

The business model has forever been disrupted

The Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent move to remote working has put many companies under pressure as they navigate a new way of managing remote workforces. Small businesses are taking substantial strain during this time given their limited access to resources, and often they lack the experience in handling human capital issues.



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Managing remotely poses a number of unique challenges. How, for example, does the company ensure remote workers are doing what they are supposed to be doing, when they are supposed to be doing it; that they are on task and on schedule? How do you keep them motivated over extended periods of time?

“Policies and procedures become increasingly important when you are managing a remote workforce,” reveals Drina Meyer-Jardine, CEO of MJ Specialised Consulting, a professional business support services consultancy.

Many small and even some medium sized businesses were caught on the back foot at the outset of the lockdown with no policies or procedures to fall back on in terms of guiding the business’s expectations of employees and employees’ expectations from the Employer.

Managing staff

One of the biggest challenges, many businesses have found, is managing less motivated staff members who may use the opportunity offered by working from home to do their own personal chores during the working day. “In addition to time sheets, there are technological offerings which offer reporting, diagnostics and analysis to measure what work the employee has done during the course of the day,” reveals Meyer-Jardine. “Certain cloud-based digital applications can even track the employee’s physical whereabouts using GPS technology.”

“Where time sheets are used”, she adds, “it is important to stress on employees the consequences of fraudulent time keeping”.

“Every company, irrespective of its size”, she stresses, “needs to have employee policies and procedures in place that guides the company culture and actions in terms of employee relations. It furthermore sets the condone actions for employees”. While some businesses recruit staff on little more than a handshake and don’t believe they need contracts, policies and procedures in place, from a legal perspective, is actually not sufficient”. Employees need to be reasonably informed of their terms of employment as stipulated within the Basic Conditions of Employment. Should the relationship with the employee sour for any reason and the employee takes the company to the CCMA or respective Bargaining Council, it’s important to, at the very least, have an employment contract in place.”

“Even businesses with only one or two employees need to have employment contracts for their staff, and policies and procedures available”, she reveals. “And while many of these documents are freely available on the Internet”, Meyer-Jardine says “rather than using generic documents, they should be specifically structured for each business’ unique culture and requirements”.

“Professional advice is an investment that will reap a significant return in the long term and means the business can avoid potentially falling foul to any regulations,” she says.

Employee wellbeing

Another priority for management is to be focused on employees’ wellbeing and mental health at a time when staff members may be feeling isolated and suffering high levels of stress. “There is no question that a lack of human connection will be taking its toll on employees, which is why managers and business leaders need to be empathetic. They need to put aside regular time to connect with each employee. If possible, they could also allow small groups of staff to come in to the office on alternate days. Rewarding and acknowledging staff for a job well done with something like a voucher will also go a long way towards making employees feel valued and appreciated,” she suggests.

“Although remote workforces may be harder to manage initially, there are certain benefits to having staff work offsite”, maintains Meyer-Jardine, “including the fact that companies can grow their workforces without having to invest in larger business premises. There is no question that remote working is here to stay, so it makes sense for business’s to successfully navigate what is involved in managing remotely.”