

CORPORATE STAFFING HUMAN RESOURCE REPORT, 2020

**THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC
AND THE KENYAN WORKPLACE**



CORPORATE
staffing services

MARCH 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

The world is battling a new, highly infectious disease, the novel Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), COVID-19 is caused by the most recently discovered coronavirus. This new virus and disease were unknown before the outbreak began in Wuhan, China, in December 2019.

COVID-19 has been declared a global pandemic, as its spread leaves many thousands sick and some have succumbed to the pneumonia-like illness.

Covid-19 was first reported in Kenya on 13 March 2020. President Uhuru Kenyatta, on Sunday, March 15, 2020, urged employers, including the government to allow employees to work from home to reduce chances of spreading the infection. The announcement however exempted workers who serve in critical or essential service sectors.

This move would be a first for the country where even public servants would be required to take up option of doing their jobs from home.

Remote working was suggested as a means of practising social distancing during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. So far, medics all over the world are urging people to stay at home in order to ensure social distancing, which is so far the only known effective means of pushing back infections. Corporate Staffing Services conducted an online survey to capture and share the experiences of employees and employers who have been working from home for nearly a fortnight now, as a result of the presidential directive following the COVID-19 outbreak in Kenya. Data was collected between March 16 and March 20. Over 1830 employees and 258 employers were involved in the survey.

Executive summary

Telecommuting, teleworking, or remote working, is the practise of carrying out business and other work procedures away from the traditional office setting.

It has been effectively used for decades in the developed world as a means to expand a company's pool of talents, save on costs of putting up a physical office, help workers mitigate issues such as traffic and as well spend more time with their families while still remaining productive.

As the advent of technology and internet took over many functions in the workplace, telecommuting has presented viable work ideas that are beneficial to both small businesses as well as big corporates.

In the wake of the novel Coronavirus pandemic, Asian Nations were urging their workers to stay home but continue working. The option proved largely successful for the workforce that was largely cultured to work from physical office locations.

Remote working has been widely recommended as a means of practising social distancing to help contain the spread of COVID-19.

Some of the findings from the survey are:

- Though majority of the employers have implemented the work-from-home Presidential directive, they have not provided proper training or resources/facilities that will enable their employees work from home productively. Resources like a laptop, good and stable internet etc are essential, depending on the kind of job one is delivering on. The biggest challenge employees are experiencing when working from home is stable internet.
- Employers have a challenge in communicating, supervising and coordinating work when their employees are working from home. This indicates that employers are untrained and have no capacity on how to properly manage and monitor remote workers. They find it easier to manage someone face-to-face.
- There is mistrust in some employers. Some supervisors, perhaps because they feel they must be in control or don't trust their workers, are uncomfortable having employees work offsite.
- Employers said that employees working from home aren't as productive as when they're onsite. The employees revealed that they have worked fewer hours when at home than if they worked from the offices.
- Almost three quarters of the employers mentioned that they would like to entrench the work from home culture in their organizations once the pandemic is over.
- Overall, only 21.4% (69) of the respondents mentioned that their organizations have a BCP in place that will be effective in enabling their organizations recover after the business interruption due to the COVID-19.

Recommendations

- Employers must provide their employees with an allowance that will cater for services such as internet connectivity and requisite tools such as laptop machines so that they are able to work from home efficiently.
- There is a need for clear communication from the employer to the employee on what needs to be accomplished during the time of engagement.
- It is important that employers have a policy in place that addresses remote working options. This will guide complexities such as communication, supervision etc. When staff are working remotely.

- Where employees require the use of communication platforms and resources like web-conferencing, employers must provide training to their employees on how to best utilize those resources.
- Employees must embrace technology if they are to work from home productively. Understanding how to work virtually and be as productive as when working on-site is a critical skill to develop.
- Employees must remain authentic. They must ensure that they are trustworthy and purpose-driven because their employer requires nothing less from them.

2. SURVEY METHODOLOGY

This survey sought to capture Kenya's workforce experiences working from home, following the Presidential directive of effecting a work-from-home policy to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus.

Data Collection

The survey was administered online. The request to participate in the online survey was delivered to all the employees and employers registered in our database, through their email accounts, with the link to the survey included in the message.

A total of 1,830 employees and 258 employers participated in this survey.

Data Confidentiality

To protect the confidentiality of the participants and their responses, all submissions were anonymous. Further, raw data was strictly viewed by an external consultant with the intent to be used for the detailed analysis, trending and content for this report.

Limitations

All of the information reported in our analysis was dependent on self-reported data, which means there are inherent issues, including exaggeration, forgetfulness, minimization, and more. Additionally, none of our findings have been weighted or statistically tested.

3. WORKING FROM HOME SURVEY FINDINGS

a) Characteristics of the Survey Participants

Respondents are from various professions, with the Service industry garnering most participants. Others are in the manufacturing sector, corporate sector and NGOs/Non-profit organizations. The table below illustrates the industries/sector our survey respondents were drawn from

Table 1: Sectors worked in

Industry	Employers		Employees	
	N	%	N	%
Financial institution (banking, insurance)	25	9.5%	243	13.3%
Education Sector	6	2.4%	86	4.7%
Service	40	15.5%	248	13.5%
Hospitality/ industry	15	6%	119	6.5%
Professional (Consulting, Accounting, Law etc)	31	11.9%	176	9.6%
Manufacturing	25	9.5%	162	8.9%
Agriculture	12	4.8%	81	4.4%
Public Service (National and County)	12	4.8%	43	2.3%
Medical/Health	6	2.4%	57	3.1%
Transport	15	6%	62	3.4%
Real Estate	9	3.6%	29	1.6%
NGO/Non-Profit Organisations	25	9.5%	124	6.8%
Other	37	14.3%	400	21.9%
Total	258	100%	1830	100%

Implementation of the work-from-home Presidential directive

Overall, more than half 65.5% (169) of the employers responded that they had implemented the Presidential directive and had allowed their employees to work from home. These are personnel mainly drawn from the transport, real estate, ICT, professional and Non-Governmental Organizations. The rest 34.5% (89) of the employers mentioned that their employees were working from their offices during this pandemic.

Business processes that support remote working are critical if organizations are to implement the work-from-home directive. Of the 89 employers who mentioned that they had not implemented the work-from-home directive, majority 67.4% (60) cited that the nature of work could not allow for offsite/remote working. These are mostly drawn from community and social services, manufacturing, engineering and architecture, education and medical sectors etc. 11.2% (10) of the employers cited difficulties in supervision as the reason for not implementing the work-from-home directive by the President while the rest, 21.3% (19) gave other reasons which include

- The directive was optional

- The management did not see the need to work from home
- We needed to plan on how to supervise the work

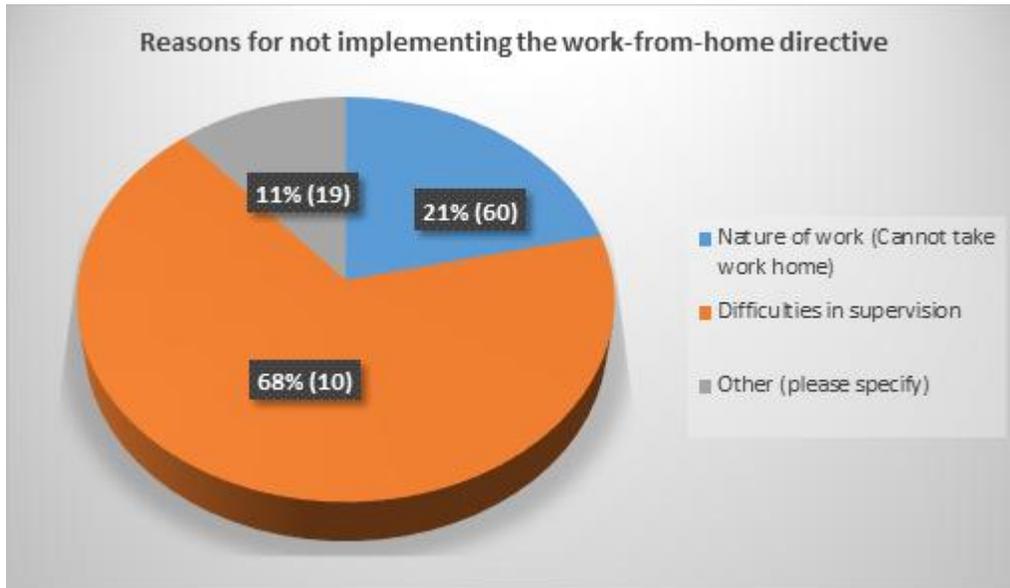


Chart 1: Reasons for not implementing the work-from-home directive

A half 52.6% (440) of the employees mentioned that they have never worked from home/remotely before the COVID-19 epidemic. The rest 47.4% (398) had worked remotely before. Comparatively, half 51.1% (86) of the employers said that their organizations have a policy on working remotely while the rest 48.9% (83) said their organizations do not have a policy on working remotely.

Ultimately, providing access to laptops, internet and collaboration platforms to employees is only half of the equation. Trust, accountability and results are significant if individuals are to work productively, whether from the office or at home. If the trust isn't there, organizations have to fix that first.

Realities of working-from-home

Employees who are currently working from home were asked to rate their productivity. Slightly more than half 55.5% (465) of the employees mentioned that their productivity has been affected negatively. Only 20.4% (171) said that their productivity is similar/comparable to when working from the office while 24.1% (202) responded that their productivity is better than when working from the office.

To get the employer's perspective on the employees' productivity, the employers were also asked to rate their employees' productivity since they started working from home. Overall, majority 46.7% (79) felt that their employees productivity has been affected negatively, 40% (68) mentioned that their employees productivity is comparable/similar to when working from the office. Only 13.3% (23) felt that their employees have been become more productive since they started working from home after the Presidential directive to help curb the spread of the COVID-19.

Majority 68.6% (575) of the employees who participated in this survey said that they have worked fewer hours since they started working from home compared to the hours they worked while at the office.

31.4% (263) mentioned that they worked either worked the same or more hours since they started working from home

More than half 54% (453) of the employees wished that working remotely would continue even after the pandemic is over while the rest 46% (385) would not wish the work-from-home to continue.

Majority 71.1% (120) of the employers mentioned that they would wish the remote working to continue and be entrenched in their organization after this COVID-19 pandemic is over while 28.9% (49) of the employers said they will not entrench the working from home/remotely after the pandemic is over.

Ultimately, what holds a distributed and virtual workplace together is the trust, patience and support employers and employees have for one another.

Challenges of working from home

According to employees, the biggest challenge is internet stability 23.4% (196) and distractions from family members 22.6% (190). Others include lack of structure, distractions from friends and lack of appropriate furniture to working.

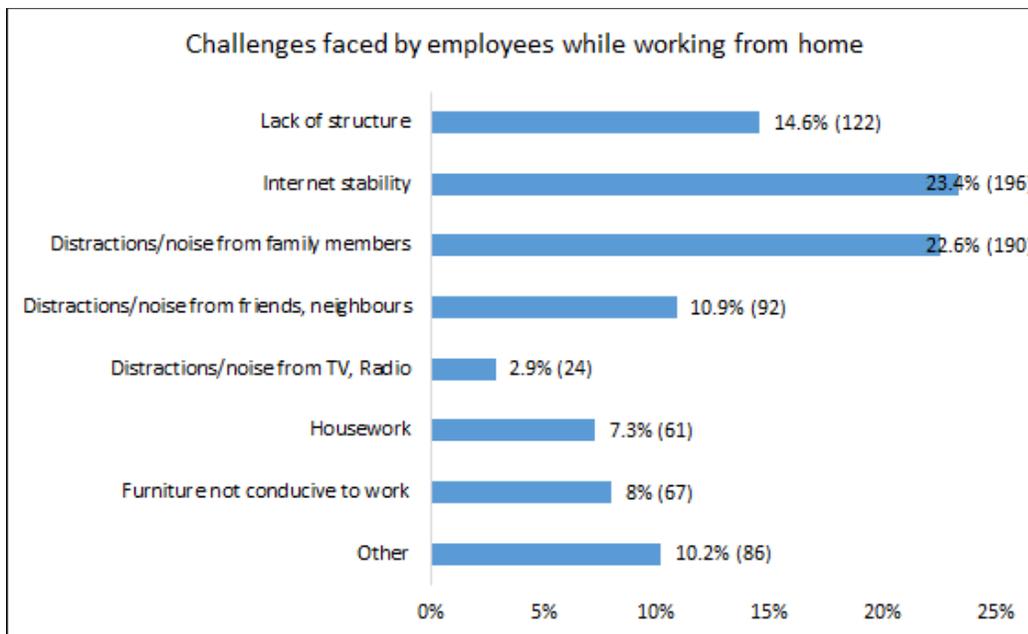


Chart 2: Challenges faced by employees while working from home

Majority of the employers 45.5% (75) whose staff are working from home are getting a challenge of coordinating work, 18.2% (30) are having productivity issues, 9.1% (15) are facing communication challenges, 6.8% (11) of the employers are not able to reach their employees if and when they require to while 2.3% (8) feel that their employees are not working while they are home.

We have to appreciate how blind and invisible a remote worker is. Employers/supervisors don't know what's going on at the remote location—what work that person is doing or what distractions they may have to deal with. And the remote worker doesn't know what's going on with the employer.

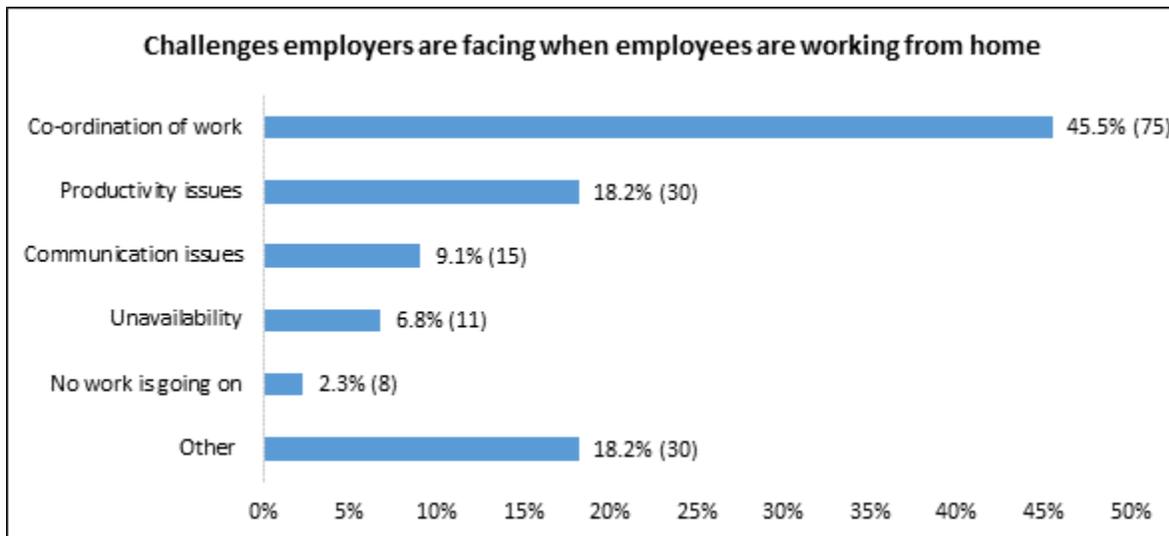


Chart 3: Challenges employers are facing when employees are working from home

The survey sought to find out what employees miss most about working from the office as compared to working from home. Majority 34.3% (288) of the employees mentioned that they miss the office working environment while working from home. 24.6% (206) said they miss the internet stability available at work, 18.7% (156) miss their co-workers, 8.2% (69) miss office facilities and 1.5% (13) miss office furniture. Remote work creates a situation where the personnel lack face time and deep relationships with work colleagues.

It's a given that professional and personal worlds will collide while working from home. Staying focused, eliminating distraction and actively engaging in the moment is critical for creating a purposeful and enabling remote working environment.

Business Continuity Plan (BCP)

A Business continuity plan (BCP) is a plan that: Ensures continuity in the event of a disaster, and Enables ongoing operations. It outlines procedures and instructions to follow in the face of a disaster, whether a natural disaster such as an earthquake or hurricane, a fire, cyber-attack or a medical epidemic.

Employers were asked if their organizations had a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) in existence before the COVID-19 outbreak. Overall, only 21.4% (69) of the respondents mentioned that their organizations have a BCP in place that will be effective in enabling their organizations recover after the business interruption occasioned by COVID-19. The rest of the organizations do not have a BCP to help them recover once the pandemic is over.

Suggestions

Both the employers and employees were asked to suggest some measures that the labour market can put in place to enhance remote working. Some of the measures mentioned include

- Employers should ensure all their systems are cloud-based instead of depending on local servers, that way anybody can access the system from anywhere.
- Embrace laptops more than desktop computers
- Fixed, cheap internet connection should be made available to everyone in their location or residences
- Strong and reliable internet connectivity countrywide
- Define core working hours and develop a policy for face-to-face meetings
- Encourage people to work in shifts
- Ensure proper followups with set timelines, goalsetting and accomplishment reports.
- Ensure constant communication via video conferencing with internet help.
- Flexible shifts
- Ensure employees are well equipped and prepared
- Outline performance expectations and training to improve capacity
- Review the overall business models to accommodate the changes

Employees suggestions

- Access to work Servers through consistent, strong internet provision
- Stable and cheap internet
- Avail gadgets to facilitate internet connection to make working from home part of company culture
- Better communication logistics
- Budgets for network, softwares and tools of work e.g laptops.
- Clearly laid out targets and timelines
- Check on deliverables.
- Compensate employees for internet, airtime
- Create a plan together with employees & adapt to use of technology
- Developing cloud systems that enable you to work outside the office would be good
- Equipping their homes with office facilities to enable easy working from home

4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

For Employers

A reliable internet connection is one of the key necessities for those working remotely. Home broadband is still considered a luxury service in most households. Mobile data has better coverage but it's quite costly on the user as the amount of data that needs to be processed through a computer is significantly larger than what ordinarily goes through a phone. It is prudent for employers to support their employees through meeting costs of internet and phone calls.

Clear communication from the employer to the employee on what needs to be accomplished during the day. This will avoid a communication breakdown that would negatively impact performance.

Employers must embrace remote work and virtual collaboration going forward. The digital space has now allowed personnel to work from wherever they are. It's important that employers have a policy in place which will guide complexities of communication, supervision etc. of working remotely.

As important as providing the employees with facilities to work remotely is, employers must also train their employees on how to best utilize those resources. For instance, remote workers often aren't taught how to set up a teleconference or video call. Or a remote worker may not know the best way to alert colleagues that he or she is in a meeting and can't be disturbed.

For Employees

Employees working-from-home must work similarly to how they worked on-site. This means that they must avoid lounging around because they are in a comfortable environment and instead stick to more or less the same hours and routine they would if they were at the office. Distractions which cannot be avoided should be minimized.

Even more concretely, employees must learn to embrace technology if they are to work from home productively. Understanding how to work virtually and be as productive as when working on-site is a critical skill to develop. Web-conferencing and other communication platforms can be effective if utilized as communication channels with the co-workers and supervisors.

Another key area to focus on at the employee level is to remain authentic. From a generational perspective, remote working demands a new level of authenticity. Employees must ensure they are trustworthy and purpose-driven as their employer requires nothing less from them.

Ultimately, everyone must avoid getting demotivated by the new dynamic that we have all found ourselves in. Experts urge those working from home not to overfocus on the negative headlines surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, as this could lead to feelings of stress and depression.