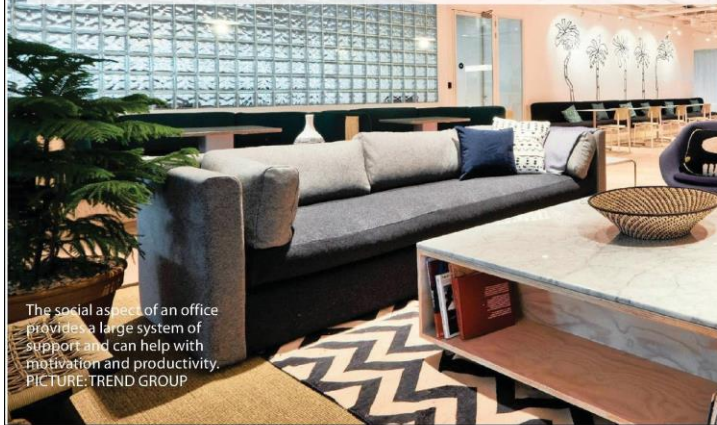


Aiming for workplace agility

The current trend towards co-working is changing office space landscapes all over the world



The social aspect of an office provides a large system of support and can help with motivation and productivity. PICTURE: TREND GROUP

BY BONNYFOURIE

AGILE workspace design is a key component of the open-plan office revolution sweeping through workplaces, alongside the co-working trend which has gained a foothold in the local market.

As evidence of this, the first WeWork office in South Africa was completed last month, with the global office-sharing group, which has 425 offices in 32 countries, choosing six floors in The Link building in Rosebank, Joburg, as its first site.

The trend towards co-working, which is defined as shared office space, equipment and services, is set to change the office space landscape in this country, as it is doing in Europe and other developed mar-

kets, says Claire D'Adorante, director of Paragon Interface, which was the local implementation architect of the project.

"Agile workplaces represent the next stage of the open-plan revolution. What is needed is more collaboration and interaction among co-workers, which has resulted in concepts such as 'hot desking', which means individual employees no longer have desks assigned to them personally but instead use the office space as and when they require it."

D'Adorante says the future evolution of the co-working trend could result in a paradigm shift in how major corporates are structured.

"Economies around the

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Office space design needs to balance social interaction and private meeting and focus areas. PICTURE: TREND GROUP



Demand rises for flexible offices

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world are in constant flux, which means business is contracting and expanding all the time, while overheads tend to remain fixed. "Suddenly, there is a realisation that business has other options for how they use a traditional workspace."

Leading organisations recognise that maintaining the status quo is a "failed strategy" in today's rapidly shifting business climate, says Dorethe Swiegers, senior designer of the Trend Group, which won the tender to oversee the construction project. As a result, she says, they need to continually innovate if they plan to thrive in a competitive marketplace.

"Technology, globalisation and multigenerational workforces are influencing the way we work. The way in which people operate is also largely a function of the environment in which they work. Therefore, innovative designs in the workspace can foster innovative working."

Swiegers says there has been rising demand for decentralised workplaces which are flexible and able to meet the diverse requirements of a multigenerational workforce.

As the main characteristics of co-working spaces are collaboration, community, sustainability, openness and accessibility, it can generally be seen as more than just sharing a physical space.

"The social aspect of an office provides a large system of support and can help with motivation and an individual's productivity. A space's success in providing balanced social, cognitive and physical ergonomics is driven by its design," she says.

"The ability for employees to work together cohesively, efficiently and collaboratively are all determined by how the space can support these actions."

For business owners, the key driver of this trend is to cut real estate costs, especially given the constrained global economic outlook and increasingly tight margins, says D'Adorante.

The major benefit for employees is that it supports "agile" working, which is the "logical next step of the open-plan office revolution".

"While traditional open-plan offices tied workers to individual desks and offered little in shared services, agile workspaces allow employees to work where they want to, with full support and functionality," she says.

Interiors to foster creativity

THERE are a few key interior architecture principles that underpin effective co-working space design, explains Paragon Interface's Claire D'Adorante.

Collaborative spaces that stimulate creativity and enable social interactions are important while, at the same time, there is a need for private meeting spaces and focus zones, to balance all the activity. Key factors here are:

- Flexibility, to maximise space usage.

- Efficiency, which means creating multiple-use spaces.

- Adaptability, to respond to changing requirements and technologies.

- Sustainability, which relates to healthy work environments.

Another consideration is privacy, which means:

- Adding quiet rooms, focus spaces and concentrated work areas.

- Using acoustic materials to minimise noise transfer.

- Dividing open spaces with planters, filing cabinets and low screens.

- Using colour and texture, in addition to stimulating furniture and fittings, to create dedicated team areas and neighbourhoods.

Themed environments suited to the particular needs of specific businesses is also a factor to consider in the design of co-working spaces, says Trend Group's Dorethe Swiegers.

"The idea is to create smaller pockets within your office space that still serve to foster a sense of belonging. For example, seating can be assigned for groups rather than individuals."

The teams themselves may be mobile, but still have fixed desk spaces at which to work.

"Another critical element is co-working or collaborative spaces, which relates to access to communal resources and amenities."

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