality, work well for the business needs."

Globally, open-plan office designs, which have been used for many years, are now more geared towards the agile space concept, which Friedman says reduces the number of open-plan desks, as staff are no longer deskbound and are able to work anywhere in the building.

"This allows for desk-sharing ratios and the end result is more agile spaces. Another global trend is the use of colour in the furniture."

Many global companies operate in South Africa and travel between international offices, and so they generally understand overseas working environments.

"Therefore, they are more willing to be progressive with regards to interior design and often even create new trends by applying an 'African edge' to global ones."

But Friedman feels, generally, South African workspaces still have "a way to go" to be on par with international design. Leon Breytenbach, national manager of the Rawson Property Group's commercial division, says with more millennials holding senior positions, Generation Z entering the workplace, and technology developing exponentially, the typical office of yesteryear is "becoming a memory".

Facilities such as break rooms; coffee and snacks on call; gyms; spas and flexitime are helpful in retaining top employees. But even though office decor needs to keep pace, Breytenbach says well-designed office accessories that can be revamped from time to time, should last for years.

Nick Deligiannis, managing director of Hays in Australia and New Zealand, says artificial intelligence will also continue to sweep every company department and will be a big influencer of workspace design.

Key office requirements

Even acoustics in office areas go a long way to improving the working environment. Picture: Paragon Interface
Leon Breytenbach of Rawson Property Group says some of the latest office trends and equipment include:

Technology
● Wi-fi. ● Cordless devices. ● Magnetic cable management equipment. ● Bluetooth-enabled standing-desk controllers connecting to mobile apps. ● Table-top embedded personal assistant touchscreens. ● Air-charging ports for mobile devices. Furniture and accessories ● Ergonomic desks and chairs. ● Height-adjustable desks. ● Incorporating plants will lift the spirits and increase energy in the office.

Office layout and decor
● Where individual workspace is needed, glass dividers allow eye contact with colleagues, do not block light, keep out noise, yet encourage a feeling of connection. ● Flexible spaces for creative team meetings will not replace traditional formal conference rooms but will be achieved with furniture which can easily be pushed together or separated as the need arises.

Colours, textures, patterns and art

● Single-colour decor is out – cheerful colours, unusual textures and geographic designs are in. ● Bright pops of colour lift the spirits, while interesting designs invigorate a tired brain. ● Tastefully incorporating a variety of textures, such as wood grain, shiny or matte metallic finishes; mirrors; woven fabrics and a mixture of old and contemporary furniture helps to keep the scene fresh. ● Murals and exciting art also help to break the tedium of single-colour areas. Scenes from nature are particularly good for refreshing tired employees.

Storage and Lighting

● Well-designed storage spaces to conceal office clutter of stationery and files. ● A minimalist style makes the space appear larger and more manageable. ● Storage areas can be colour-coded to make a bright statement within a busy workspace. ● Natural light is always best for mental well-being. ● Desk lamps are trending at present to allow each employee to personalise their lighting requirements.