

# 5 reasons to join a growth-stage startup

By [Jeanne du Plessis](#)

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If you're itching to take the next step in your career, you might want to put down the ties and pencil skirts and explore the opportunities that are being offered in South Africa's thriving startup scene.



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Between two guys tinkering with technology in a dorm room or a garage and the next Facebook or Apple lies a world of possibility – and being part of the growth or scale-up phase of a new idea may be the most exciting journey of your life.

Here are five reasons why joining an expanding startup may be the best career move you make.

## 1. Real freedom to innovate

Startups are known for disrupting existing industries with pioneering ideas. The underlying philosophy of innovation is ingrained in their culture and comes to life in all parts of the business.

“If you have an idea that you think could work, we want you to try it out. Thoughtful experimentation is part of how we operate,” says Arjun Khoosal, chief technology officer of Kandua, a South African online home services marketplace. “Quick feedback loops tell us which ideas to pursue and which ones to discard.”

“It’s not about which boss you can convince to like your idea, it’s about whether it works or not,” adds John Murray, chief technology officer of Leadhome, a South African tech-enabled real estate company.

“The kind of innovation that happens at a startup every day comes around once every 10 years in a corporate,” says Shabnam Osman, product manager at Yoco.

## **2. The fulfilment of doing meaningful work**

In a startup, things move fast and there is no time to be wasted. That means more time focused on doing work that matters.

“If I’m spending time away from my kids, I don’t want to be pushing paper and attending unnecessary meetings, feeling like if I disappeared it wouldn’t really matter. I want to do work that means something,” says Osman. “These are very results-focused environments. This may sound cut-throat, but I find it really freeing, because it means is that it’s not about the hours you put in, but what you achieve,” adds Osman.

“There are few places where you will find more job satisfaction than at a startup,” says Murray, a sentiment that is echoed by Khoosal: “The work we do at Kandua can be really challenging, and that is exactly why it is satisfying.”

## **3. With great freedom comes great accountability**

Many people associate the startup life with relaxed dress codes and flexible working hours. A free-for-all this does not make. Startup teams demonstrate personal accountability at all levels, from the most junior manager to the top leadership.

“Everyone knows what they need to get done, and they get on with it. No-one is looking over your shoulder to see what you are doing or how you are working on it,” emphasises Khoosal.

“Being in a startup is much more suited to me being a working mom than corporate ever was,” says Osman. “It’s not all coding until 2am with boxes of pizza and beer, it’s about knowing what needs to get done and doing it. That means I can be at cricket matches and doctor’s appointments, but I also deliver at work.”

“We have a remote-first policy at Leadhome, letting people choose where they work,” says Murray. “It doesn’t make sense for you to sit in an office if you do your best work from home, but that is connected to a performance-based culture.”

## **4. Being a person and not a role**

Startups have few structures, almost no legacy systems, and no pre-determined boxes to put people in. You are not valued for your title, but for the value you add.

“You need to be the most useful person you can be by doing the most useful thing you can do. Because there is so much to be done, you can slay in more than one lane, and really try your hand at a variety of tasks,” says Khoosal.

“‘What is my role?’ is the wrong question to ask when you are in a startup. You want to know what needs to be achieved, and then match your skill set to that,” says Osman. “Being part of a startup has taught me to be bold about my abilities and to step out of my comfort zone daily.”

## **5. The surprising diversity in South African startups**

Silicon Valley stereotypes have imprinted on our ideas of who works in South African startups. The reality is quite different.

“More than two-thirds of our team is female,” says Khoosal. “At Kandua, we not only look for people with diverse backgrounds but people who are able to appreciate diverse perspectives and integrate that into the product design.”

“I am a Muslim woman who wears a hijab and totally fit in at Yoco. I did not expect that,” adds Osman.

## **Choosing the right startup**

If this sounds attractive to you, it’s important to know that not all startups are the same. When choosing to join a new venture, Murray advises to scrutinise the business fundamentals, make sure you trust the founding team, and to not only look for smart ideas but great execution: “Ideas are cheap, execution is what matters.”

## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

Jeanne du Plessis is a social innovation and communications strategist, and the founder of Rain Tree. She helps impact entrepreneurs find their voice and tell their stories and helps established brands transform social and environmental issues into business opportunities

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