

Leading experts warn the world about the dangers ahead

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COMPANY CULTURE IN THE NEW NORMAL

Covid-19 has opened up a new way of working. In this new normal, however, how do we keep employees engaged? **FAnews** spoke to a few industry experts about keeping employees engaged and committed in this new normal.

Companies have become more aware

Twenty twenty was indeed a challenging year for businesses, with smaller companies being more battered by the storm, than larger enterprises that were able to weather it better. Many organisations resorted to unprecedented cost cutting initiatives, to keep jobs from being shed and to stay afloat, which has resulted in the prospect for meaningful increases and bonuses seeming bleak.

With this in mind, organisations need to explore non-financial interventions to keep employees engaged and maintain a company culture that fosters a positive emotional commitment from employees. Employee engagement is not driven by remuneration, despite many managers tending to erroneously make this correlation, but instead it is driven by a meaningful work environment that nurtures good emotional connections between employees and their employers, as well as the policies that support this.

Despite all the challenges, the pandemic has managed to shift the thinking around employee engagement, with business leaders taking steps in the right direction. The pandemic has forced managers and employees to develop a common purpose with employees being increasingly recognised for their contributions in achieving business objectives.

Companies have also become more aware of the non-work-related challenges that affect employees' mindsets and have put in place strategies, policies and interventions to address these and support greater work-life balance. This has led to them developing greater levels of mutual trust with employees, and increased levels of transparency, where employees have visibility of the things that affect them.



Muhammed Goolab
Executive Committee Member
South African Reward
Association



Ensuring that employees remain engaged

Enabling employees with the right hardware, software and tools to work from home is important, but ensuring that one's employees remain engaged is critical.

Employee engagement is defined as the emotional commitment that an employee has towards their employer, their colleagues, the company's vision and goals. Employee engagement, their well-being and effectiveness are driven by numerous experience factors such as organisational stability, trust in leadership, compensation and benefits, and recognition, to name but a few.

Implementing the following principles will go a long way towards ensuring that employees remain engaged:

- **Communication and dialogue** – with staff working from home, staying in touch via daily team meetings and/or one-on-one check-ins are important, to manage team performance, facilitate dialogue with employees and enable regular feedback.
- **Sharing of information** – frequent and transparent sharing of informa-

tion from leadership to the coalface, ensures that employees are kept up-to-date because they are reliant on the leaders to make crucial decisions that could have an impact on the organisation and, most importantly, their jobs.

- **Maintain a positive work environment** – remote working has caused a blurring of lines between work and home life. It is important to encourage employees to maintain a healthy work/life balance. Furthermore, both the leadership and management team should show flexibility and be in-tune with the factors that impact employees outside of the workplace.
- **Compassionate leadership and supportive management** – it is important to demonstrate awareness and empathy to the psychological, health, and financial impact of the pandemic, all of which are far reaching, by remaining accessible to your teams.



Heidi Dias
Executive Distribution
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Constantia

An engaged workforce, is a productive one

Motivating employees and increasing their morale, so that they remain engaged, connected and optimistic has become a priority for all employers.

Whilst employees may not be in close proximity, the need to connect with others is strong, and employers can enable this through daily virtual chats and meetings, regular emails with updates and plans, online team activities and casual hangouts, as well as a buddy system where personal connections are fostered. Much of this comes down to effective communication,

and as employers are often caught up in the day-to-day survival of their business, they may neglect this crucial aspect.

However, it is easy to get into the habit of communicating so that it becomes an integral part of the company's culture. Employees need to feel heard and valued, and one thing the lockdown has brought to the fore more than ever is the usefulness of technology. There is almost no excuse not to be in touch as there is a myriad of ways to connect.

Encouraging health and wellness and providing strong leadership, ongoing support and genuine care can make all the

difference in the world. It may be the smallest thing that has the greatest impact... a kind word of appreciation, acknowledgement of a job well done, a personal email or phone call. Being mindful of employees and their challenges should be an employer's top priority because, after all, an engaged and committed workforce is ultimately a productive one.



Anne Grunow
Chief Human Resources
Fedgroup

Effective leadership of remote teams

Managers need to be trained in coaching, developing and engaging in effective leadership of remote teams. No matter where teams are located, managers are responsible for employee engagement, performance management and weekly tracking.

Engage in honest progress reviews, pay scale discussions, and re-evaluate past incentive structures. The incentives applicable before the pandemic, may no longer apply. If performance has not been in line with company productivity targets, then these deviations from performance should be expressed with employees early on, so that there is an opportunity to improve

via course correction and/or performance management.

The induction processes at companies must include a remote onboarding process. This will prepare new recruits and address their needs. Talent acquisition strategies must also be updated to account for developing a remote workforce.

Team leaders are to actively converse with employees (omni-channel means) about their long-term growth and success. They should learn more about employees' intrinsic motivation and past performance and identify what talents can be leveraged from each person, based on past performance and success as a team, because those skills still exist within the organisation.

More importantly, practice and training for employees on how to work functionally, in a remote setting, is important.

Policies should be drafted to enable workers to Work-From-Home (WFH), with outlines of measures in place, to support teams from an IT, direct line management, and other inter-departmental areas. Processes and procedures will need to be amended or even redrafted to fit the new remote work dynamic.



Renay Sewpersad
Fire Protection Association
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Compassionate leadership

Teams thrive under compassionate leadership. During the pandemic, people needed leaders to connect compassionately... leaders who are self-aware and leaders who lead with kindness and care.

The strength of leadership is often measured by looking at things from a commercial perspective. The strength of leadership lies in building a healthy team that is aligned with your purpose and can meet your deliverables. This style of leadership requires leaders to tap into their emotional intelligence and engage with their teams.

Most leaders ascend to leadership positions as a result of their demonstrated technical expertise. The need to develop the skills required to manage and motivate people is often overlooked in many organisations. This can create a vacuum between what employees expect and need from their leaders, and what leaders think good leadership looks like.

Those leaders who are strong technically but have struggled with leading with compassion and emotional intelligence, have had to step up. Teams led by leaders who have invested in these 'softer' skills have improved their productivity and have better employee retention rates.

Embracing a holistic leadership approach that balances technical excellence with the ability to manage people compassionately, is essential to helping your teams navigate uncertain periods and thrive over the long term.



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