



6 innovative ways companies are changing the workplace

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Increasingly companies are seeing the workplace as a strategic tool for productivity and collaboration by introducing workplace innovations that make offices much more appealing places to work.

Richard Andrews, Managing Director of Inspiration Office, an Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy said: "What makes an office environment great is different for every company. But these are six innovations we are seeing in offices around the world and increasingly in South Africa."

1) Overlap Zones

"A way to encourage spontaneous collaboration among employees is designing space to allow for "overlap zones", which make it more likely employees will run into each other," said Andrews.

Research from the University of Michigan showed that when scientists worked in a space where they ran into one another they were more likely to collaborate. The data suggests that creating opportunities for unplanned interactions among employees both inside and outside the organisation actually improves performance.

Samsung built an office that includes large outdoor areas sandwiched between floors that encourages employees to hang out and mingle in shared spaces. Online clothing store Zappos purposefully planned to build a smaller office for the U.S. headquarters to increase the number of probable interactions per hour per acre.

2) Configurable Desks

Said Andrews: "We are seeing a greater demand for desks that fit together like puzzle pieces. They can be moved, reworked and reattached as employees see fit. It matches their immediate needs such as working solo for a collaborative project."

Headphone company Skullcandy uses configurable desks at their office in Zurich.

3) Music Rooms

"One way to boost employee productivity at the office is to foster a positive company culture," Andrews noted.

It's not prevalent in South Africa yet but overseas music rooms are proving popular, as long as they are soundproofed! At LinkedIn's headquarters in Mountain View, California, employees can play in a room that's stocked with high-end music equipment like drums, guitars, keyboards, AV equipment, microphone stands and even stage lighting.

The program improves the company's marketability to potential employees, especially musicians, both as a specific perk and as a means to demonstrate the company is not like all the others.

4) A monitor revolution

We could be entering a new age for office monitors in 2018.

"The past year has seen many offices upgrade their screens to 32-inch or even bigger screens and the latest models feature almost border-less edges or even a curved display," Andrews noted.

Besides the significant productivity advantages, companies are also beginning to deeply consider how their technology impacts

on the look and feel of the workplace. Monitors and other technology have become more prominent, as more workplaces opt for sit-stand desks, the back of the screen and cables are more visible. These latest screens create a sleeker, modern look across the workplace, in turn, organisations are also choosing support tools with aesthetic appeal and that hides cables.

5) A Superdesk

Designing an office around the "open office" concept is one thing. But what about creating a shared desk for your company's entire staff?

To represent their collaborative approach to work, marketing company the Barbarian Group built a 400 square meter desk that weaves through their office headquarters in New York City, which can sit up to 170 people at once.

"Of course this might not be practical for employees who want to work in a quieter space, but it does create a sense of oneness," said Andrews.

6) Plants & Greenery

It isn't too hard to believe that spending time around nature and sunlight and fragrant greenery is good for you. But now, there's scientific research to back that claim. A 2014 study in *Journal of Experimental Psychology* by *Nieuwenhuis et al* showed that

adding plants and greenery in an office can help increase employee productivity by 15%.

"Office landscaping helps the workplace become a more enjoyable, comfortable and profitable place to be," Andrews added.

For example, Google's office in Tel Aviv, Israel, has an indoor orange grove that turns an otherwise normal, collaborative space into a relaxing area that makes you feel like you're sitting outside on a park bench.

