

MEDIA RELEASE	PSA calls for hybrid system for implementing “work from home”
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The Public Servants Association (PSA), representing more than 235 000 public-servant members, calls for a hybrid approach in terms of working from home.

The phenomenon of working from home is not a new and most public servants would attest that the workload in Public Service is huge and impossible to complete within regulated office hours (eight hours at most), meaning taking work home, which compromises the time left to spend with loved ones. The truth is that if public servants did not take work home, very little would be accomplished in the Public Service and backlogs would be the inevitable occurrence. The many meetings that public servants are required to attend also take too much time away from real work. This means most public servants sacrifice their private time to catch up on work, ensure that deadlines are met and that services are provided timeously. For this crop of dedicated public servants, working from home is neither a choice nor a luxury, but a necessity.

Whilst the idea of working from home may, at face value, look enticing, it also takes a lot of financial sacrifices from the workers concerned. Indeed, there are benefits for workers as they can save on the cost of transport and time spent on travel to and from work, especially with load shedding that causes unnecessary wasted hours sitting in traffic. However, other expenses may not be catered for that the employee may have to bear. By working from home, the employee bears overhead costs that should be borne by the employer. Office space, electricity, and water costs, and in some cases internet connectivity, are some of the hidden costs incurred by employees. Unfortunately, the system does not have a way or a method to recognise, let alone reward these sacrifices made by workers when they work from home.

Working from home does not mean that the workload is reduced. If anything, that is a fallacy. The contrary is the case. Most employees would attest that instead of reducing, the workload is far greater as working hours do not exist. This was proven during COVID-19 when meetings were scheduled until late into the night. The PSA is, however, aware of the question of whether this should be maintained and sustained outside the parameters of the state of disaster. What impact would it have on service delivery if working from home were to become a norm and how should it be regulated? These are crucial questions that both the public and employees should consider. The PSA's view is that working from home must be regulated and the criteria used for eligibility must be clear and transparent. The decision on who gets to work from home or not should not be at the discretion of managers. It must be a function of well-articulated criteria, type of service involved, and the extent to which its implementation does not compromise service delivery.

Whilst there are also several constraints to this phenomenon, the PSA believes that there are more positives than negatives if such a system is managed properly and all stakeholders play their part. It is true that the COVID-19 pandemic and the wave of the Fourth Industrial Revolution have been altering the workplace.

A hybrid work environment in which people can work from the office as well as from the comfort of their homes is unavoidable as this represents the future of work. Many workplaces are adapting their work in line with these new developments and the Public Service cannot afford to be left behind.

The PSA will engage government at recognised platforms on this hybrid system in an attempt to ensure that public servants are not left behind with the Fourth and Fifth Industrial Revolutions that are about to dictate the new way of work.

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