

More companies embrace new ways of working

Companies are increasingly softening to the ideas of remote working and flexitime as the understanding of the importance of employee wellness on productivity starts gaining ground.



Image source: Getty Images

This and other noteworthy trends emerged from an annual HR Survey conducted by Jack Hammer, independent African executive search firm with offices across the continent as well as Los Angeles.

The survey polled HR directors from 28 major companies across various industries including Fintech, Financial Services, Health, Education, Retail, Media, Manufacturing, and the NGO sector.

“Globally, the trend is for companies’ talent retention strategies to look beyond mere financial incentive, and to implement measures that ensure employee buy-in and engagement as a result of the focus on their wellbeing. We were therefore interested to see how South African companies fare in this regard, and to find out what measures have been introduced in local workplaces,” says Advaita Naidoo, COO at Jack Hammer.

She says the survey allowed for open-ended response answers to the strategies companies have employed that had a notably positive result on employee engagement, wellness and productivity.

The most popular “new ways of working” reported by SA companies polled, included:

- Remote working solutions (54% of companies)
- In-house catering at company expense (25%)
- Flexible hours (54%)
- Purpose-designed engaging workspaces (36%) (Including pause-and-rest areas, sleeping pods, ergonomic furniture, and green spaces.)
- Physical and mental wellness options (29%)

Other interventions, which are at the beginning stages of being introduced locally, include:

- Relaxed dress codes
- Extended/non-traditional leave policies
- International secondments
- Study options for employees and families
- Sabbaticals for long tenure
- On-site childcare

“Companies are really starting to take on board the importance of being outcome rather than output and process-driven, and the fact that treating employees like adults actually empowers them, leading to an increase in engagement and productivity,” says Naidoo.

She says as with previous surveys, the fintech and financial services sectors continued to score higher on implementation of new ways of working measures, but that there is a definite shift towards other industries getting on board, with retail close on the heels of the leaders.

“From all the respondents we are seeing an understanding that a culture of trust is paramount, and that policing should be giving way to a focus on deliverables and engagement,” Naidoo says.

She says that in highly competitive markets, workplace culture becomes the differentiator for the ability to attract top talent.

“As we have noted through our US office, companies focus very heavily on their Employee Value Proposition and employer brand, because this is a critical talent magnet. And the impact of top talent is immeasurable.

“In the SA market, competition for talent is less robust, but in the tech space, the same principles apply, with a high demand for skills which are in short supply. What makes the difference then, is workplace culture and benefits. Of course, because of our economy, employers are also searching for ways to incentivise and retain talent, and this is where these non-financial incentives can make a difference.”

Naidoo says the challenge to introduce new, employee-focused policies is particularly onerous for large, established companies.

“It is of course easy to establish these practices as the norm when you’re starting from scratch with a new start-up, but it is much more difficult to implement in a behemoth or an older company. Some of the concerns expressed were the difficulty HR managers had in shifting the company leadership’s approach to outcomes-based rather than activity-based measurement.

“What is clear however is that companies, regardless of established policy and practices which are often decades-old, should at the very least start thinking in that direction if they are to keep up with the changing world of work and the work-life approach of new generations of workers. If they fail to adapt and update the policies, they are very likely to start losing competitive advantage – at first perhaps slowly, but without a doubt substantially down the line - to other companies who are able to attract rising stars and retain proven talent because of their employee-focused strategy.”

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