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UAE: PRIVATE SECTOR WORK WEEK

DECEMBER 2021

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ABOUT | EMIR



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UAE WEEKEND CHANGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CEOs of large private sector companies in the UAE will follow the government in changing to a Saturday-Sunday weekend, according to a survey by Emerging Markets Intelligence & Research (EMIR). Most of these senior decision-makers, however, will not shift to a two-and-a-half-day weekend; instead, they plan to create a mechanism that allows for religious observance on Fridays while maintaining a focus on productivity. Leaders of companies that are heavily dependant on technology-enabled remote working are less concerned about the change than those organisations with location-based staff. Data in this briefing document are based on a survey of 106 UAE-based regional CEOs (or equivalent title as regional No. 1) of large international companies. Further insights were gleaned from 11 roundtable discussions with 116 CEOs, of whom 10 represented the public sector.

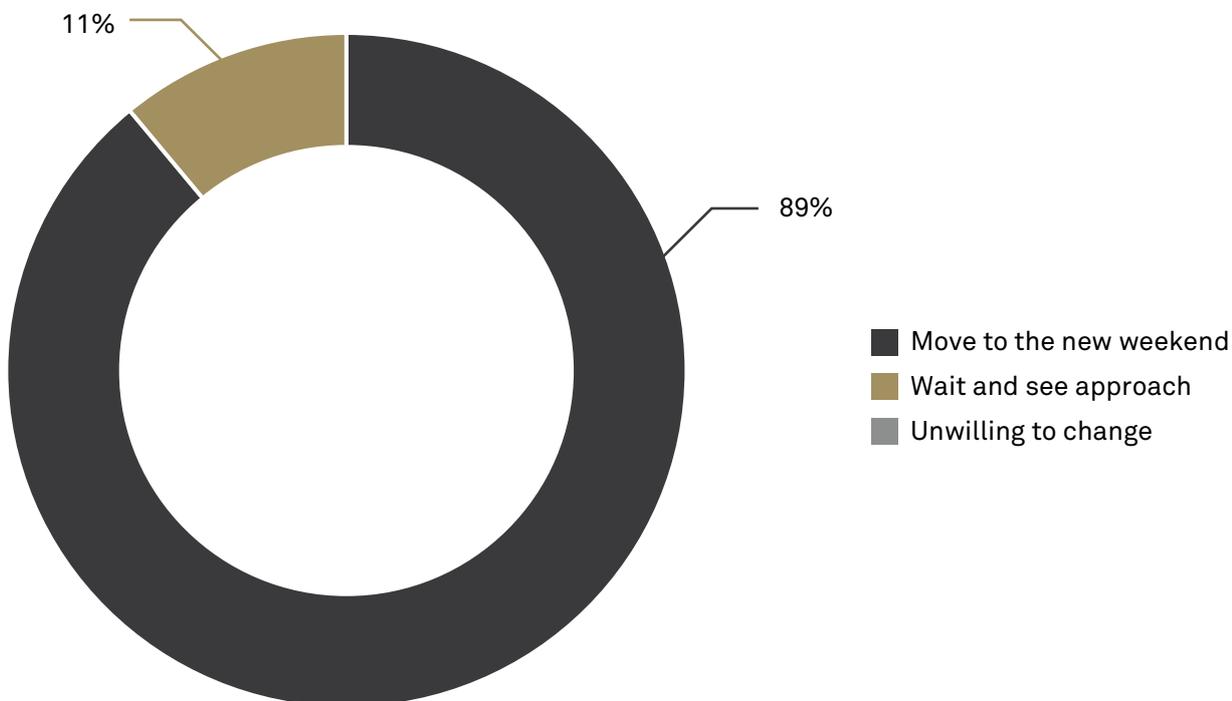
UAE WEEKEND CHANGE

KEY INSIGHTS

- **Some 89% of decision-makers will move to the new weekend come January 2022.** For most firms there will be little reason not to change, especially those that work with government or those that employ large numbers of nationals, such as the banking sector. Only 11% of respondents are taking a wait and see approach while nobody said that they are unwilling to change.
- **However, some 90% will not shift to a four-and-a-half-day work week.** The vast majority of those planning to change to the new weekend will not follow in the footsteps of the public sector and adopt the shorter working week. Just 10% are taking a take a wait and see approach. Most private sector leaders said they will opt for a five-day workweek ending on Friday but flexibility for devout employees will be provided.
- **Most firms will opt for the “Turkey-type model”.** Companies are planning to follow the Turkey model whereby staff are given time to attend midday prayer but are expected back to the office. How companies offer that flexibility will become an increasingly important point amid a global battle for talent, especially given the regional dynamics as Riyadh aims to lure investment and talent away from the UAE. A smaller group, which could be probably stereotyped as the tech-enabled, remote working Silicon Valley-type companies, will offer flexi-work from home on Friday (or every day for that matter, in which case it matters naught).
- **Almost all CEOs welcomed the announcement.** Respondents outlined the benefits for the UAE as a global commercial hub and the ability to align with colleagues in other international markets. The new working week will also support international trade and business by ensuring smooth financial, trade and economic transactions with countries that follow a Saturday-Sunday weekend.
- **Still, near-term disruption to regional operations is a concern.** The main apprehension among business leaders is around the potential disruption to overseeing clients and employees across the region, not least in Saudi Arabia. Back in 2006, when the UAE switched its weekend to Friday and Saturday (from Thursday and Friday), it was followed by the kingdom and the rest of the GCC. It is not inconceivable that the kingdom once again, follows suit in the coming years. With Saudi policymakers keen to diversify the economy and challenge the UAE in key sectors, Riyadh will be wary of allowing the Emirates to gain an advantage from the calendar change.
- **Companies are considering creating blended work timetables.** Work-life balance was cited numerous times as a key issue for UAE-based business leaders amid fears that Sunday becomes an unofficial workday to serve regional clients. While other countries in the region maintain a Friday and Saturday weekend, UAE-based MNCs may need to adopt flexible working hours (something accounted for in the UAE’s new labour law, which comes into effect on February 2nd, 2022).

SURVEY INFOGRAPHICS

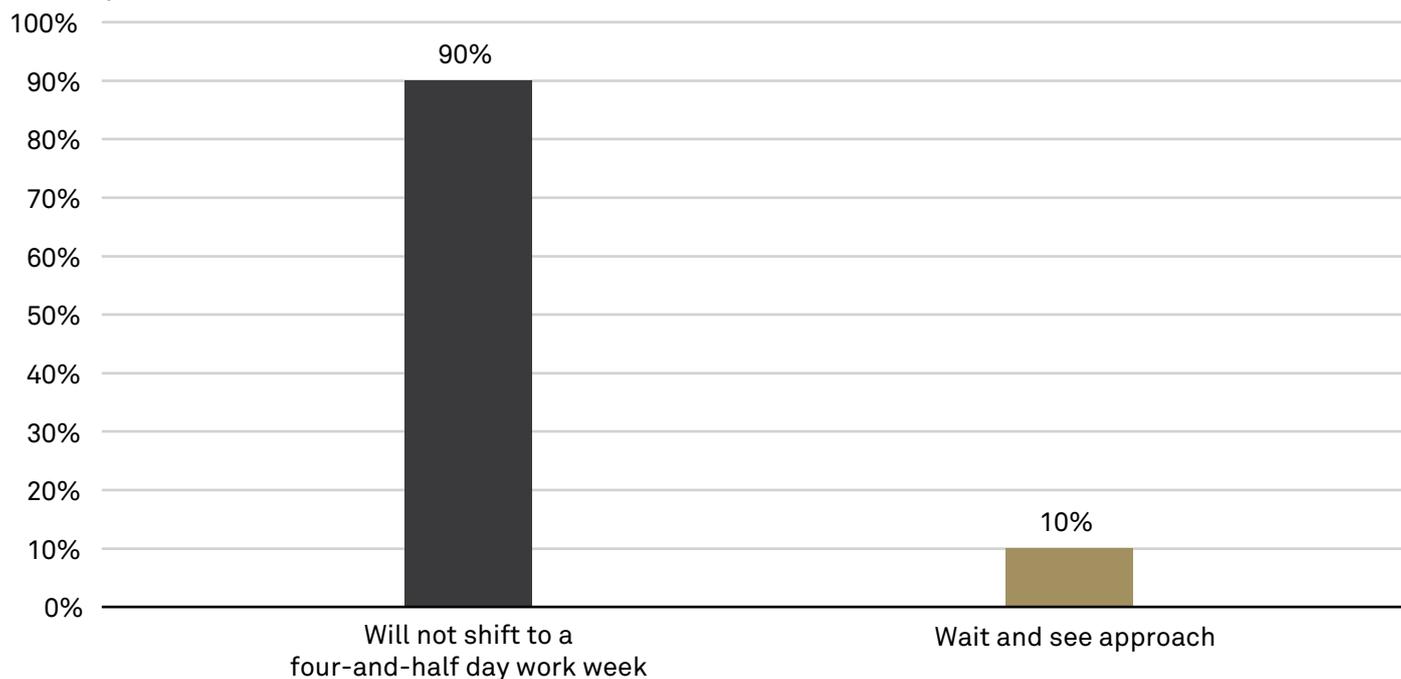
HOW COMPANIES WILL FOLLOW THE GOVERNMENT IN CHANGING TO A SATURDAY-SUNDAY WEEKEND



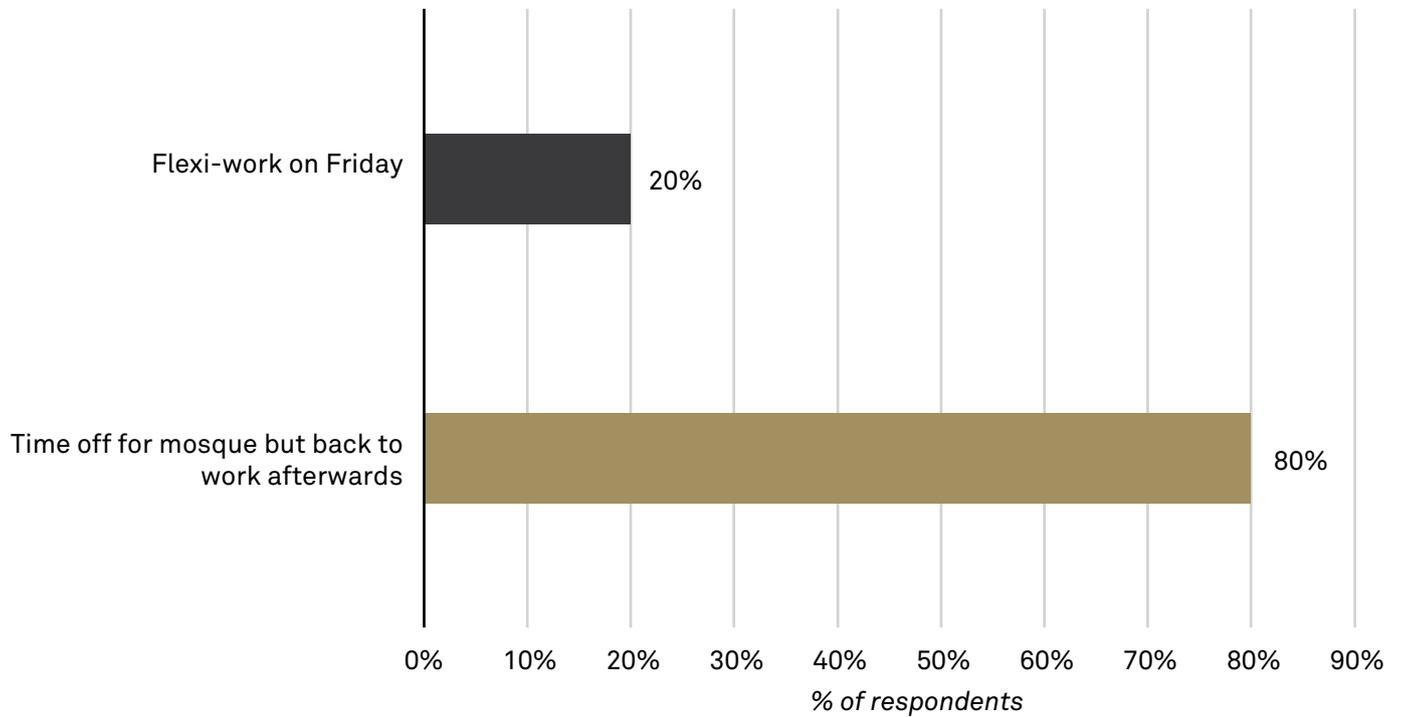
SURVEY INFOGRAPHICS

OF THOSE PLANNING TO CHANGE

% of respondents



SURVEY INFOGRAPHICS HOW COMPANIES WILL OFFER WORKING FLEXIBILITY ON FRIDAYS



SURVEY INFOGRAPHICS MAIN CONCERN RELATED TO THE WEEKEND CHANGE

- 

Potential disruption to overseeing clients and employees across the region
- 

Sunday could quickly become an unofficial workday to serve regional clients
- 

Blended work timetables that allow different staff to work different days in order to satisfy regional requirements

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