





Necessity and Reality of Remote Work in UAE

The term «remote work» seems strange to many countries in light of the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic and its disruption of life on our planet. It, therefore, became necessary to apply this system as one of the emergency solutions to maintain the functioning of the vital sectors in each country. But how will this emergency system be implemented and what are the likely results of its application now and in the future?

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), remote work was not new or surprising for many sectors, as the system had been launched two years ago to allow the employee to perform his/her tasks wherever he/she is, away from the workplace but with the same quality. After the outbreak of Covid-19, the government issued a decision authorizing the commencement of remote work for state institutions, excluding some sectors such as energy, communications, health, education, security, police, posts, shipping, medicines, water, food, civil aviation, finance, banks, and government media. Under the policy, office-based workers must be limited to not more than 30 per cent in the workforce.

Remote work as defined by the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, it is a work system in which an employee performs his/her duties from sites that are different from the employer's offices. This means that the employee performs their duties from remote sites on a part-time weekly, monthly or full-time basis.

In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation in its decision to apply



Above: Hamdan Bin Mohammed Smart University is participating remotely in an international symposium to support education in Africa

remote work required all sectors to use electronic and smart applications in the execution of their mandates, while providing electronic channels for support and assistance, and specifying the management of the remote work method in terms of working hours.

The obligations also include ensuring a secure technological environment by observing the controls related to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of data, organizing the access to enter the systems to complete the work remotely, and follow up on employees who work remotely online, in order to ensure their commitment to working hours remotely, and to perform and complete the work.

Under these policy guidelines, the obligations of the employee who is working remotely include the approval of his employer to attend to the workplace; and whenever she/he is required to do so, to perform tasks according to the time frames set for completion, and be available to answer all calls and emails, and to maintain the confidentiality of information and documents.

One team in different locations

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, Vice President, Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, stated that the UAE is standing together in one trench with its citizens and residents against the current challenges.

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«We are racing against time to make our country fully ready for various circumstances,» His Highness Sheikh Mohammed said as he made special recognition to the efforts made by various federal and local healthcare authorities to maintain the safety and health of society.

Sheikh Mohammed said that the UAE government is ready to deal with all future circumstances, adding that the country will be part of the global efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

«Our message for everyone is that we are completely ready to deal with all circumstances. Over the past 10 years, we have invested in smart learning, electronic and smart services to enhance our readiness for emergencies and disasters. Today, we are reaping the fruits of our strenuous efforts as evidenced by the continuation of our educational process and basic government services. We are being proactive in dealing with global health conditions.»

His Highness Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid made these remarks as he chaired a virtual meeting of the UAE Cabinet, during which he remotely hosted a number of front-liners working in service centers for treating novel coronavirus disease patients to check on their conditions and listen to their observations and related proposals.

Flexible system

In its latest studies on this system, the Mohammed bin Rashid School of Government confirmed that the UAE government had adopted flexible working hours and telecommuting before the Covid-19 crisis, and that the measures and decisions taken by government departments in the UAE formed a major factor in the success of the experiment, as it chose the right jobs to work remotely, and encouraged employees to take advantage of the benefits of this initiative to increase productivity.

The study indicated that there are some obstacles that can be overcome when applying the remote work mechanism, including the employee feeling that he/she was left alone away from social contacts and events at the headquarters of the institution. The study, however, made it clear that remote work can create new habits and behaviors that are more beneficial at the level of institutions.

«One of the challenges of teleworking is that there are jobs that are not suitable for this model. As the theoretical works that transfer their materials electronically flourish, the muscular and physical works still need to be physically present at the present time» the study reported. The study recommended that institutions should take advantage of the benefits of working remotely, such as reducing costs and

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recruiting talents, and not to let the concerns of weak oversight over workers to postpone this step.

The study also warned institutions not to take hasty decisions in the remote work system, as all efforts must focus on improving the digital work environment, while adopting hybrid employment, where the employee is available to work remotely on certain days, to make the institution benefit from the advantages of the two types of work. It confirmed that the institutions must be more realistic in setting clear expectations, with a focus on just and equal treatment of employees remotely located within the institution while giving remote employees access to management with the same ease.

Happiness of employees

In a report issued by Dubai Future Foundation on remote work in light of the Covid-19 outbreak, it was indicated that remote work in the short term under the pandemic will focus on well-being models, such as happiness indices and activities to promote social interaction such as digital community events. This will become prevalent in HR policies to ensure employees remain healthy mentally while working remotely. Productivity will be measured through outputs rather than inputs, with employees managing their own time, instead of being subject to mechanisms that monitor their working hours or attendance.

In the long term, after the Covid-19 crisis, working remotely may become an integral part of work with entities maintaining a remote working structure, except for meetings that have to be held face-to-face. Large events, seminars and workshops will go digital, with virtual and augmented reality used to create 'real-life' inclusive experiences. Automation will increase rapidly. Employees will need to diversify their skills or use their existing skills for other jobs. Creativity will increase as traditional jobs are replaced. As well-being workplace models are implemented, they will need to be designed to



achieve and maintain happiness at work and avoid mental health issues.

Private sector

In the context of applying remote work to the private sector, Flashes met Hozan Ali, sales manager for PCS Wireless Middle East Branch in Dubai, who said that this business environment is not new to their company since they have been using it from 2015 given that their company is headquartered in the United States of America (USA) in addition to the company dealing with agents from several countries.

He said the COVID-19 crisis caused a disruption to their work system in the first two weeks but as the weeks went by, most of the company's branches began to merge with the system of remote work.

Ali pointed to a noticeable increase in the company's sales with most of the customers switching to purchasing online, so that the employees in the company's sales department turn into home sellers. «They call the customer directly, prepare and manage the shipment of orders from home, but there is necessity of having a small number of employees in the warehouse and maintenance departments at the company's branch headquarters» Ali said.

On the future of this system in their sector, Ali said: «It is expected that our sector will depend on remote work in the future as a necessity, because it may save a lot of time and money.» He added that, for their company, the customer can now prepare his/her order and ship it via the technology of «limited entry» to the company's system. This technology has been recently introduced to the company's customers. Ali urged other sector players whose work is compatible with this system to join it as it offers better working time options

Above:

The General Directorate of Residency and Foreigners Affairs in Dubai activates remote work system for Amer centers