

Future of remote work

It is common knowledge that the past two years, since the arrival of the COVID-19 virus in South Africa, have been extremely testing - forcing people from their comfort zones into uncertainty and discomfort. This resulted in the workplace moving from offices to homes and meetings becoming virtual calls.

The *Remote Work Policy Framework for Public Servants* seeks to make the Public Service a forward-leaning entity on remote work where public servants will be allowed to work outside their normal working environment. The *Policy Framework* does not dictate from where a person should work. It can thus be at home, in another province, another office, or another department. The Policy is, however, a response to COVID-19 and not a permanent feature beyond the current pandemic.

Elements of Public Service Remote Working Policy

- Approval for remote working is a management discretion and not a right.
- Remote working can be for a specified period or on a recurring or regular basis, depending on the nature of the job.
- All departments should validate mechanisms that ensure that service-delivery operations are not disturbed (employees must always be reachable).
- Ensure full compliance with occupational health and safety protocols, especially when employees who are working remotely visit the office, to minimise contamination and exposure.

- Remote working can be terminated by the employer with 24-hour notice if the employer has reason to believe the employee is not performing in accordance with the performance agreement, is not adhering to policies and provisions of the framework, or work requires employees to return to their normal, officially designated workstations.
- Rules of engagement on video calls, virtual meetings, instant messaging, availability on email, and standard response times should be clearly stipulated.
- Determine how security and confidentiality will be maintained.
- Each department should include a clear strategy and plan for how communications will be maintained and amongst all employees.
- Departments should include measures to train and equip supervisors to manage the day-to-day functioning of remote working to include quality of work, providing support to employees whilst not micro-managing and maintaining team spirit.
- Working hours should be maintained.
- Employees are still expected to uphold the image of the Public Service, requiring them to adhere to the content of the policy, or any other government rules whilst working remotely.

While the above is by no means a comprehensive list, shop stewards must note this information as it covers some of the most important points that employers must consider whilst enabling employees to continue to effectively work from home.