

How Covid-19 is impacting your employees

By [Dr Amelia Richards & Jenni Jones](#), issued by [Ask Afrika](#)

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The Covid-19 pandemic is accelerating business transformation, and although it may be a crisis, it also presents an incredible opportunity for organisational change. In these uncertain times it is critical to reassure your employees that while everything is evolving rapidly, your organisation values them and their unique experience and contribution. Managing a partial or fully remote workforce requires an understanding of the impact of the home environment, and lack of social interaction and other workplace benefits on employee wellbeing.



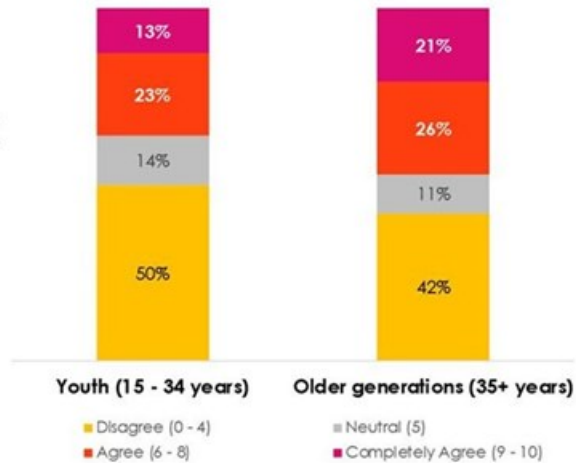
The Ask Afrika Covid-19 tracker interviewed a representative sample of 5000 South Africans for the past 11 weeks, tracking the socio-economic impact of the virus, the lockdown and gradual re-opening of the economy. The recent results highlighted financial distress as one of the main factors that has a negative impact on the emotional and psychological wellbeing of South Africans. The fear of unemployment remains high since the onset of the lockdown in March 2020. Most South Africans understand the reason for the lockdown, and a total of 43% are hesitant about returning to work, unsure whether it is safe or not. Now more than ever, 68% of employees will do whatever they can to ensure that their employers stay open for business, since they are aware of the negative effect the Covid-19 pandemic had on businesses.

Two in three employees are doing everything they can to ensure their employer stays in business.



44% of people feel safe to return to work when required to do so, however, 43% don't feel the same.

The Youth feels less safe than the older generations to return to work when required to do so.



Employers and managers alike are dealing with a lot of unknown factors that if not managed effectively can mean closing doors temporarily or permanently. For the first time business owners are forced to adapt to a 'new normal' that implies managing work forces 'remotely' since work environments do not allow for the full workforce to return to work with a 1,5-meter distance between workstations. Social media has circulated a few jokes to lessen the tension that exists for parents that are forced to home-school children whilst putting in a concerted effort to focus on job-requirements all at once. The Ask Afrika Covid-19 tracker showed that home-environment and emotional distress are up to 10% higher for lower income families compared to their higher income colleagues, mainly due to the lack of space in the home for children, family members, homework and full-time employment duties all at once. Households with two – four occupants are faring best compared to households with more than four occupants, showing higher feelings of fear, depression, discouragement and irritability among the employed.

It is thus important for managers to be aware of where the pressure points lie in their own workforces, in order to empower and care for employees through being sensitive to the new world of virtual offices that will become the new normal in future. The Ask Afrika Covid-19 employee survey showed that employees that don't feel safe, supported and emotionally secure find it difficult to be engaged, productive and innovative, three core elements, businesses need during these times.

It is imperative for employers to remain in contact with remote and virtual workforces during lock down to understand the impact of the virus on productivity. The aim for businesses and their employees is to accept the new way of working as the new normal, however it remains a journey to get there when one applies the Kubler-Ross model to the process of dealing and working through crises and trauma. Business owners will benefit from understanding which pockets in the workforce are operating in the different stages of dealing with Covid-19. At the onset of the pandemic, employees were in denial, thinking that the pandemic is an international problem, only reserved for people that travel. Upon realisation that it might affect South Africans, anger set in, especially if one is forced to stay home. Bargaining follows, when employees start to weigh up different options for sacrifices made on a personal level. Sadness is important to work through especially if there was a loss of income, job security, health etc. Acceptance is what we all are currently working towards, accept the new paradigm, the new office hours, virtual offices, social distancing etc. But again, it is a process, and we will all reach the finish line at different time slots and in different ways.

The Ask Afrika Covid-19 Employee Wellness Tracker showcased that if employers and managers stay close to their employees albeit virtually, the time employees take from denial to acceptance can be shortened. Stress levels of employee groups will decrease, coupled with a realisation that the Covid-19 virus's impact can be managed effectively. Resilience is the name of the emotional game changer during these uncertain times. Emotionally resilient employees are more productive, innovative and engaged. Employers and business owners can count on the loyalty of the workforce during these uncertain times, if workforces know and feel that they are part of the new normal, co-creators of a sustainable future for the organisation. A strong culture is evident when management is sensitive towards and addresses the basic emotional needs of staff even though different pockets can be operating in different phases of trauma management. In the words of Josh Bersin: "When we empower and care for people they adapt and do amazing things, we just have to give them the

tools, time and culture to succeed.”

For more information on Covid-19 research opportunities please contact:

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Ask Afrika is a specialist in customer service research. Besides having the most extensive proprietary benchmarks, Ask Afrika is also the preferred partner for government and NGOs seeking proactive social research.

Ask Afrika collects employee feedback through an online and/or telephonic survey; to empower companies with a comprehensive view of the emotional state of their employees coupled with unpacking their current stressors. Insights can be provided per business unit, job level, job function and/or different demographics – to enable companies to improve their staff management capabilities and implement strategies best suited to individual employees/ employee levels to alleviate the stressors. These surveys provide employees an opportunity to voice their concerns, while learning about the unique challenges and potential organisational weaknesses as your organisation reimagines its post-Covid-19 return.

With us, you can make game-changing business decisions confidently.

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