

# WorkInProgress continues to support the startup community



By [Evan-Lee Courie](#)

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#TheLockdownSeries explores the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on businesses, how they prepared for lockdown and its impacts on operations and employees, as well as lessons learned that we can take into the post-Covid-19 era.



Charmaine Lambert, manager at WorkInProgress

[WorkInProgress \(WIP\), an Absa innovation lab](#), is a workspace that provides facilities and support to startups, innovators and original thinkers to connect, unlock potential, create and grow solutions.

Charmaine Lambert, manager at WorkInProgress, believes that the next six months will be a challenging time for the majority of the startup community.

We chat with her to find out more about the innovation lab has been doing during the coronavirus pandemic.

## ■ How has Covid-19 impacted WorkInProgress?

We took the decision a week prior to lockdown to temporarily close the WorkInProgress co-working space in an effort to protect the facility members, visitors and staff. I don't think any business has gone unscathed with the arrival of coronavirus, but our members have shown incredible agility and are all working remotely in the safety of their own homes.

I think it's the overwhelming entrepreneurial nature of our ecosystem that has stood them all in good stead.

“ I'm happy to say that our virtual community engagement and sense of connectedness has strengthened through all of this. ”



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### ■ *How did you prepare for the lockdown?*

At the advent of social distancing, we took measures to inform our members of the importance of hygiene and sanitisation. We provided sanitiser at the workspace and encouraged our members to keep a safe distance from each other where possible.

As the situation escalated, we engaged our partners and members before making the decision to temporarily close. In an effort to assist the businesses that reside in our space, we've also suspended fees until further notice.

### ■ *What's the biggest challenge you are facing during this pandemic?*

Our biggest challenge will be the ability to host face-to-face events – something that we do often for our members, and members of the public.

### ■ *What sort of assistance will you need going forward? Our focus is not on the assistance we need, but rather how best we can service the needs of our broader ecosystem, our members and the startup community in South Africa.*

We've already hosted a live stream workshop on our Facebook feed to assist small business in this challenging time, and we'll be focused on identifying further topics which will serve to inform and educate our audience on topics relevant to them at this time.

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■ ***If you are able to operate, what steps are you taking to continue operating?***

While we aren't able to operate our coworking space, we're engaging with our community every day to aid and support them where possible.

■ ***What measures have you put in place for your employees?***

All WorkInProgress staff have transitioned to a work-from-home environment and the team continues to support members where possible.

■ ***Are you communicating with your customers? If so, how?***

Freya Bell-Dreyer, our general manager, has taken to writing an inspirational note to our community at the end of each workday, which I think has given many people some light relief and welcome human connection in this tough time. In addition, we're connecting with our members daily via emails and calls and we're all in constant communication on the members' Slack channel.

■ ***How are you offering assistance to your customers who rely on your services?***

WIP has informed members that there will be no member fees from the month of March until further notice.

■ ***What do you predict the next 6 months will be like?***

The next six months will be a challenging time for most in the startup community as it is even harder to secure buy-in and financing for new business concepts in a declining economy. However, it also creates room for those who are able to pivot quickly to identify new opportunities.

“ For now it's important to [#StayHome](#) and stay safe, but we do miss our [#workspace](#) and all the incredible members that make our ecosystem so suited to [#fintechs](#). Here's Andy Clark from Woolworths Financial Services on how his team

appreciates [#WorkInProgressCT](#) [pic.twitter.com/PaYqYoyfEB](https://pic.twitter.com/PaYqYoyfEB) — WorkInProgress (@WIP\_CT) [April 25, 2020](#) ”

■ **Now is the time to innovate and experiment. What is WorkInProgress doing?**

As a co-working space, we're collaborating within the wider Absa group and with our members to further define what the 'new normal' is in light of Covid-19.

In the meanwhile, our first virtual-workspace event – a presentation on marketing for small businesses - was a success and we plan to build on this.

■ **What has been your biggest lesson from all this?**

I think there have been many lessons, one of which is how important it is to have the necessary technological tools available to enable remote working.

“ *It's been an eye-opener to see how productivity has been maintained throughout all the disruptions and challenges.* ”

## ABOUT EVAN-LEE COURIE

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