

Benefits of co-working spaces in a recession

 By Hassan Shaikh

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The benefits of co-working spaces for small businesses and entrepreneurs are many and there are some good examples of these spaces in Johannesburg.



Image source: www.revolve.joburg

The [Hello Joburg website](http://HelloJoburg.com) ranks the following as the five top co-working spots in Johannesburg: Nomads & Co in Parkhurst, Slow in the City in Sandton, JoziHub at 44 Stanley, Open in Maboneng and Travail in Melrose Arch.

Especially during a recession, corporates should be making the best use of co-working spaces. Inter-departmental collaboration within an organisation is also deemed to be co-working and does not necessarily only apply to cross-business co-working.

With the high costs associated with renting space or having to acquire more office space due to business expansion, corporates can save by rather using the spaces they have more effectively. If, for example, you need to expand current departments that require growth internally, opt to create a smaller, more cost effective co-working space off-site for functions that don't necessarily need to be office bound. These co-working spaces can be located strategically in relation to the head office and close to high volume traffic areas that take into account where staff live and travel from. What this does is it empowers employees to choose where they can work. Empowered employees are productive employees. Also, considering the time lost travelling in traffic and the need for high levels of productivity, these spaces can bridge the gap between remote working and office based working.

It's also important to properly consider the pros and cons of different office set-ups when trying to reduce space and reduce spend. To date, open plan spaces are by far the most common way that office spaces are set up. We were sold and convinced that by having open plan offices we would move toward a more progressive approach to workplace effectiveness. This isn't necessarily the case.

Pros of open plan spaces:

- It is cheaper, both from a real estate perspective and a fit-out perspective.

- It deals better with expansion.
- It's better for employees to be in open plan than being isolated in an office.
- People look busier (operative word being 'look').
- Influences the culture of the organisation whether it be positively or negatively.

However, the negative aspect with open plan is that, as an element of effective office design, it is the most disruptive and unproductive workplace setting as a stand-alone element. What you really want to achieve is a place that facilitates employees and not contains employees. Collaborative spaces address this issue very successfully.

Just as co-working spaces need to make sense for the type of business and business culture internally, so do collaborative spaces. The essential elements that make collaborative spaces effective include:

- **Choosing the correct furniture for the type of activity:** For example, if you have an informal meeting area, you would need furniture that is more relaxed, but also something that will offer some sort of acoustic value and sufficient privacy.
- **The positioning of the collaboration space in the overall layout:** When there are many people in the same space, unspoken boundaries start forming and people become territorial. Collaboration spaces need to either be part of a team or divisional space or be completely neutrally positioned.
- **Technology and equipment:** The incorporation of electronic whiteboards, electrical connections and sharing technologies add further value to the position of the space and the make-up of the space. Using the correct technology and equipment for the organisation will enhance the inclusion of collaboration spaces.
- **Indoor environment:** By using the interior design effectively, we can create the right environment for the right work setting. This means that considerations for window treatments, temperature controls and even lighting are important, especially in spaces that will facilitate presentations and video conferencing that are not boardrooms and meeting rooms.

Remember, it is easy to create beautiful spaces with large budgets, but good design thinking creates effective, productive spaces. With everyone feeling the pinch of the recession, now is a good time to start rethinking your office design and finding ways to optimise your space. This does not need to be at the detriment of productivity and office morale but, if done correctly, could in fact improve both.

ABOUT HASSAN SHAIKH

Hassan Shaikh is the founder of Revolve, a specialist corporate and retail interior design strategy agency. Currently busy with his Masters degree in interior design, Shaikh has over 15 years of experience in the industry including working for a number of prominent architectural agencies and retail brands in the UK. He is also one of the first entrepreneurs to be selected on the pilot Investec Property's Business development programme.

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