

# COVID-19 HAS FAST-TRACKED THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



More than a year has passed since our first nationwide lockdown imposed on 26 March 2020. With this came change, which saw a major shift in collaboration to a multi-stakeholder approach to manage and mitigate the risks. This has and continues to include government, business, communities and citizens.

At the heart of the crisis, which was system revealing, are the people. It was evident that solutions were needed to ensure the sustainability of the people, business and the economy as a whole.

**The impact of Covid-19 has had a dramatic impact on how we, as Alexander Forbes, operate as a business and how we interact with you – our clients. It effectively kick-started the fourth industrial revolution and we have been fortunate, from a business continuity perspective, to facilitate every moving part of our business to a remote working environment. This includes our consulting teams, administration and investment teams, with appropriate support from management and systems to ensure no lull in the service and engagement that we provide. The ability to continue to service our clients and consult with employers, boards of trustees, management committees, members and individuals has resulted in a seamless transition into the new world.**

We recognise the challenges that our clients are facing at these times and may continue to face in the future. We're making every effort to manage these challenges through the various parts of our business and lobbying through respective industry bodies to support assistance and relief where this is practically possible. We do fully understand that while we wait for the vaccine to be accessible to the broader population, there will continue to be waves of the virus – resulting in these challenges continuing as part of our future.

The uncertainty that we are all faced with at this time is what we have evidenced as the most pressing issues for the employers, fund members and individual clients. Feeling like there is no ability to control what is happening around us creates fear. Decisions made in this frame of mind tend to have a detrimental impact on long-term outcomes.

Our communications are targeted to reach employers, trustees, management committees, members and employees. These are focused on how important it is not to panic, but rather to encourage engagement with your consultants and advisers. Holistically, helping employers to strategise and to review the employee benefits programme to promote employee well-being, engagement and productivity, manage absenteeism and ultimately boost the bottom line.

On the employee side, focusing on financial well-being supporting employees to better understand their personal journey, helping them to balance their short- and long-term objectives and taking control of what of they can. Balancing personal, health and financial well-being can be daunting – less so with access to a holistic employee benefit offering, including financial advice and a functional Employee Assistance programme that provides support, especially in times of uncertainty.

Our core purpose is to provide advice to help employers, employees, funds, members and individuals through these periods of uncertainty and assist in rebuilding the future through tailor-making best of breed solutions to meet specific needs.

As we have moved through the various lockdown levels, we've all experienced different levels of fatigue, challenges and exhilaration. Level 1 opened the economy significantly, with greater freedom of movement, but with this we have seen the second deadly wave of the virus and now a third wave. While we have had a welcoming, albeit brief, taste of some normality, it is a step in the direction of a fully functioning, but bruised economy again. Businesses that have weathered the lockdown thus far are now able to take stock of their actual position and how they will move forward. For most, the change and evolution is forever.

The new world of work has prompted new discussions around benefits, especially pertaining to flexibility. It has also highlighted the interconnectedness of an employee benefit programme and how important it is to consider the employee value proposition and benefits holistically. How you not only trade-off the risk/retirement part of the employees' journey, but with greater levels of flexibility guiding your employees to better understand how the choice of their healthcare option; or access to critical illness or gap cover that can complement and enhance their personal benefit offering. How remuneration can be structured. In addition, the support frameworks such as retirement benefit counselling, education, wellness and advice to help manage debt and smooth consumption throughout the journey assists in providing a cost-effective, long-term plan.



For most South Africans, leveraging off the benefit offerings in the workplace is critical due to shortcomings in their personal planning or lack thereof. Group arrangements offer employees access to savings and benefits that they may not perhaps have the financial means or discipline to access or to manage these benefits in their personal capacity. Most employees rely on their employer to provide benefits in the event of death, disablement, savings and even healthcare. Employees and their families look to the employer for support, who is mostly always the first port of call. There is an element of trust that the employer will look after their employees. In return, employers offer benefits that not only attract but retain staff.

**With an integrated approach, we have been able to impact the savings and retirement outcomes through group arrangements and through the interventions supported through the workplace.**