

More South Africans willing to embrace remote work than global average - study

According to a new report, one of the major legacies of the pandemic is that employees expect to be allowed to work remotely more often. This is a finding from the study *Decoding Global Ways of Working*, conducted by the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and The Network, including local partner organisation CareerJunction, which included almost 209,000 participants in 190 countries and 1,421 in South Africa. It's the second in a series of publications that BCG and The Network are releasing about the pandemic's impact on worker preferences and expectations.



Photo by Vlada Karpovich from [Pexels](#)

Over half – 53% – of South Africans said their preference in the future will be for a job that allows them to work from home at least occasionally. However, South Africa has also emerged as one of the countries that would embrace fully remote work, with 44% saying they want to work fully remotely compared to a global average of 24%.

“The pandemic has significantly changed how people think about their work and mobility preferences, because many had to transition to remote work basically overnight,” says Rudi van Blerk, principal and recruiting director at Boston Consulting Group, Johannesburg. “Workers and managers alike have seen that flexible work models are possible and, in fact, desirable, with only four percent of South Africans saying they would want to return to working completely on-site at an office after the pandemic.”

Keeping it remote

In fact, South Africans in digital, knowledge, and office jobs in particular — many of whom are already working remotely — want more workplace flexibility on a permanent basis, and would even consider going fully remote. Marketing & Communication leads the charge, with 62.5% saying they would move to a fully remote mode of working.

Even study participants who have jobs that require the handling of physical goods, or contact with clients, expressed a desire for setups that would allow them to work remotely at least occasionally. Nearly 60% – 57% – of social care workers in South Africa said they would move to working remotely.



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24 Dec 2020



People also desire flexibility in when work gets done. In total, 61% of South African respondents would like some or full flexibility in defining their working hours. This is in line with the global average of 64%. The majority of workers in all job roles also show a strong desire for this flexibility to extend beyond the pandemic.

“South African respondents felt a generally positive impact of Covid-19 on the way they work, particularly in terms of the flexibility in when and how to work, the use of digital tools, effectiveness, and team collaboration,” says van Blerk. “The only exception was work-life-balance, where the impact reported was negative. Overall impact was worse in physical or social contact jobs, like social care, manual work, and customer service – but it was positive for knowledge/digital jobs.”

Shifting preferences and values

The survey also identified some shifts in what people value at work – and South African respondents’ preferences shifted considerably during the crisis.

In BCG and The Network’s last study on global talent, in 2018, respondents said that they expected their jobs to provide them with a mix of both short- and long-term benefits. The short-term benefits that were most important in 2018 — good relationships with colleagues and managers and a good work-life balance — still top the list today globally. And another short term-benefit—pay—has joined them as a priority. Long-term benefits like career development and skills training have faded.

Respondents in South Africa, on the other hand, while also valuing good relationships with their colleagues, work-life balance, and learning and skill training in line with the global trend, were more concerned with company values.



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9 Dec 2020



“South Africa was one of the only countries where company values ranks the highest, and moved up from being ranked fifth in 2018 to being ranked number one,” says Wiebka Cooper, Operations Manager at CareerJunction, The Network partner organisation that helped with the survey in South Africa.

“Interestingly, financials, stability and pay were not so important to South African respondents, which is different from the

global trend. South African workers appear to be much more motivated by softer factors around values, culture and good work-life balance than hard factors like pay. Employers need to ensure that these softer needs are met even in virtual work settings.”

Going green

South African respondents also care more than the global average about environmental responsibility and diversity: 79% of South Africans said environmental responsibility had become more important in the past year, compared to 69.6% globally. Eighty-two percent of South Africans also said that diversity and inclusion (D&I) had become more important to them in the past year, compared to 68.7% globally.

These issues were also particularly important to the country’s young people, with 87% saying D&I and 82% saying environmental responsibility had become more important to them in the past year. Half of the South African respondents would even refuse to work for an employer that does not match their beliefs in these aspects.

“Organisations now need to take what they’ve learned and create long-lasting solutions to meet expectations that will linger after the pandemic ends,” says van Blerk.



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The report makes recommendations for how companies can adapt to workers’ expectations about remote work for the long term, among them new leadership models and remote work strategies designed for individual jobs.

The data gathered for *Decoding Global Ways of Working* provides insights into worker preferences by gender, age, education level, level of digital skill, and position in the job hierarchy. This data will also inform a third report that BCG and The Network will publish in the coming weeks as part of their latest research into global talent. The third report will focus on the pandemic’s impact on people’s career plans and prospects.

A copy of the new report can be downloaded [here](#).

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