

Which employees are suffering most from remote working?

Remote working disproportionately impacts younger generations the hardest, with senior business leaders a close second. This is according to one of South Africa's largest workplace design consultancies.



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Linda Trim, director at Giant Leap, said: “For more junior workers, having less time in the office in order to develop relationships and learn by observing their senior colleagues really hampers their careers.

“Younger workers may suffer disproportionately from the absence of the anchor point of the workplace to help their social and professional development.”

Physical disconnect

Similarly, leaders in the workplace report that day-to-day tasks and instructions can be managed fine from home but fostering a shared sense of purpose and growing the business, the bigger picture work, is stilted and difficult when not done in person.

“Without regular face-to-face contact, leaders find it harder to lead and may even lose their ‘edge’ in their field of expertise when they are operating in a more of a vacuum.”



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This disconnect between leaders and their team has often created the misperceptions that people are not working as hard.

“But what we have noticed is that more junior workers aren’t getting to the answers as quickly and asking any question, at any time, as they would if they were physically next to their managers.”

Isolated adaptors

Trim noted that those ‘in the middle’ and who had been at a company for a long enough to know its ways, culture and expectations had better adapted to working from home in the beginning.

“But now, a year later, they are also increasingly reporting missing their work friends and the particular dynamism and innovation that happens when people work together. They also miss the cohesion and community,” Trim added.



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Communication challenges

Trim also noted an under-appreciated and under-reported obstacle of working from home is the challenges of effectively reading our colleagues and clients via virtual communication.

“As social beings, we are designed to influence the thinking and behaviours of other people. We have a whole array of non-verbal behaviours that help us interpret the person in front of us, much of which is unavailable to us in a remote working scenario. Fundamentally, face to face gives you much greater bandwidth.

“It helps us interpret other people, but just as importantly, it helps us not to misinterpret them.”



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More than just a building

The future of work is all about choice, with the office being part of a wider ecosystem of physical and digital spaces where employees can work.

However, the office remains at the heart of our work ecosystem because, even in a post-Covid world, so many of us instinctively recognise the value of coming together to work, in person.

“The office provides a much better environment for encouraging people to feel like a valued member of the business,” Trim concluded.

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