

Many of South Africa's recruiters and employers have been asking an important question over the past few months: Is remote work falling away, or is it here to stay?



The global coronavirus pandemic has, without doubt, provided employees with greater flexibility over where, when and how they work. 'Flexible', 'Hybrid' and 'Remote' are no longer just buzz words in the corporate world. They are now firmly embedded models in the employment landscape, and potential deal-breakers for many of South Africa's top talent when it comes to applying for jobs.

We're living in interesting times. Many businesses have now been back to work with their new models in place for several months and Pnet's latest data reveals how this is playing out. The South African job market is showing a growing number of remote work opportunities, with remote job offers more than tripling since the first quarter of 2021. And since March 2020, remote job opportunities have grown more than 22 times! Year-on-year, remote working opportunities have increased by 160% - so it's safe to say that remote work is here to stay!

While remote/hybrid work can be seen as a great risk, it also presents a great opportunity for organisations of all sizes. Despite all the lockdown and social distancing restrictions having been lifted, the fact is that many businesses have already invested in remote working technology to attract top talent and reduce office overhead costs. This is another reason why remote work is unlikely to disappear from the employment landscape any time soon.

It does appear, however, that certain professions seem to provide more remote employment opportunities than others. In South Africa, the roles with the most remote job opportunities are currently Information

Technology, Business & Management and Admin, Office & Support. Our data reveals that South Africa is currently experiencing a skills shortage, particularly in sectors such as Information Technology.

Candidates in very high demand are more likely to demand remote/hybrid working opportunities, so the employee value proposition needs to adapt to accommodate these expectations. Employers will be better equipped to attract and retain top talent if they design work that is not only flexible in terms of geographic location, but also in terms of maintaining and growing company culture in the new world of work.

Remote/hybrid work is not possible for all roles, however, and this could negatively impact diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. One of the biggest challenges companies will face in the remote/hybrid structure will be creating a work experience that is fair and equal for all employees - regardless of where they are situated. Employers who fail to treat remote employees fairly will risk reputational damage that may affect their brand and bottom line as well as their recruitment efforts.

It is therefore crucial to alleviate bias by providing managers (especially hiring managers!) with formal training to help them understand and overcome their unconscious biases. It's also a good idea to offer some degree of flexibility for both office-based and remote/hybrid employees. If you enable in-office employees to choose their preferred office hours, you are less likely to spend time wondering about the productivity levels of the staff who work from home.

At the end of the day, a successful remote/hybrid structure requires a new way of thinking as an employer. At the very least, you'll need to review your current EVP and HR strategy. Many employees have had a taste of flexibility over the past two years and companies that keep this going - at least to some degree - are more likely to attract and retain quality candidates.