



How does remote working impact Diversity & Inclusion?

Introduction

Earlier this year, a leader in Employer Branding, Universum, identified four key challenges and trends talent acquisition experts should pay attention to in its [global 2022 Talent Outlook](#), namely: Hybrid working; Flexibility culture; Inclusion; and Work-Life Wellness (balance).

In the presentation of its findings, they posed an important question: ***Will a shift to remote working help or harm inclusion?***

September is Heritage Month, the perfect time to explore the different types of diversity in the workplace as well as some of the ways that Diversity & Inclusion can enhance a company's success. We also explore the pros and cons of remote work within the context of Diversity & Inclusion – from the perspective of both employers and employees.



What are the different types of diversity in the workplace?

Within a social context, the types of diversity are endless – encompassing every distinguishing physical feature or trait that individuals in a group of people may have. When it comes to diversity in the workplace, however, here are seven of the more common types:



- **Cultural diversity** means developing a workforce that is not only comprised of, but values, employees from different cultures and acknowledging the set of norms they get from their society or their family values. A common example of cultural diversity in the workplace is a multilingual workforce.
- **Racial diversity** is the acknowledgement and celebration of difference between racial groups. Race is a protected characteristic that refers to an individual's race, nationality and ethnic or national origins, for example African, Caucasian, and Asian.

- **Religious diversity** refers to an acceptance of multiple religions and spiritual beliefs (or lack thereof) in the workplace, for example allowing employees to observe important dates in their religious calendars.
- **Age diversity** is an acceptance of different ages in a professional environment, which includes taking steps to prevent ageism in the workplace. The benefit of age diversity is that it enables workers of different ages to collaborate, share knowledge and support each other in complementary ways. Generational examples include GenZers, Millennials, GenXers and Baby Boomers.
- **Gender diversity** is an umbrella term that is used to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity of expression beyond the binary framework. In the workplace, it has traditionally related to the goal of achieving a 50-50 balance between male and female employees. Today, "gender diversity" entails efforts to be more inclusive of individuals across many variations of gender identity and sexual orientation.
- **Disability diversity** encompasses creating an inclusive and supportive work environment for differently abled individuals living with physical or mental chronic conditions. Having a variety of talents and limits in a workforce is called ability and disability diversity. Companies often provide their employees with sensitivity training, or classes or workshops designed to help people understand and appreciate the disabilities of others.
- **Socio-economic diversity** deals with employees' education and financial status. Allowing employees, regardless of their financial stability, to work and thrive is good business practice. It is the employer's responsibility to make sure employees have the opportunities to become more financially stable. This form of diversity is particularly important in South Africa as helps to redress the imbalances of the past, which led to the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of many communities.

How can Diversity & Inclusion enhance a company's success?

Many successful businesses have identified three core aspects as part of their Employer Brand Narrative: Inclusion, Innovation, and Positive Impact. When it comes to attracting and retaining talent, Diversity & Inclusion have become huge priorities. This is because candidates now look for companies with similar values that stay committed to their diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) policies.

Hiring individuals from varying cultural and socio-economic backgrounds is also good for business. [In a survey of over 1 700 companies](#), companies who prioritised diversity produced a greater proportion of revenue from innovation (45% of total) than companies with below average diversity (26%).

Research suggests that more diverse organisations foster a culture of creativity and productivity, as people from different backgrounds tend to use their shared experiences to develop stronger solutions to problems. If everyone in a company shared the same life experiences and came from similar backgrounds, it is likely that they would think alike more often than not – and fewer dissimilar opinions would lead to less ideas in terms of how to grow a business and move it forward. Ultimately, cultural diversity contributes to greater innovation and more profitability, leading to better long-term outcomes for a company.

Diversity and inclusion strategies in recruitment have been on the rise and will continue to become more prevalent in 2023. According to recent research conducted by Glassdoor, 76% of today's candidates consider a diverse workforce to be an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers.

Businesses are turning to technology such as AI and workplace assessment tools to remove unconscious bias in the recruitment process and build diverse workplaces. Since 2021, CareerJunction has seen corporates actively recruiting for diversity and inclusion roles, like "Diversity & Inclusion Manager" or "Diversity & Inclusion Co-ordinator".

Remote or hybrid work can promote diversity, equity and inclusion, but it also comes with potential challenges. In the following sections of this whitepaper, we look at the some of the pros and cons that have been associated with remote work within the context of Diversity & Inclusion.



How does remote working positively impact Diversity & Inclusion?

Findings* reveal that **65%** of talent professionals believe remote working will have a positive effect of inclusive hiring and **58%** believe it will result in a more inclusive working environment (especially for parents).

Here are some of the ways that remote/hybrid work can support Diversity & Inclusion efforts:

The flexibility that comes with the remote/hybrid model helps broaden opportunities for women, supporting the goal of employment equity in the workplace



Many women must juggle their work responsibilities with those of raising children and – for a growing number of single parents in particular – the traditional office environment can make it difficult for them to advance in their careers because of the costs associated with childcare among other factors.



Remote/hybrid work creates new opportunities for those who can't afford transportation costs as well as for people living with disabilities.



Historically, the cost of commuting has posed a significant barrier to employment for marginalised groups in South Africa. A daily trip to work can be a daunting prospect for employees with mobility limitations, or for those who are sole breadwinners and caretakers of elderly parents and/or children. Remote work removes the cost and stress of commuting, allowing employees to join teams and meaningfully contribute without having to physically be in an office.

Employers can tap into a wider talent pool when hiring for roles that are not geographically restrictive.



This makes diversity within the workforce more achievable because employers have greater access to candidates from more varied backgrounds and demographics.



By creating a distributed workforce, employers can attract and retain individuals who prefer working from home as a means of improving their work-life balance.

This is particularly the case for Gen Y (Millennials) and Gen Z employees, who tend to be attracted by employee value propositions that include flexible work hours and mental health days.



*SOURCE: Universum-INSEAD Global Remote Working Survey (2022-01)

How does remote working negatively impact Diversity & Inclusion?

Findings* reveal that **44%** of professionals feel they might be missing out by working remotely; that those working from the office will build stronger connections and relationships; and that remote workers will be less considered for promotions, special projects, and so on. Moreover, **45%** of talent professionals expect a negative impact on those unable to work from home.

Here are some of the ways that remote/hybrid work can deter Diversity & Inclusion efforts:

- **Remote work can make some employees feel lonely and cut-off from their colleagues.** In the traditional office environment, employees were more easily able to connect with one another, enjoying a cup of coffee together or stopping to chat at each other's desks in between meetings or daily tasks. These informal conversations can positively impact inclusion and support a happier work experience. Remote work can lead to feelings of isolation and even burn-out risk, as employees tend to work longer hours with fewer breaks. Companies utilising the remote/hybrid work model may need to go the extra mile with regular check-ins to help employees feel connected.
- **Employers may find it difficult to foster a strong company culture, common vision or sense of camaraderie.** Having employees situated in multiple locations, and often working different hours, may reduce opportunities for collaboration. This may be partly offset with online collaboration tools and virtual teambuilding activities, but face-to-face collaboration is often more effective because it allows individuals to pick up on non-verbal cues (for example, body language) and build relationships.
- **There may be barriers to work based on technological literacy, particularly for older employees.** Adapting to the tech required for effective remote working may be more challenging for employees in the 45+ age group. This could result in ageism during the hiring process, with older candidates not being considered for potential roles based on their lack of tech proficiency.
- **Some people don't have homes that are suitable for remote work.** There is an important socioeconomic factor to consider. Talented individuals simply might not even apply for a remote work position if they don't have a clean and quiet environment with high-speed internet. Some may not have the physical space for a home office, while others may have children at home or live in a noisy, crowded neighbourhood which could distract them from their daily tasks. Furthermore, an unsuitable home office space may create health risks. For example, employees may develop musculoskeletal injuries from poor seating arrangements over an extended period of time.



CareerJunction's stance



While the jury may still be out on this issue, it certainly appears that – from a Diversity & Inclusion perspective – remote working does more good than harm, more so when the hybrid model is used. In these post-Covid times, conversations about remote/hybrid models tend to focus on productivity and management, and about the fear that company culture will suffer. Yet remote work does offer great opportunities for inclusion, for example a single parent who needs the flexibility that these new models offer can now once again become part of the talent pool. Remote work can level the playing field for marginalised groups, removing barriers to entry for many candidates and providing employers with additional opportunities to create diverse teams within their organisations. Diversity & Inclusion is not a “nice to have” ...it is essential to the long-term health of a company. And while not all work can be done remotely, using a remote/hybrid model correctly can positively affect ROI.

To ensure that you're tracking the right metrics to help you align your Diversity, Equity and Inclusion goals and hybrid strategy, it is a good idea to consider the following questions:

- Who is working mostly at the office and who is working mostly at home?
- Do your employees have equal flexibility in deciding when to come into the office?
- Does the amount of time spent in the office affect an

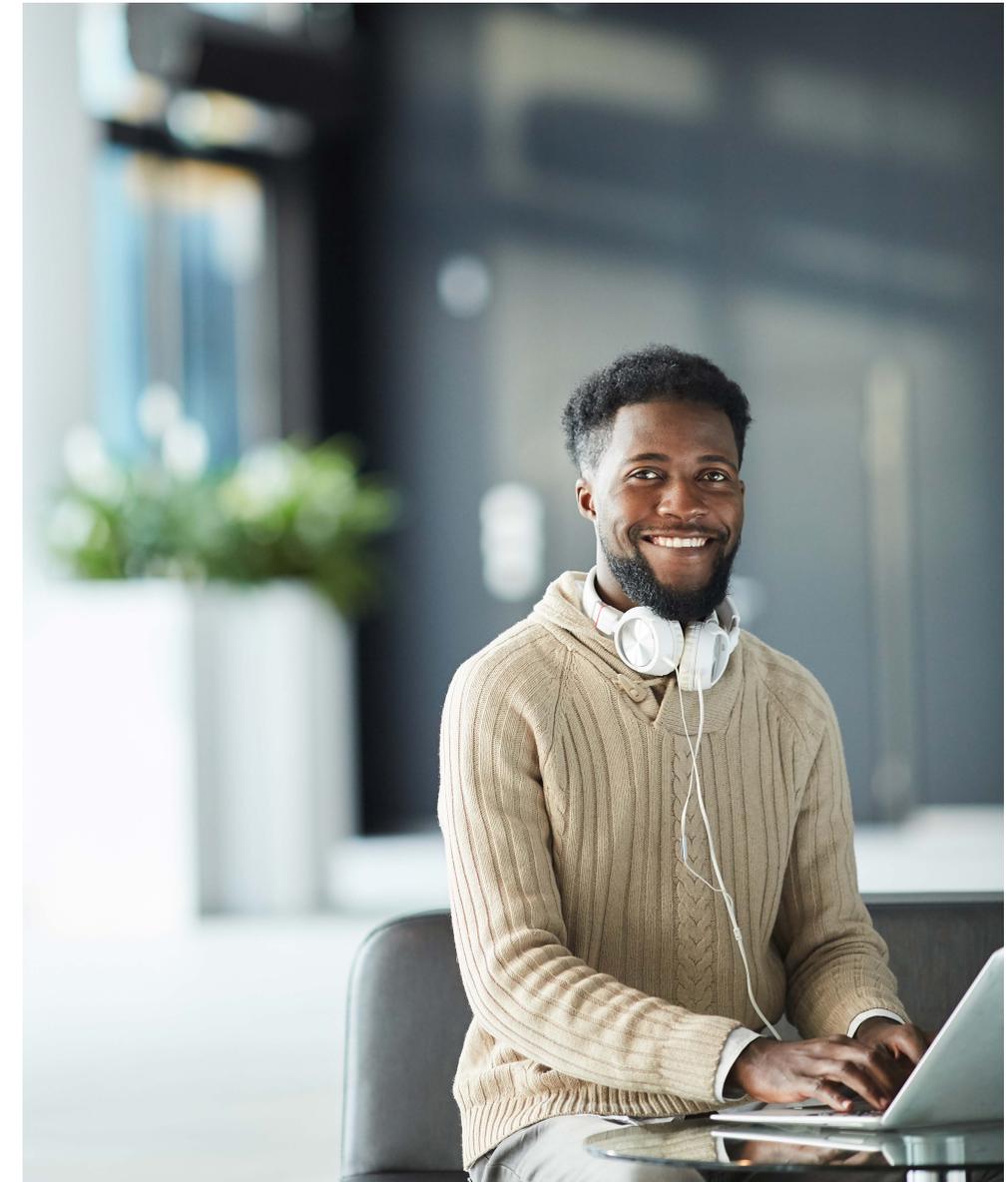
employee's opportunity for promotion?

- How are remote employees managed compared to those who work predominantly in the office?
- In what ways is your hybrid policy positively or negatively affecting employee engagement and retention?

CareerJunction is committed to making Diversity & Inclusion a priority. In fact, it is a huge and important part of how StepStone (our parent company) operates as a global entity. That said, we also truly believe that company culture and face-to-face engagement with peers is a crucial aspect of belonging. So, like many businesses in this post-pandemic era, we are navigating the evolving world of work and we will continue to monitor the impact of the hybrid/remote model closely.

If you're looking to add more diversity to your workforce, CareerJunction's specialist online recruitment platform is a great place to start. We are proud to have a database of approximately 3.3 million registered jobseekers on our platform, representing a broad cross-section of society.

To find out how CareerJunction can help you with your recruitment plans, call +27 87 232 2020 or send an email to recruiter.support@careerjunction.co.za.



A photograph of two men in an office setting, both smiling and looking at a laptop screen. The man on the left is wearing glasses and a light-colored sweater. The man on the right is wearing a patterned shirt. The background shows a window with a view of trees and a bookshelf. The entire image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

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Junction***