

# How the shifts in leadership attitude is altering traditional offices

The speed and ever-changing disruption to the global business environment has leaders rethinking how to create more robust organisations - and the impact is likely to be felt most keenly in the office, the frontline of the change.



Image source: Getty Images

Isla Galloway-Gaul, MD of Inspiration Office, an Africa-wide office space and furniture consultancy said: “Business leaders are reporting working in new ways to create a more agile workforce and boost employee engagement. Collaboration and inclusion in increasingly important for companies to thrive as vibrant organisations.”

So what major changes are on the way?

## Physical space as a tool

Instead of a private offices which can often create a barrier between colleagues, executives are increasingly using open-plan workstations alongside everyone else.

Said Galloway-Gaul: “To stay within a closed office is representative of an old management style of clear hierarchy, which

is no longer a good perception for management.”

"Increasingly the culture and personality of the leader who needs to be physically seen by his workers, especially in moments of uncertainty, is catching on."

Leaders are therefore placing themselves in the midst of the flow of ideas and people. The invitation to the rest of organisation is clear. Anyone can work anywhere no matter what his or her title or status may be. The leadership prototype is no longer a destination. It's a thoroughfare that is opening up and strengthening relationships.

A physical workspace can send a message to employees. Leaders need to be involved in how the workplace supports their people.

## New mobile world

"These new ways of working require an evolution of the workplace environment designed to support new leaders. And, forward-thinking organisations are recognising how the work environment can be used more efficiently as people are now able to work anywhere, anytime," said Galloway-Gaul.

Because of this phenomenon, many companies have a reduced real-estate footprint making it even more important to fully-leverage existing office space.

"There's great benefit to this ability to work while on the move, but there are risks in working away from a centralised office. And those are that executives face even greater challenges in maintaining relationships and connections, especially in globally integrated organisations," Galloway-Gaul added.

## How design matters even more

The office is of course front and centre of the changes needed for an inclusive culture. "There are new ways to see the office, particularly for leadership teams, so that all their functions are easily carried out," said Galloway-Gaul. Steelcase, a global office services design company which is represented by Inspiration Office in South Africa, has created a simple model:

**Space as nexus:** Because organisations are more networked and integrated and because executives maintain tightly controlled schedules to respond to demands for their time and presence, maintaining relationships is a challenge. Leadership environments can help to better connect people and information. These spaces can also provide remote executives with a virtual presence more similar to the leaders who are physically in the room.

**Nurture the individual:** Science confirms a link between physical and mental health and how our brain performs. "Significant stress can impact how we think and solve problems if it isn't managed properly. A workspace designed to help leaders deal with stress and promote their wellbeing can improve cognitive performance," Galloway-Gaul added.

**Enable transitions:** Leaders need to constantly switch gears throughout the day and those shifts cost time — a critical resource. The workplace can help to speed up contextual immersion and support leaders getting into flow faster.