

The ACLAIM
Work From Home
Challenges & Solutions
Survey Report

May 2020

ACLAIM Africa Limited



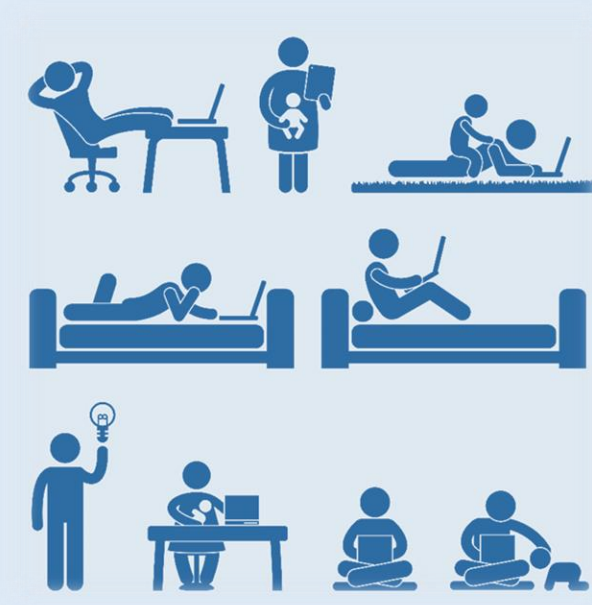


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Acronyms

ACLAIM	ACLAIM Africa Limited
COVID-19	Corona Virus Disease 19
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
WFH	Work From Home
WHO	World Health Organisation



The ACLAIM Work From Home Survey Report

The COVID-19 pandemic has led to the, now cliché, phenomenon of “The New Normal”. This *new normal* has led to several organizations – either voluntarily, or in a *survival-for-the-fittest* mode – adopting the Work From Home approach. With the advent of the social distancing guidelines shared by WHO and the response by several Governments through partial or full lockdowns for extended periods, the WFH concept has been given a quantum leap.

In many countries, Uganda inclusive, the lockdowns were announced with immediate effect.

Consequently, not many organizations had adequately prepared for the WFH implementation. Those that had planned for eventualities like these immediately activated their Business Continuity Plans.

The WFH approach – as part of the *new normal* – is highly likely to outlive the COVID-19 lockdowns, with many



employers remodeling their businesses to allow some or all employees to work from home all or part of the time. Cognizant of this shift, ACLAIM sought – in a survey – to ascertain the challenges faced as well as suggested solutions by employees who have been tasked with working from home during the lockdown.

First, we conducted a literature review of various articles by Harvard Business Review, Timecamp, Venture Harbour, Clockify, Zapier, Money Crashers, among others, relating to challenges faced by people that had been working from home in the past, as part of their business model. We identified the top 10 challenges that seemed to cut across most.

We then sought to ascertain whether these held true in the Ugandan setting following the COVID-19 lockdown imposed by the Government on most organizations. We asked respondents to score the identified challenges on a scale of 0 to 5 (0 being least affecting and 5 being most affecting). We also asked them to share what enabled (could have enabled) them to flourish as they worked from home.



To ascertain the challenges faced based on **nature of business**, we categorized the organizations of respondents into: not-for profit; service-based; product-based; and product & service-based.

To disaggregate the results based on **size of organization**, we used the combined parameters of number of employees, years in business, and annual revenues.

ACLAIM's motivation in commissioning the **Work From Home Challenges and Solutions Survey** was rooted in our vision of seeing "*Thriving Organizations*". We define a *thriving organization* as one that is growing continuously, developing its capabilities to manage societal needs and

meeting its objectives by delighting its various stakeholders (employees, clients, partners, shareholders, government, etc). It should be able to accomplish this in a dynamic business environment and to sustain the performance over a long period of time, even through economic downturns. Our hope is that this Survey report will provide insights to organizations to *Thrive* in the *New Normal of Work From Home*.

Enjoy the read and Thrive On!

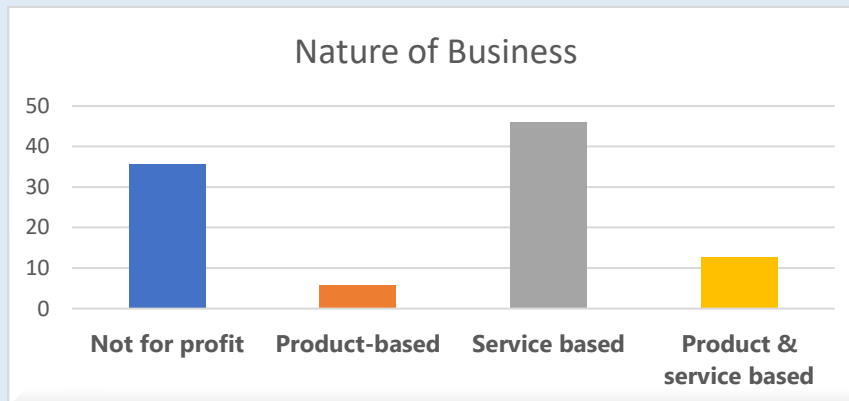
Alfred Brian AGABA

Managing Director | ACLAIM Africa Ltd



Our Lessons, Our Insights

1. Nature of Business vs WFH



82% of the respondents work in **Service-based** and **Not for Profit** organizations.

18% work in **Product** or **Product & Service-based** organizations.

Our Lessons: The high response from service-based & not-for-profit organizations suggests that they, more than the product-based organizations, were able to WFH. The product-based businesses who relied on customers accessing their products from the streets of operation, and who had not promoted their brands beyond their locations, struggled. Even though they would have wanted to continue operating, many did not have databases of their walk-in clients and could, therefore, not reach them.

*Product-based businesses should **Reinvent** their **Business Models** to not only survive but even thrive in the current times.*

Our Insights: Product-based businesses should consider re-engineering/re-inventing their Business Models to remain relevant. Business needs to be more *Relational* than *Transactional*. Simple databases of customers and their profiles would have provided a great platform to being resilient and not only surviving these times, but *Thriving*. Take an example of the market vendor, Musa, that you buy farm produce from on a weekly basis. If Musa had kept your telephone contact and a profile of the items and quantities that you usually buy from him, he would have been delivering to your door step right now, through partnership with a trusted *Boda boda*. Not only would Musa have maintained weekly sales, but even increased revenues as he would have been assured of your custom for all market items from him.

2. Organization Size vs WFH

Respondents' Organization Size: 57.5% of respondents came from organizations that had been in operation for **more than 10 years**. 59% of respondents came from organizations with **over 50 employees**. 59% of the respondents that wished to disclose, came from organizations with annual revenues **exceeding \$1,000,000**.

60% work in **Larger** organizations,
20% work in **established medium** organizations
20% work in **SMEs**.

Our Lessons: We can reasonably deduce that the lower response from the smaller organizations (including SMEs) suggests that many of them were not able to continue their operations through WFH following the COVID-19 induced lockdowns. This could be attributed to the SME lack of necessary systems and infrastructure, for instance: staff lacking portable gadgets/tools of work like, laptops; inadequate cash reserves to sustain operations in absence of walk-in clients; slow uptake of online banking platforms; low investment in cloud storage servers, among a multitude of other factors sighted by the respondents as examined later in this report.

Our Insights: Many SMEs have long distanced themselves from developing **Business Continuity Plans** and **Risk Profiles**. Some of the excuses have included: *"Those are for the larger organizations", "We are too small", "We shall consider that when we are bigger – for now, we need to serve current customers", "Those are ideal, we need to be practical",* among other similar.

The COVID-19 lockdown has demonstrated that even smaller organizations need to apply the very basic principles of risk management. If they are to *thrive* in business and align to the *new normal*, SMEs need to apply more strategic thinking by asking the simple but all-powerful question - *"What if?"*. Granted that very few organizations - even the most sophisticated - envisaged the COVID-19 pandemic. But an organization that had, even basically, answered the question ***"What if I could not access my work place for one month (for whatever reason), how would I continue operating?"*** is more likely to be operating fairly well even during the lockdown.

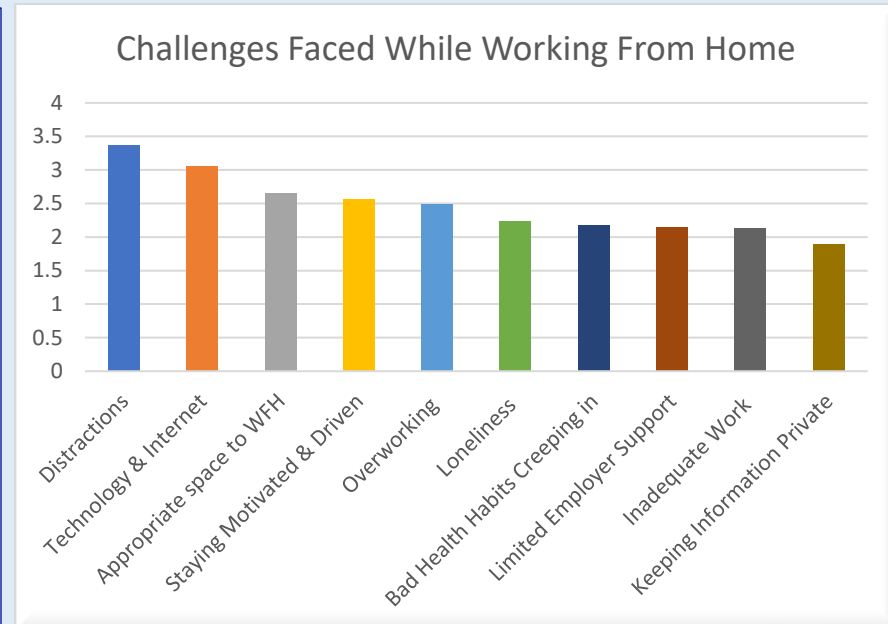


*SMEs should consider developing simple **Business Continuity Plans** after appreciating their **Risk Profile**.*

3. Challenges Faced with WFH

The 10 key challenges that were presented to respondents included.

- i. Distractions & interruptions;
- ii. Technology & internet challenges;
- iii. Finding appropriate work space at home;
- iv. Staying motivated & driven;
- v. Overworking;
- vi. Loneliness;
- vii. Bad health habits creeping in;
- viii. Limited support from employers;
- ix. Not having enough organizational work to do; and
- x. Keeping work-related information private.



Most Challenging

70% were mostly affected by **Interruptions & Distractions**.

59% were mostly affected by **Technology & Internet** challenges.

49% were mostly challenged in **finding appropriate work space at home**.

Least Challenging

Only **21%** reported being mostly challenged to **keep work information private**.

Only **30%** reported being mostly affected by **limited support from employers**.

Only **31%** reported being mostly affected by **bad habits creeping into their lives**.

3.1 Interruptions & Distractions



70% were mostly affected by **Interruptions & Distractions**.

Our Lessons: Majority of the respondents face interruptions & distractions as the biggest challenge during WFH. This suggests that many live with relatives, neighbors, pets, etc, which hardly allow them to concentrate on delivering work assignments because of constant interruptions.

Others stay alone but constantly have to take breaks to make their meals, attend to visitors, clean, go shopping, among other household responsibilities. For some, this is the time they are tempted to curl up and catch up on their favorite TV shows, series and movies during work hours.

Our Insights: For those that live with other people, it is important to invest time to enlighten the housemates about how you are at work, even if they can see you at home. It is key, however, to make time for them as well so that they do not feel neglected. Even little children have been known to learn the routines, over time, to let Daddy/Mummy/Auntie/Uncle work once they appreciate the change. A few lapses, of course, are expected in the early days, and might even be healthy, with a toddler occasionally bumping into the room. If possible, one may choose a quiet area with some privacy. Even better, if you can find a spare room with a closed door.

Employees who have to juggle between house chores and work assignments should divide their time appropriately. This can include a to-do list and a set of targets to achieve each day, accompanied by alarms and reminders, if necessary. This should help with keeping on top of both work and home assignments. When tempted to catch up on your favorite TV shows, remember that your delivery (or the lack of it) affects the organization's performance, and, in turn, your stay in the organization.

Discipline is the key attribute required here – both from you and those around you.

*Choose a **private space, allocate your time appropriately & remember that your delivery affects your organization and your own stay.***
Discipline!

3.2 Technology & Internet Challenges



Our Lessons: Many respondents reported struggling with technology and internet connectivity. This included: no or poor internet access (leading to no or slow connections – freezing or dropping video calls); expensive internet bundles; limited knowledge regarding use of online tools; insufficient knowledge about solving connectivity challenges; slow or ineffective devices, among others.

*Employers should **facilitate staff with sufficient tools and data** and train them in their use. Employees should apply different **smart methods** to make the best of the internet available.*

59% were mostly affected by **Technology & Internet challenges**

Our Insights: Back-up plans! To the extent possible, have a combination of a mobile hotspot device like a MiFi and a cell phone that allows tethering. Identify spots in your house that have a good internet signal and set up the work space there.

Ensure that web pages that are not in use are closed and only opened when needed. Check that no background apps are consuming data on laptop/phone when not in use. Employers should provide sufficient data bundles to enable seamless delivery. Internet is no longer a luxury, nor are Facebook, Whatsapp, etc only hang out places for connecting with family and friends, but platforms to do work and business.

Research about the different video applications available should be done and staff trained in the same e.g. what to use from Zoom, Google Meet, Webex, Whatsapp, Skype etc when making video vs voice calls, small vs large groups, considering functionalities and data consumption. Before a call, ensure that you have at least two options. If one fails, you are ready to switch to another. Log into a scheduled call a few minutes before time to sort out any issues – sound, visuals.

Lighting for video calls is key since you do not want people to see something similar to your shadow. Your primary light source should be in front of you at the back of the camera and not behind you. The appropriate angles are also important to consider - the camera being at eye-level. One can improvise by stacking some household items like big hard cover books. Cooler colors are also advised for one to wear since bright colors reflect light.

In case of a faulty computer, a backup device like a tablet, cell phone etc. can get you through the day until you can get your computer fixed.

3.3 Finding appropriate work space at home



49% were mostly challenged in finding appropriate work space at home

Our Lessons: The number of respondents that had trouble finding appropriate spaces to WFH fairly matched that of those who were not challenged.

It is clear that many houses in the country are not designed with WFH in mind. Even when buying furniture, focus has largely been on comfort, and few ever think about a reading table and chair.

Some people's work spaces include a couch, bed, kitchen table, etc. Using an inappropriate work station for a long period of time can lead to an increased risk of injuries to backs, necks and fractures associated with bone fragility, among others.

Our Insights: It sure does cost a lot of money to invest in a perfect work station. However, in the short term, one can make simple adjustments using items already in the home. If you don't have a good chair, you can add cushions for back/leg support. Support your feet with a step stool or something else if they do not touch the ground while you sit. Raise your laptop/monitor using books, boxes etc. to ensure that its top is at or slightly below eye level. Make sure your shoulders are relaxed and your elbows around 90 degrees.

In the mid-term, individuals may need to re-orient their thinking about the design of homes and how to furnish them. Architects and real estate developers, too, have their work well cut out for them.

Organizations can also partner with furniture stores to provide subsidized work stations for employees that work from home so as to improve productivity and also address occupational health and safety issues.

*Make simple adjustments using items at home to create work stations.
Employers to **invest in WFH furniture** for their employees.*

3.4 Staying Motivated & driven



43% found it challenging to stay **motivated & driven**

Our Lessons: While the majority of the respondents were able to remain largely motivated and driven during WFH, up to 43% struggled to keep up and stay true to their work. Some feel insignificant, while others feel underwhelming. This especially holds true for those that have been used to tight supervision while at office. The prying eyes of the supervisor are now miles away and the pressure to deliver seems lighter. The usual pat on the back from the supervisor or guidance when stuck is not as frequent. There is no team-mate to Hi-5 after a win, for a joint celebration.

Our Insights: In order to stay motivated, employees should work with their supervisors to set weekly targets. At least twice a week, there should be one-on-one check-ins between employee and supervisor to track progress and provide/seek support. For supervisors, this is a time to demonstrate more *leadership* than *management* of employees under their care.

The little wins should be celebrated with colleagues. Use of apps like Slack and Whatsapp can be adopted for the online Hi-5s.

Employers are advised to continue with recognition and rewards initiatives that are carried out at office and also adopt creative Online Happy Hours or Online Games and team building.

Ultimately, though, people working from home are encouraged to find intrinsic motivation in the “why” of the work they do, that is, the value of their deliverables to the greater company purpose.

*Set weekly **targets**.
Touch base with
colleagues about
progress. **One-on-Ones**
with Supervisors.
**Recognition &
Rewards**. Online Team
Games.*

*Please reach out to ACLAIM on info@aclaimafrica.com in case your organisation needs our **WFH Online Team Games** initiative called **ACLAIM Online LoL (Laugh out Loud)***

3.5 Overworking



Our Insights: To avoid ‘Ooops! I lost track of time’, there is need to set a schedule with targets and timelines. Use an alarm if necessary, for each key task. Once the day’s targets are achieved, you will feel like you have done enough and deserving of the rest, especially for those that overwork out of a sense of guilt. Carry out the bigger tasks early, so that you achieve early, and unplug early.

As you develop the discipline, how about agreeing with your spouse/child/other housemates to come and “rescue” you at a particular time. They sure will as they would have tried to keep away from you to allow you work during the designated hours. Support systems are very important while going through new changes in life.

If working with colleagues, a habit of a formal online “check-in” first thing and “check-out” last thing by Slack or WhatsApp might be helpful.

38% found it challenging to unplug from work and hence were **overworking**

Our Lessons: Many respondents did not struggle with overworking, however, 38% found this a challenge as they struggled with unplugging from work.

Many supervisors fear that employees will relax when they work from home. But the reverse has been the reality for many. Hours that used to be spent preparing to go to office, in traffic jam to and from work, have been fully transferred by many to organizational work.

While, initially, this leads to increased productivity, over a period, it degenerates into over-exhaustion, back & neck pain, sleep deprivation, inadequate family time, ultimately leading to lower productivity.

*Keep a **schedule** of targets and deadlines. **Set alarms** if necessary. **Check your progress** against the targets. Ask a housemate to “rescue” you from the desk at a particular time. **Check-in and Check-Out** of work.*

3.6 Not having enough organizational work to do



33% of respondents reported **not having enough organizational work to do while working from home**

Our Lessons: Majority of the respondents had enough organizational work to do from home. A few (33%) struggled with finding what to do, probably because of inadequate or late preparation for WFH by the employers or even employees themselves when the lockdowns were announced by the Government.

Our Insights: Employers should endeavor to set up their systems and policies in such a way that WFH or similar changes in operation are not such a big shift. This includes the use of online storage software like Dropbox, Google Drive, Teams, etc. Having laptops & smart phones for all employees is also key to ensure that staff have devices that can enable them work from home.

For product-based organizations, consideration should be made for setting up online shops and delivering to customers, to enable business continuity. Transportation or distribution partnerships are key, where the entity may not be able to afford or would opt not to be involved in delivery and distribution.

In the event that lack of adequate organizational work is caused by reduction in demand for products, organizations can invest this time in activities like: online staff training; strategically thinking through their business models; exploring how their existing competences could be transposed to other essential needs (a company that used to deliver men's apparel to the doorstep has now morphed into using that competence to deliver food to the doorstep).

*Early preparation & creativity. **Changing Business Model.** Transposing existing competences to other business needs.*

3.7 Loneliness



32% of respondents reported struggling with **loneliness** while working from home

Our Lessons: Majority of the respondents did not struggle with loneliness while working from home. This could be attributed to the increase in mental health awareness from employers, media and other sources that have helped individuals fight off such feelings.

However, there's still a 32% who are struggling with loneliness which warrants attention. Loneliness is different from being alone. Being alone is a fact. Loneliness, however, is a feeling. It is a sense of sadness because one feels that they have no friends or company. Yes, many times, our work colleagues become our friends.

Our Insights: Employees who feel lonely should try distracting themselves by calling colleagues, friends or watching a movie. You may miss the office jokes, but the same could be embedded into a light-hearted WhatsApp group. At ACLAIM we have one called *ACLAIM Easy* which is never void of laughter.

Supervisors/Managers can also regularly schedule video calls to ensure teams keep seeing each other to continue having a simulation of the office feeling.

When lockdown lifts, one can also try – once in a while – working from a nearby coffee place during WFH.

Employees should also not shy away from seeking professional help if loneliness persists because it affects not only their productivity but also their overall well-being.

If you are alone and are tempted to feel lonely, remember that this is the best time for self-discovery and growth. *"If you are never alone, you cannot know yourself."* Paulo Coelho

3.8 Bad health habits creeping in

31% of respondents reported struggling greatly with bad health habits creeping in

Our Lessons: Majority of the respondents were not greatly affected by bad health habits creeping in while working from home. This could be attributed to the increase in health awareness from employers, media and other sources.

However, 31% are struggling with a whole range of unhealthy habits such as sleeping in longer than usual, overdrinking alcohol, over eating, remaining sedentary for extended hours, among others.



All progress takes place outside the comfort zone.

“Bad habits are easy to form but hard to live with. Good habits are hard to form, but easy to live with”

Our Insights: Employees should continue to utilize available resources like online work out videos, simple home work-outs, as well as keeping active while working from home.

As lots of research have it, working out will help one feel happier, healthier, more energetic as well as improving the quality of your sleep.

Bad habits cannot be wished away. They must be replaced with good habits. As it is said *“Bad habits are easy to form but hard to live with. Good habits are hard to form, but easy to live with”*

For each bad habit creeping in, identify the counter good habit and start through small steps to action. Get an accountability partner – someone to start the journey with – if necessary.

3.9 Limited support from employer



30% of respondents reported receiving **limited support from employers**

Our Lessons: While the lockdown was quite abrupt, majority of the respondents report that they had support from their employers and therefore did not struggle much in that area. That the employers, largely, did what was in their power to support employees to ensure business continuity. This ranged from provision of gadgets such as laptops, internet access, motivational messages, remote connection to work servers, etc.

Our Insights: Employers should continue to support employees in order to thrive while working from home. In addition to the support currently provided, there is need to streamline *Work From Home Policies*. These will address home working hours, performance management, leave, benefits provided, team buildings, compensation, facilitation of work, confidentiality, office equipment, workers insurance, conflict of interest, communication, among other issues. If organizations have such policies, WFH will be more structured and defined and many will consider remodeling their business models to incorporate WFH for some or all the employees for some or all days.

WFH Policies will make working from home more structured & seamless.

Please reach out to ACLAIM on info@aclaimafrica.com in case your organisation needs our support in facilitating development of **Work From Home Policies**.

3.10 Keeping work-related information private

Our Lessons: Only 21% of the respondents reported facing challenges keeping work-related information private. However, despite the low numbers, this is a real challenge given the magnitude of the worst adverse implications to the employee and organization.

Some employees share their computers with their spouses or other relatives in the house. Computer screens with confidential information could be left open (or not logged out of) and hence accessed by others in the house. This is especially true since the employee's guard may be let down *a little* in the presence of *trusted* family members. The discussions during the voice and video conferencing calls may be heard by those close-by, in the event that one is unable to find a private work space from which to operate.

All the above information could be received by the *innocent unsuspecting* relative and inadvertently shared or discussed lightly with crooks that would be eagerly waiting for an opportunity to pounce and misuse the information. This would lead to a breach of the duty of confidentiality by the employee, and, by extension, the organization they work for.

Additionally, while there maybe network firewalls at office, at home these may be weak/non-existent, especially if one is sharing an internet connection.

21% of respondents reported having difficulty with **keeping work related information private**



Our Insights: To the extent possible, workers from home should get a private place or excuse themselves from hearing distance when talking about confidential information. On computers/phones, they should log out from accounts with possible confidential information before leaving work stations.

Given that the employees are likely to have signed confidentiality agreements (that the housemates did not), they should invest time to explain to the housemates about the implications of sharing with others – even casually – what they would have seen or heard. And for them not to feel offended when the employee has to log out of systems before sharing the gadget.

Employers should, to extent possible, provide the required gadgets and internet connections for employees to support WFH, and where shared, different user accounts could be opened on the gadgets.

Final Thoughts

Work From Home is, indeed, a *new normal* that has been imposed on organizations by COVID-19. While not a new practice in itself, its uptake was really highly optional. Now, it cannot be ignored. With its adoption comes lots of opportunities that many – in the past – would have thought impossible, along with attendant challenges that must be addressed.

The courageous, non-rigid, change-friendly, organizations that quickly figure out how to reinvent their business models, shall Thrive. We shall witness various changes in organizations including but not limited to: increased update of risk management and business continuity

models, even in the smaller entities; growth in relational rather than transactional business approaches; increased use of cloud/online storage and applications rather than localized; more homes designed with a WFH space; internet service providers increasing focus on residential than before; performance measurement based more on outputs/deliverables than input/time; increase in personal discipline; employee and organizational productivity; job designs; employee policy frameworks; backward and forward integration; among many others.

How are you as an employee/ employer/ leader/ preparing yourself to align and remain relevant?





Acknowledgements

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Alfred Brian Agaba – Managing Consultant | Managing Director: Quality Assurance of survey, provision of insights.

About ACLAIM Africa Limited

ACLAIM Africa Limited (ACLAIM) is a leadership and management consultancy firm incorporated as a limited liability company in 1995.

The vision of ACLAIM is simply to see “Thriving Organizations”. A thriving organization is one that is growing continuously, developing its capabilities to manage societal needs and meeting its objectives by delighting its various stakeholders. It should be able to accomplish these in a dynamic business environment and to sustain this performance over a long period of time, even through economic downturns.

To that end, ACLAIM’s mission is “to address the leadership and management challenges in Africa through consulting, training and outsourcing”. This is done across various sectors including: Health, Education, Livelihoods, Climate & Energy, Tourism, and Financial sectors. The key market segments served by ACLAIM include: Government, Donors, Not-for-Profits, Corporates and SMEs. The main capability areas in which the company possesses expertise include: Organizational Effectiveness; Finance & Grants; Procurement & Logistics; Human Resource; Information and Communication Technology. Over the past 25 years, the Company has successfully conducted engagements in up to 29 countries on 5 continents.



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