

# How to manage remote workers during Covid-19 and beyond

Experts around the world have been advocating for increased workplace flexibility and work-from-home arrangements for a long time. In fact, flexible work has been linked to improved employee engagement by the likes of Gallup, Gartner and other highly respected research and consulting houses. However, given the Covid-19 pandemic, companies have now been forced to move quickly, and implement work-from-home arrangements or risk closing their doors. Michelle Baron-Williamson, CEO of Managed Integrity Evaluation (MIE), shares her views.



Image source: Getty Images

“Though some employers have been hesitant to implement flexible work in the past, it is by no means new to South African organisations,” says Baron-Williamson. “We have seen that the lockdown has allowed companies to test the model at scale. For some, this model is working, proving that it is possible to maintain high productivity while employees are working remotely. The question now, though, is do we bring our people back to the office or not – and how can this new working dynamic be managed?”

## An international shift

In April 2020, Gartner released results from a survey of 317 CFOs and business finance leaders in the US. They found that 74% of respondents expect at least 5% of their previously office-bound workforce to become permanent work-from-home employees in a post Covid-19 future. With a further 6% expecting half their workforce, or more, to remain remote.

Baron-Williamson says, “A crucial driver for business leaders when making the move to offer remote working conditions is the potential significant financial benefit that can be gained, from an operational perspective.”

However, it's not just the business leaders that are seeing the benefits of remote work. Employees are also enjoying the opportunity to avoid long commutes, manage their own schedules and remain close to family members who may need care.

"When examining international trends and local developments, it's not a leap to expect that remote work and work-from-home will become more normalised, even beyond Covid-19. However, those organisational leaders that are investigating whether or not to implement some form of remote working options for their employees, must first consider if their strategies to manage a more virtual team are in place and can be easily replicated," indicates Baron-Williamson.

## One size doesn't fit all

"Despite the positive response shown by many, remote work is not for everyone," says Baron-Williamson. "Or rather, not everyone can be managed the same way, and deliver the same degree of productivity, remotely. As a result, companies will need to understand how to equip employees, correctly, to get the most out of the new way of working, as well as provide them with the right support."

*“ The arrangement has to be a productive one. This means obtaining stronger insight into how employees are likely to behave or react to different situations. Focus must be given to areas like problem-solving, emotional agility, communicating with impact, reliability and quality, autonomy and drive, and that age-old concern for many managers – time management. ”*

"Just as importantly, motivating employees who spend little or no time in the office will require understanding as well. Take for example an employee's extrinsic motivators such as praise and recognition, how will these play a role to the shift required in an out-of-the-office work arrangement," adds Baron-Williamson. "This is why we offer the Remote Worker Index, as an assessment tool to help organisations gain this type of insight and guide companies around how potential, or existing employees, will react in a flexible work environment."

"We all know that remote working isn't going away anytime soon. If anything, it is expanding. As a result, it is more important than ever to work with partners who can guide organisations and help them manage the complexity of optimising their remote work talent decisions. Our focus is to not only provide objective assessments into the likely behaviour of employees when working from home, but to provide an outcome on how to manage and motivate employees with limited supervision," concludes Baron-Williamson.

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