



How Southern African Employees are Navigating Covid-19

Pulse survey

July 2020

[KPMG.co.za](https://www.kpmg.co.za)



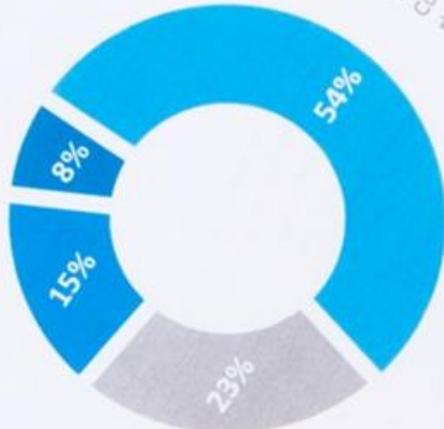
Introduction

The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has been significant and far reaching for many employers. While specific impacts have varied, a common thread is that many organisations have changed the way they operate as a response to the pandemic and as a means to survive. For many employees, this has changed the way in which they interact with their teams, their leaders and their organisations as a whole.

KPMG has gathered insights on the current “pulse” of employees to help employers in Southern Africa understand how they can best support their employees.

Our report is based on **a survey of more than 400 employees from over 58 organisations in Southern Africa** during the months of May/June 2020. Similar to our surveys conducted in other regions, this report highlights the remarkable resilience shown by employees to keep moving forward in the face of great disruption. In addition, leaders are stepping up to the plate in supporting the well-being of their workforces and the largest work-from-home experiment in history is challenging the belief that you have to be at the office to be productive.

Employees from South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia, Swaziland, and Mauritius, employed in over 20 industries including financial services, professional services, pharmaceuticals, transport, government, etc., participated in the pulse survey.



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31%

6

5

4

3

2

1

Q1

Q2

Q3

Q4

15

201

23

31%

8%

Key findings





Key Findings – Leadership and Communication

Southern African employees are confident that their senior leaders are making the right decisions during this crisis

During a crisis like COVID-19, there is a high dependency on leaders to set the right tone at the top and to make the right decisions to effectively navigate the crisis. **Over 70% of employees expressed confidence in their senior leadership to make the right decisions** for their organisations and actions to be taken as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This helps to explain the widespread resilience among the employees we surveyed as more than half indicated they were feeling positive in general.

Confidence in Senior Leadership to make the right decisions



Employers are doing a good job in communicating effectively with employees and providing communication pertinent to wellbeing during this time

More than 75% of employees indicated that the **communication from their employers has been clear and helpful** in understanding what they need to do in response to COVID-19, leaving them better equipped and able to navigate through these changes and challenges. This information has assisted their understanding of the types of resources available in terms of healthcare and benefits (e.g., health plan information, paid time-off, when to stay home, etc.). Nonetheless, most employees would like to receive additional information on various related topics, with the top three commonly cited topics being:

1. “How to manage my current workload and how deadlines would be affected”
2. “How to keep track of changing priorities”
3. “How to balance my caretaking responsibilities (e.g., childcare, eldercare, or other)”

A key concern for employees is an **expected decline in their organisation’s revenue/ profit**, as such, another recurring theme picked up in the survey was the concern of financial impact to employees and what this would mean to them. Leaders need to be aware of this concern and communicate transparently and compassionately and on a regular basis (more than half of the survey respondents indicated that they **would like to receive weekly communications from their employers** on COVID-19 and actions taken).

Clarity of organisation’s actions in communications



While many employees are satisfied with general communications, they would like more transparency on their organisation’s future sustainability and job/income security

Key Findings - Support and Balance

Managers have stepped up to the plate in supporting their employees

The overwhelming majority of employees we surveyed felt supported by their managers in adapting to the changes triggered by COVID-19. This bodes well for building resilience within workforces as managers have a significant role to play in helping employees navigate this crisis. One of the key ways that managers have done this is to get their employees the help they need in order get their jobs done. **Approximately 70% of employees felt that their managers were either very helpful or extremely helpful** in this way. Good, supportive management practices developed out of necessity during this crisis should become the norm going forward.

Support from manager to adapt to organisational change



81%

Teams are playing an important role in navigating the current challenges

While the COVID-19 pandemic has forced workforces across Southern Africa to work remotely (90% of employees in this survey), **teams are still finding ways to connect and support each other**. For most teams, this is the first time that they have had to work for a sustained period of time without seeing each other face-to-face. Despite this, **over 80% of employees felt that their team is working well to support each other** during COVID-19. This has shown that actively reaching out and offering support is a powerful tool to navigate a challenging time for any team.

Teams are working well to support each other



84%

Employees have a clear picture of wellness resources available, but many are finding that workloads are above normal during this time

Having realised the physical and emotional challenges that COVID-19 has presented, organisations have done well to communicate what health and wellness resources are available to their employees. However, **workload demands are affecting a significant number of employees. Over 55% of employees reported having a workload above their normal capacity**. This number increases to 75% when only considering senior managers or above. Prolonged periods of workloads above what they are accustomed to can negatively impact the wellness of employees and if not addressed, can lead to burnout and other mental health challenges.

Access to information for health & wellness benefits is good



89%

Organisations should watch out for burnout of managers and executives

Key Findings - Remote-work enablement

The resources for remote-working were made quickly available for many employees

Before COVID-19, remote working was on the rise, but was still not the norm among Southern African employers. Widespread lockdowns triggered a large work-from-home experiment with minimal time to prepare for this. Our survey suggests that the vast majority (**85%**) of employees were able to access required resources while working remotely. Clearly, remote-working is possible and many organisations will likely be more open to this in the future than they were before. That being said, many organisations will need to develop clear remote work from home policies, which could cover amongst other things working hours, information security, re-imbusement of employee-incurred costs such as wi-fi (if not covered by the organisation), etc.

Satisfied with access to resources while working remotely

85%



Key Findings - Remote-work enablement (cont.)

Employees are generally satisfied with support from their IT departments

The IT department plays a critical role in enabling remote working and ensuring access to their support is essential. Most employees surveyed (75%) are satisfied with IT's support. The key challenges for employees from an IT perspective are connectivity challenges and not having access to some of the physical IT resources they normally use such as a monitor and printer.

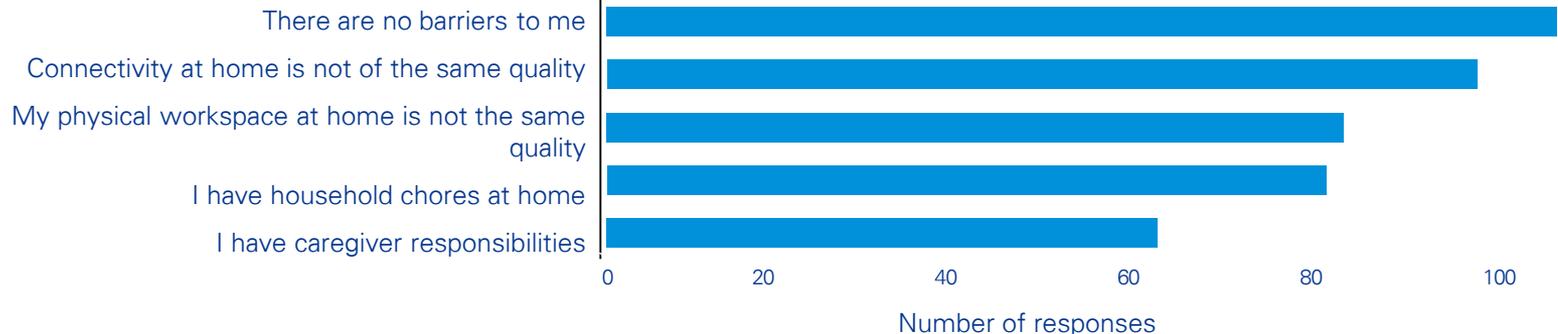
Employees that are satisfied with the support from their IT department, but basics such as monitors and printers that they do not have at home remain a challenge

While many employees face no barriers to maintaining their workload, connectivity, physical workspace and family/household are challenging for some

One of the key hinderances to remote working before COVID-19 was the concern that employees would not be able to maintain their normal workloads if they were not at the office. Our survey partially challenges this. As can be seen in the graph below, many employees surveyed felt they had no barriers to maintaining their workloads working from home. However, for those that did experience barriers, connectivity and physical workspace, followed by household and caregiver responsibilities were the main barriers to overcome. Given the current necessity and future possibility of remote working, organisations should remember that not everyone's experience is the same and focus on the key barriers identified in this report to help employees remain productive.



Top Barriers Facing Remote Employees





COVID-19

Key Findings - On-site safety

Organisations are making strong efforts in ensuring the safety of their employees

As many countries across Southern Africa gradually open their economies and places of work, employees feel satisfied with their organisations' overall safety efforts. This could be partly driven by the necessity to adhere to government regulations on keeping workplaces safe, which helps to drive compliance in this area. Consistent monitoring of these regulations as well as the changing nature of the outbreak are necessary for organisations to maintain these levels of satisfaction. At the time of publication, South Africa faced the biggest threat of infections with a projected peak period in August and September 2020.

Satisfaction with the organisation's safety efforts



The safety guidelines are being clearly communicated by most organisations

Organisations seem to be making a concerted effort to communicate their safety guidelines as **86%** of employees felt the guidelines were being clearly communicated. As these guidelines change, leaders should update employees quickly and provide an accessible platform for employees to submit their concerns or questions about the safety guidelines. The potential anxiety of going back into the office can be eased by continuous, clear communication about how to keep yourself and others safe at the office.

Employees that feel the safety guidelines provided were clear



In general, employees are confident about their organisation's health and safety policies

Most employees (89%) in the survey indicated that they are at least "Somewhat confident" about their organisation's health and safety policies and over two-thirds are at least "Very confident" or "Extremely confident". In particular, having access to protective personal equipment (PPE) such as face masks and access to sanitisers were important to employees.

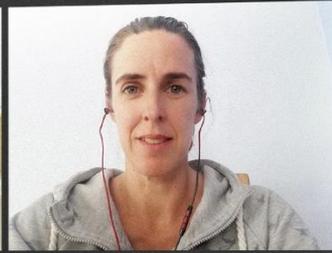
Confident about the organisation's health and safety policies being able to keep me safe



A photograph of a living room. In the foreground, there is a purple sofa with a green pillow. To the right, a laptop is open on a table. The background shows a patterned rug and a wall. The text "Key steps for employers to take" is overlaid on the image in white font.

Key steps for employers to take

11:43



Key steps for employers to take

Leadership



- During these uncertain and insecure times, there is a high dependence on leaders to ensure the right measures are taken in response to COVID-19. Setting the right tone at the top is critical to ensuring business continuity and to drive resilience. Leaders are urged to provide stable, yet agile direction and must be able to strategise, organise and prioritise actions to be taken.



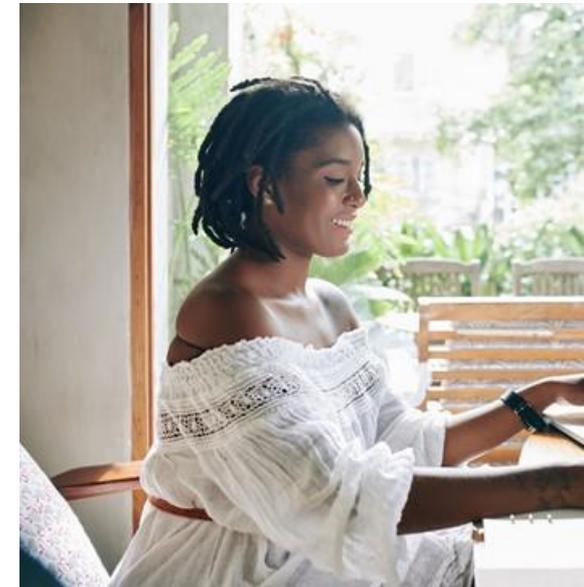
Communication

- It is important that the information you provide gives the relevant details that employees need to continue their role and manage their safety through this new reality. To do this, leaders need to engage in an iterative process of asking employees the right questions that are pertinent to how they are doing, how the organisation is doing in its support and communication efforts, and what further assistance employees need.
- Conducting recurring pulse checks as a means to extract valuable information from employees has proved to be an effective mechanism to understand what employees are feeling and what they need to respond to COVID-19.



Support and Balance

- Employees have generally felt well supported during this time. Good, supportive management practices learned during this crisis should become the norm going forward.
- In managing burnout, prevention is better than cure. Monitor and manage workload demands during this time. To prevent burnout (particularly among leaders), reassess expectations and resources for employees to ensure that they can meet the business and people challenges in a time of significant ambiguity.



Key steps for employers to take (cont.)



Remote-Working Enablement

- COVID-19 will likely see a long-term shift towards increased remote working. As you plan what this may look like for your organisation, provide employees with the tools that they need for their specific workplace arrangements.
- Consider reviewing your HR policies to allow remote working on a more permanent basis for those that would prefer this. This could help retain talent and improve productivity.



On-Site Safety

- Keep employee safety as the top priority. This can cultivate trust and commitment among your employees if they see their leaders taking their health seriously.
- Establish and continuously enhance your mechanisms for maintaining strict health and safety measures and ensure that you communicate regularly to ease the tension for those that are required to or prefer to work on-site.



Our point of view on the new reality

COVID-19 has brought significant changes to the ways of working and employers have had to consider how their operations need to adapt in order to survive. Without the prospect of a widely available vaccine in Southern Africa until at least the end of 2021, employers must be prepared for a lengthy period of disruption and accept that some of the changes experienced may last for the long-term. We are seeing greater shifts towards more remote working, and employers are increasingly investing in adapting to this new reality while others are still exploring what specific changes are needed to best enable their workforces to thrive. As employers embark on this journey, KPMG has identified several recurring themes to consider:



Remote working is here to stay. While, it may not work for everyone, both employers and employees have seen benefits of greater flexibility, and the resulting positive impact on productivity. Either for necessity or choice more likely to work remotely and organisations will need to consider and manage the operational implications of this.



With a shift away from “presenteeism”, **traditional Performance Management assumptions are up for review**, with a focus on outcomes and empowerment of individuals.



The previously slow digitisation of the HR environment has been disrupted. Employee development will require an accelerated **transition to resilient, flexible and blended digital learning as a matter of urgency.**



The acceleration of automation will see an impact on most, if not all roles, requiring a rethink of existing organisational structures, roles and ways of working. Digital transformation is as much about talent as it is about technology.

Our point of view on the new reality (cont.)



Increased demand for the optimal deployment of resources, regardless of silos, structures or teams is transforming traditional structures. The 'boundaryless' organisation enables collaboration across the connected enterprise, creating the opportunity to reshape the workforce in ways before would never be considered.



The implementation of the New Reality requires **a reshaping of the workforce and reimagining of the people agenda in line with changing business and operational strategies**. This requires an HR or People Function that is future-focused, customer-driven and able to adapt in the face of uncertainty.



The **role of leaders changes in the distributed workforce**. Leaders will be charged with matching skills to tasks that need to be done – accessing skills and capabilities wherever they are, cutting across formal lines of accountability. The role of a leader is to create a context within which employees can make their own judgements in a model of distributed leadership.

Contact US:

Monna Monnakgotla

Partner

Digital Consulting: People and Change

+27 71 600 5467

monna.monnakgotla@kpmg.co.za

Collins Makhado

Associate Director

Digital Consulting: People and Change

+27 66 440 5686

collins.makhado@kpmg.co.za

Moroesi Motsei

Principal Consultant

Digital Consulting: People and Change

+27 60 997 6158

moroesi.motsei@kpmg.co.za

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