

Covid-19: An accelerant for inclusion in the workplace

By [Goobisa Ntshona](#), issued by [LexisNexis](#)

18 Jan 2021

As we embrace a new way of working, considering the perspectives and circumstances of your entire workforce - including people who might otherwise have been excluded or marginalised - has fast become one of the most crucial aspects of a company's survival in these trying times.

Diversity and inclusion should naturally form part of a business's ethos during its 'good days'. But in times of uncertainty, where companies are buckling under the financial strain while also shouldering a stressed workforce, these pillars of good business can further help steer organisations into safer waters.

More than one way to success

In many ways, we are conditioned to believe there is one right way through which industries can thrive – such as working set hours and adhering to social norms. However, since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic, we have been taught many valuable lessons. One being that the old and traditional ways of conducting business, while effective, may not be the only way forward any longer. Industries can remain equally operational and productive by working remotely, adopting technology as an additional tool and leaning into the diversity of its workforce.

Cognitive diversity is valuable

Diversity of personnel equals diversity of thought and ideas, which is compulsory for a more effective approach in these unprecedented times and to achieve long-term financial stability and reputational longevity.

In a pre-Covid-19 existence, a diverse workforce was already proven to result in both a positive, stable work environment and a fruitful bottom-line for companies in comparison to other organisations who fail to make this pillar a priority. Now, while we learn to navigate through this new normal, where Covid-19 must be factored into every output, diversity is even more advantageous.

Laura Liswood, secretary-general, of the Council of Women World Leaders, writing for the World Economic Forum Covid Action Platform, says "Cognitive diversity – the numerous ways people think and carry their varied experiences – offers a spectrum of perspectives that can help organisations navigate this unprecedented economic and health collapse."

Simply put, a company that already houses a diverse workforce is one step ahead of those that do not. The key now is to harness the power you have on hand through the process of inclusion.

Encourage diversity in collaboration

Now is the ideal time to foster partnerships between employees who bring their own experiences and cognitive diversity to the table.

This could range from encouraging collaboration between older and younger members of the staff complement, to teams across different departments and from divergent socio-economic backgrounds, gender, ethnicity and education backgrounds. Encouraging collaboration on this level, creates an informal training space in which employees can share their expertise and exchange ideas to develop innovative solutions that yield positive results for the organisation and its clients. This has the added benefit of bonding team members, keeping them mentally active and ensuring the psychological safety of your workforce as they manoeuvre day to day work demands.

Reduce hierarchy

LexisNexis managing director Videsha Proothveerajh believes the answer lies with leaders of today becoming “comfortable with reduced hierarchy, which takes us close to the field, the shop floor and all levels of the organisation, gleaning valuable feedback to be incorporated into the organisation’s plans to continuously improve. The willingness to be collaborative and understand the value of diversity and inclusion as a business investment is a valuable skillset to hone.”

This is where open communication with every employee becomes essential.

We may all be in this together, but each individual within a team will have their own personal experience of dealing with this pandemic. Ensuring that all employees feel equally catered to and safe to voice their opinions is key.

Want to access insights around Future of Work Trends post Covid-19? Find them [here](#) and [here](#)

For further insights around managing your workplace more effectively in this new normal, [click here](#).

About Gcobisa Ntshona, Human Resources Director at LexisNexis South Africa

Gcobisa Ntshona is accountable for driving the Human Capital strategy for the company. She has a proven track record of delivering business results through her strategic focus on value creation. She is a passionate and engaging leader with the ability to balance both strategic and tactical people management aspects. She has worked with different business executives across various sectors in South Africa and abroad. Her visionary approach will drive employee engagement and talent management with the aim of establishing LexisNexis South Africa as an employer of choice.




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