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# What is agile working and why is it taking off in South Africa?

Agile working, where employers offer fewer constraints and plenty of flexibility to an employee, is increasingly popular in South Africa. But how should businesses adapt to this trend?

Isla Galloway-Gaul, Managing Director of Inspiration Office, an Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy said: "Agile working is a natural consequence of the growing acceptance that work is something we do, not somewhere we go. We are increasingly being asked to consult on how the workspace should adapt to this trend of working in the office and away from it."

## Understanding agile work culture

"By using various tools, communicating with their employers and working from a place where they can be at their most productive, workers often produce faster and more valuable work than when working from crowded cubicles," Galloway-Gaul noted. Although many confuse the term with flexible working, agile work culture has different goals, despite also incorporating flexibility. Flexible working is often perceived as favouring the employee, but with agile working, the organisation seeks long-term best results from its employees.

## Advantages to agile working

Businesses gain tremendous benefits from agile working. In an era when many people prefer to work from home, coworking hubs or cafes, employers can save a lot of money and space by reducing their office size. "Thanks to the flexibility factor, business hours can easily be extended or even shortened and there are fewer outside factors to disrupt the regular workday. In exchange for greater freedom, employees are more mo-

tivated to work and are more productive with their daily tasks, which is mutually beneficial to company and worker,” said Galloway-Gaul. Workers also enjoy an improved work-life balance, fewer commutes, and therefore better general wellbeing.

### **Why is agile working needed?**

As increasing numbers of Millennials, who value flexibility and a healthy work-life balance above all, move into and hold more senior positions in the workplace, it’s practical to cater to this trend. And it makes sense to give established workers greater control over their working lives too.

Said Gaul: “Thanks to the power of smartphones and laptops, cloud services that allow access to work files from anywhere along with the increasing prevalence of high-speed Internet, it’s no wonder that the agile work culture is thriving. And traffic seems to be getting worse in South Africa all the time too. Giving people the choice of how and where they work makes a lot of sense.”

### **How to achieve agility?**

According to Galloway-Gaul, agility needs to be thought of in four separate dimensions: time, location, role and source. “The time category refers to the interval when staff work and has many considerations, such as how working hours are agreed upon, how overtime is measured and paid and whether or not employees can choose their own working hours and even how some employees can work in shifts,” Galloway-Gaul said.

The location dimension refers to the places where employees can be at their most productive and it can involve (but is not limited to) home offices, hot desking, coworking hubs or simply sitting in a café. Businesses may need to introduce smaller, well connected workspaces for when employees are in the office and do away with traditional fixed desk space and one-person offices.

The role category establishes the functions and responsibilities of an employee or a team, while the source dimension refers to the type of agreement with the worker, which can be crowd-sourced, freelance-based, partnering or even based on fixed-term contracts.

“If a business is interested in jumping on the agile working trend, it is important to do thorough research before changing company culture to establish if it is truly advantageous to your line of work, your employees and business aspirations,” Galloway-Gaul concluded.

