

# The shift towards remote working may be permanent

BY JAMES KAHONGE

In 2014, Abel quit his job at Bloomberg, against advice from family and friends, and relocated to Kenya to co-found a dairy company. While this venture was not hugely successful, it offered him valuable insights into the entrepreneurship world. He co-founded Kikao64 in 2020.

**Leaving your job at Bloomberg was a bold move. Weren't you afraid?**

I grew up in a rural setting, and that was the reason I chose agribusiness. In my second year at Harvard University, I took a course taught by renowned political science Professor Robert Bates which covered topics on the political economy in rural Africa and, specifically, the politics of agricultural development and food supply. This detour helped me understand how businesses are run, and how rural and low-income economies function.

**Have you since found your rightful place?**

Yes. I am happily living my purpose by contributing to my local community and supporting the start-up ecosystem in Eldoret and Kenya at large.

**What is Kikao64?**

It is a modern co-working space and incubation hub for the emerging technology community in Eldoret. The hub is a meeting point for budding entrepreneurs, techpreneurs, students, researchers, designers, programmers, non-profit organisations, creatives and athletes.

**What is Kikao64's mission?**

My partners and I started it with the aim of bringing opportunities closer to the people of Eldoret. We envisioned a space where ambitious professionals and students could connect, collaborate, share knowledge and ideas, and thrive together. We also saw an opportunity to nurture a vibrant community of motivated and like-minded individuals, to transform the fortunes of the North Rift region.

**In what ways is a co-working space better than an ordinary office?**

Co-working spaces enable members to connect with a diverse set of individuals, to increase their productivity and creativity. During this Covid-19 period, many professionals are working from home, which limits how much they connect with others. A co-working space eliminates this barrier.



**This shift to smaller or no office space could be permanent**

Abel



These spaces are also cost-effective and provide greater flexibility as well as built-in business support services. They also come with perks such as free internet connection and refreshments.

**Is it possible to brand one's business in a shared space?**

Absolutely. We live in an increasingly digital world where you can build a brand entirely online without having a physical location. A good example of this is the emerging clouds (ghost) kitchen business model which enables restaurant owners to cost-efficiently start a virtual food delivery brand without having to set up their own physical restaurant space.

**What lessons can employers learn from this departure from traditional office set-ups?**

You are employees yearn for flexible and creatively designed work spaces that have a diverse network of professionals. This is because such spaces allow regular networking sessions and teamwork, enhanced productivity and creativity, general wellness and work-life balance. This has been the trend in the western world, but it is fast catching on here. Employers need to provide flexible work environments if they hope to attract and retain the best talent.

**Other than office space, what other struggles do start-ups face based on your experience?**

Access to adequate capital and top talent, prohibitive regulations, limited business support services and lack of mentorship.

**What does the future of work look like?**

Mostly, remote-working. The pandemic has accelerated the move towards a decentralised and flexible working environment. It has revealed that employees can be as productive working remotely as they are while working in the office. The prolonged pandemic period has pushed many companies to reduce their rented office space to save on costs. This shift to smaller or no office space could be permanent.

**Aside from your career, what else are you proud about?**

It gives me great satisfaction to inspire, mentor and support aspiring entrepreneurs through my story. Additionally, I have financially supported several students through school. Working to uplift the economic status of my community humbles me.