

# Is your boss buying into the flexible working culture?

Citrix research highlights that South African organisations still need to overcome trust issues to implement a full-fledged flexible working environment.



Brendan McAravey, country manager at Citrix South Africa

Today, new research from Citrix reveals that even though 93% of South African IT decision makers agree that technology increases employee productivity, almost 80% still believe that their employees are more productive in a central office environment as compared to working remotely.

The study, which was commissioned by Citrix and conducted by research firm OnePoll, questioned 250 IT decision makers across South African organisations. The research investigates the relationship between employee productivity, flexible working and the use of technology.

## Not so flexible about flexible working

The much-touted Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) is under way, and technologies like cloud computing, AI and machine learning are supposed to be taking centre stage so that local businesses can improve innovation efforts. However, innovation does not seem to be front of mind for many South African businesses.

Rather, 74% of those who polled say that they are investing in cloud technology to primarily improve data security and enhance document control, followed by 61% investing in cloud tech to save costs, and only 59% looking at using the tech to offer flexible working to their employees.

Historically, South African businesses have preferred employees working from their offices. The research findings suggest that one of the main reasons for this is a lack of trust between management and their employees, with 61% saying that this hinders flexible working in South Africa. However, there are winds of change in the background with 93% of decision makers agreeing that flexible working, enabled by the right technology, increases productivity and agility.

Other major hindrances to the adoption of a flexible working culture are a lack of technological infrastructure, hardware and software (60%), cyber security threats due to human error (52%), and organisations themselves not being able to fully comprehend the business benefits (52%).

## **Not so balanced: employers vs. employees**

Interestingly enough the study revealed that even though management feels that employees are potentially more productive when working from a central location, 58% of them feel that they themselves are more productive when working flexibly. Nearly a third (32%) say that they work at the same level of productivity whether working flexibly or within an office during normal office hours, and only 7% say they are less productive when they work flexibly.

Of the 48% of respondents that confirmed they offer their employees the option of working flexibly, 27% of them leave the final decision in the hands of the team managers. Meanwhile 15% said that only certain departments can work flexibly, and 12% said that only more senior staff can work flexibly.

## **Changing the way we work**

Locally, businesses are under immense pressure to finalise their digital transformation strategies, not just to meet the constantly evolving business priorities, but also appeal to a changing workforce that demands not just a highly flexible and productive working environment, but also a secure one, that caters to their different needs.

External pressures like rising urbanisation, traffic congestion, etc. are seen as the main driving force behind flexible working in South Africa, by 61% of respondents. Half (51%) stated that international trends like diversity and inclusion are making flexible working a necessity, as firms look to increase workforce access to everyone, regardless of their characteristics. Half (50%) also said that flexible working has also become essential in order to attract the best global talent to the country.

## **The way forward**

South African businesses have come a long way from previous research which found they were investing in technology to only keep the lights on.

“Companies are now looking to technology to provide a safer and more secure workspace. Ninety-six percent of businesses agree that cloud-based tools allow employees to collaborate better anytime, anywhere and 91% agree that IM tools enable employees to remain connected with each other, yet South African businesses still need to break the mental barriers around productivity being greater when working from a central office location. This is essential to competing for

talent on a global scale. For example, 54% of UK employees already enjoy flexible working, so while South Africa is taking some preliminary steps towards progressive change, we still need to bring about a cultural mind shift to ensure that we have a strong flexible work culture.” notes Brendan McAravey, country manager at Citrix South Africa.

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