

Flexible staffing is key to getting the hospitality sector back on its feet

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The South African hospitality sector was arguably the hardest-hit industry as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns, curfews and other government control measures. These events highlighted the risks involved in maintaining large, full-time staff complements, as many hospitality businesses were forced to lay off their employees in an attempt to simply stay afloat. As the country reopens and people once more begin to travel, visit restaurants and attend events, a more flexible and lower risk staffing model has become vital.



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Not just about tourism

Tourism makes up a significant proportion of South Africa's economy, and consequently of the hospitality sector. Stats SA figures report that tourism had a R130.1bn direct contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2018, which makes up nearly 3% of the country's GDP. The sector was severely affected by the Covid-19 lockdowns – according to the Tourism 2020 report, foreign arrivals dropped by 71% from just over 15.8 million in 2019 to less than 5 million in 2020.

However, while the tourism industry is economically important for South Africa, restaurants and events also form an important part of the hospitality sector. While tourism is often a source of foreign income, the bulk of the hospitality industry is supported by locals. When no travel was allowed within our borders, and when curfews and alcohol bans and limits on the number of people in a space were enforced, the entire industry suffered immensely.

Building the gig economy, providing sustainable opportunity

Like many other industries, the pandemic and lockdowns resulted in massive job losses within the hospitality sector, which highlighted the risk and instability of the traditional full-time employment model. The reality is that with ongoing uncertainty and increasing numbers of external disruptors threatening the status quo, flexibility has become critical.

While events may be starting to pick up in 2022, and restaurants and hotels are beginning to see increased occupancy, there is no such thing as 'business as usual' anymore. The potential for further disruption is high, and the recovery is slow when following a stop-start trajectory rather than a linear path. Bringing back a permanent workforce in a world where there

are so many unknowns is far too risky.

Flexibility and scalability are key to recovery

The traditional model of the hospitality sector? has typically been to directly employ full-time, permanent staff, but given the lay-offs and other challenges faced by the industry, this is no longer a sustainable approach. The hospitality sector needs a more flexible workforce that can easily be scaled in both directions, to cater for fluctuations in demand while minimising the risk of carrying significant fixed permanent costs.

Temporary Employment Service (TES) providers can be hugely beneficial in helping hospitality to get back on its feet. TES can ensure that hotels, restaurants and eventing, as well as other businesses within hospitality, have a right-sized staffing service that will enable them to operate optimally, regardless of any external disruptions they face. For employees in this industry, TES also provides a form of income continuity, as they can be deployed as and where there is work available for them.

The benefits of TES

A reputable TES provider offers a number of benefits beyond flexible staffing models. This includes taking over all of the admin involved around hiring, such as vetting and matching skills, as well as ongoing human resources processes. A TES provider will also ensure that staffing solutions are compliant and meet regulatory requirements for the industry, that they will contribute positively toward the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) scorecard of the employer, and that staff are upskilled appropriately. TES providers can also offer temporary employees benefits akin to those typically only afforded to full-time staff.

While the South African hospitality sector is beginning to see the start of recovery, the reality is that we have a long way to go, and we may never get back to pre-pandemic levels if traditional ways of doing business isn't changed. Other external disruptors are also likely for the future, and the future has become impossible to predict. Given the unpredictable nature of the current world, the ability to maintain a flexible workforce is critical to both recovery and future success, and TES providers are an instrumental part of the solution.

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