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### **The challenge of keeping remote workers engaged and feeling valued**

According to Gallup 2020, culture can be understood as "how we do things around here." Right now, the "how" is changing daily, and in some cases forever, due to the manner in which many companies are still working.

Lindiwe Miyambu, group executive for human capital at African Bank, says this brings quantifiable risks to a business, with research showing an immediate impact on employees' sense of belonging and overall employee engagement. "Even if for many employees, the long-term remote work option may be preferred, there is no doubt that we are seeing a break down in critical relationship-building at work," she says.

Results from Gallup (2020) found that employees who do not work in the same location as their manager are 10 percentage points less likely to say someone cares about them at work and to feel their contribution is not recognised. They are also 5 percentage points less likely to feel like their opinions count. And for those individuals with an absolute preference for working in person, the disengaging effects of remote work can be as serious as 17% lower productivity and 24% higher staff turnover.

Miyambu says employees who work virtually are definitely more disconnected from core cultural components and this has necessitated the introduction of a new set of actions to build culture and help reach people in different ways.

Managing remote working is not just a matter of providing remote workers with a new IT communication platform and assuming it will be business as usual. "Managers need to be aware of how remote work may create feelings of isolation, a lack of focus and decreased creativity among team members. They have had to develop and build a whole new skills set for managing their team effectively."

She says some of the most notable management requirements for leading remote teams are:

- Resist micromanagement. Managers shouldn't have to micromanage a team in the office, so you shouldn't have to do it when they are working remotely. Regular one-on-one check-ins help managers avoid micromanaging, while still enabling them to keep a pulse on the team and provide them with an opportunity to ensure feedback goes both ways. "It's important that managers track metrics that matter to their organisation and check in with employees. Too much oversight however can show employees signs of mistrust."
- Instead of micromanaging managers should focus their energy on building a psychologically safe working environment where team members are comfortable to voice their opinions and ideas and not fear being judged or shot down.
- When it comes to working with remote teams, the key is to allow for flexibility. Although a concrete plan is important, managers should be open to adjusting strategies as needed. Whether employees choose to put

in their hours in the morning or evening should not matter, as long as the work gets completed and is of high quality.

- The best method is to ask team members how they want to be managed while working remotely. In that way, managers can keep a pulse on what each employee needs to be productive while working from home.

“All of these requirements require management to fully understand that relationship building is a core requirement that will enable them to employ different methods for their diverse teams,” she says.

Looking forward, Miyambu believes the workplace of the future will become a hybrid model of employees working from home and at the office. “Leaders will be required to relearn new ways of leading in a remote world as the predominant delegate-and-comply model of management will no longer work. They should encourage ongoing human connection through continuous communication and leadership one-on-ones which promote higher levels of trust, engagement, and productivity,” she concludes.

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