

Networks impact on decision making

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Marketers often target consumers assuming that we operate in isolation, as individuals, independent of each other. However, we are all part of a wide range of networks and communities and these have an effect on us.

People's level of interconnectivity - the way they interact with other people - impacts on the communications they receive, how they process information, and ultimately on the decisions they make. This is important in general terms but will be of special relevance to companies whose products or services have a consumption-in-groups component, or a peer pressure component (such as beverages, telecommunications, clothing and fashion items, some leisure activities, etc).

South Africans and their networks

It is interesting to look at networks and support structures that people utilize. In a study of 2000 metropolitan adults conducted in February/March 2003, we uncovered the following :

People need more support

- Eight percent say they *don't have a really close relationship with anyone* while 17% claim that they would *like to have more and closer friends*.

People do have places to turn to for support

- Forty-six percent are fortunate enough to *have family members* they can turn to, while 39% look to their *friends*. To some degree, *community organisations* (13%) and *governmental organisations* (9%) also have a role to play.

Support structures vary according to race and region

- Support structures in terms of *family* are highest among whites (52%), and lowest among Indians (40%).
- Bloemfontein (66%) and Pretoria residents (65%) turn to their *family* more so than the other regions.
- Coloureds tend to turn to their *friends* more so than the other population groups (55%), while Indians do so the least (27%). Whites in Pretoria demonstrate this even more so (62%), and blacks in Durban the least (19%).

Several projects have been done already, and still more are underway

Research Surveys is currently conducting studies for six major clients to delve into the broader field of well-being, of which networks and inter-connectivity is one element.

In one South African company, we obtained a response rate in excess of 90% from employees on a well-being study. In terms of networks in this company, we established the following and were able to make some comparisons with a national metropolitan sample :

Support structures need to be developed, capitalised on, and nurtured

- *Twelve percent* of employees claim to *feel lonely*, consistent with the 10% of our metro sample who have similar feelings
- *Eighty percent* of the employees have *family and friends* to turn to when they need them. In our metro study, this question was in two parts - 39% claimed to have *friends* they can turn to whenever they need them, while 46% turned

to family.

- *Thirteen percent* of employees claimed *not to know very many people*, versus 14% from our metro sample

There is often more conflict at home

- *Eleven percent* of employees reported *a lot of conflict in their household recently*, while only 3% of people say that their *relations with their colleagues are quite poor*. Fortunately, most people seem to have support structures in place at work - 58% of employees claimed to have *someone they can talk to about problems at work*
- Eighteen percent of employees admitted that their *sexual relationship has suffered* over the last few months.

People don't always feel valued or that they belong

- *Sixteen percent* feel *unworthy/very critical of themselves*
- *Eight percent* don't think *people think much of them or respect them much*
- *Twelve percent* say they *don't really belong and want to be more accepted*, compared to 11% of metro respondents feeling this way.
- *Eight percent* of employees said that people *very seldom ask them for advice*, versus 15% in our metro sample. Even taking into account differences between the two samples (most notably racial differences), the figures for the South African company are still lower than the national results, which is good news for the company concerned.

People need to believe

- *Fifty-six percent* regard themselves as *spiritual people*
- *Seventy-five percent* have *strong personal beliefs*

In order to understand how people will react to different market situations, we need to investigate people's well-being and their everyday quality of life. In this way, we can uncover the intrinsic needs and concerns of people, and establish what different people really need.

Research Survey's Everyday Quality of Life Index (EQLi™) allows us to understand people more holistically and provides a way of tracking quality of life reliably. Connectivity (size, influence, sense of belonging, self respect, support systems, relationships) is only one element of the EQLi™, an essential tool for determining the effects of products and services, communication and policies on peoples' ultimate quality of life.

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