

مؤسسة دبي للمستقبل
DUBAI FUTURE FOUNDATION



Organizational Agility And The New Normal Of Workspaces

A case study of
how enterprise
agility helped an
organization adapt to
the “new normal” of
work space amid the
COVID-19 pandemic

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IDEA IN BRIEF

DFF's recipe for success in a remote setting:

- Agile organization and an empowered workforce
- Clearly defined goals and milestones
- Mental and physical well-being of its employees
- Encouragement and emotional support
- Investing in the right technological infrastructure.

Implications of the “new normal”

Most roles in an office can be performed remotely. In addition to tasks that don't require much face-time, DFF teams were able to virtualize functions like front-desk and recruitment through technology. Going forward, virtual futurist networks, online content crowdsourcing, online education, virtual accelerator programs or museum experiences will have a place in DFF's agenda.

One of the most important challenges organizations can face in a remote working setting is to assess their employees' productivity and performances fairly and effectively.

A sound performance management system in the “new normal” must focus on the outcomes rather than the number of hours or the level of productivity of an employee. Measuring the outcomes requires a significant amount of effort from the managers upfront to define clear goals and set milestones.



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Introduction



“COVID-19 is a global crisis but also an opportunity for our organization to test its agility, resilience and readiness for the future”

Khalfan Belhoul, CEO



The Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic continues to grow exponentially across the globe. The United Arab Emirates is at the forefront of containing the spread of the epidemic through extensive testing, mobility restrictions, travel bans, and, most importantly, work-from-home decision for most roles to ensure the well-being of its residents.

Our experience in the past few months with remote work has triggered multiple questions in employers and employees’ minds about the future of work. Can we work remotely and still be as efficient, if not more? Are conference calls more effective than physical meetings? Even the previously non-believers of the value of remote

work are puzzled with the results of the UAE and the world’s recent remote working experience.

The rate of change in the way we work has surpassed the speed at which the regulations can follow. New regulations may follow the new organizational social contract dictated by the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a Gallup study, 43% of the employees in the USA spent at least some of their time working in a location different from their coworkers. Around 12% of the employees spend 80-100% of their time in a remote location. The same study also found out that the employees who work 3-4 days a week remotely are significantly more

engaged with their work compared to those who work with their coworkers all the time.

In line with its mission of “collectively imagining, inspiring, and designing Dubai’s future,” Dubai Future Foundation pioneered multiple efforts, policies, and technological solutions aiming to continue business operations remotely. Dubai Future Foundation’s ongoing efforts, coupled with other global and regional best practices pave the way for a “new normal” where partial remote workforce, if not a complete one, is the norm rather than an exception. So far, “new normal” has proven to be more agile and efficient than before.



What made Dubai Future Foundation thrive in a remote-working setting?

Agile organization and an empowered workforce

Dubai Future Foundation’s strategic business units typically consist of smaller teams collaborating extensively across the organization.

As a significantly flat and “agile” organization with an empowered workforce, Dubai Future Foundation has successfully transformed into a remote-working organization which could not be possible in a top-down organization with rigid rules.

Agility is the ability of an organization to renew itself, adapt, and succeed in a rapidly changing, ambiguous, turbulent environment. Organization design experts of McKinsey describe the agile organization as “one that thrives on change and gets stronger, and it becomes a source of real competitive advantage.” Having

thrived amid the quarantine, Dubai Future Foundation plays an exemplary role for all private companies and government organizations in Dubai.

Clearly defined goals and milestones

The second enabler of the success was its strategic plan, which acted as Dubai Future Foundation’s Northstar at a time of limited face-time with the leaders.

The plan, which is visible to all business units through an online platform, has created transparency for expected deliverables and milestones. The plan consists of six strategic objectives cascaded down to enabling strategies, initiatives, and more than 400 projects with clearly defined owners, contributors, and milestones. It also clarifies what success looks like through strategic objective measures and KPIs at every level.

Mental and physical well-being of the employees



Many employees are at risk of experiencing unanticipated mental health consequences due to working from home globally.

Mentally, isolation from the social circle and colleagues creates loneliness. Physically, blurring lines between work and home increases the burnout risk of the employees. If not appropriately managed, the decreased mental and physical well-being of the employees can significantly lower the productivity of organizations.

Dubai Future Foundation has taken its employees' mental and physical well-being very seriously during the COVID-19 outbreak. The well-being team, a committee of DFF employees that lead initiatives to improve physical, social, emotional, environmental and intellectual well-being of the employees, created a well-being section on the co-working platform, where they have posted interesting, pragmatic, and fun information on how to take care of physical and mental

well-being during this challenging period. The team also arranged virtual well-being workouts three times a week.

Employees asked quiz questions and played games through instant communication channels. In one instance, the CEO played Monopoly with the employees.

The corporate affairs team sent fruit boxes to the employees' homes to encourage them to eat healthy at a time of decreased mobility. All of these initiatives boosted the morale and helped increase the mental and physical well-being of the employees.

Encouragement and emotional support

Dubai Future Foundation's "caring culture" played an essential role in the organization's success in working remotely.

Social channels like the organization's instant messaging group flooded with supportive messages while the leaders kept the momentum through an online town-hall meeting with 110 attendees and the teams organized virtual coffee breaks to continue social interaction, which served as an emotional support net and increased productivity of the employees.

Investing in the right technological infrastructure

Very importantly, Dubai Future Foundation successfully navigated the remote-working journey through quickly investing in and adopting novel communication and collaboration tools such as the new videoconferencing and co-working tools.



encourage them to eat healthy!

What does the “new normal” mean for Dubai Future Foundation and its strategic business units?

Dubai Future Foundation’s “caring culture” played an essential role in the organization’s success in working



Technology Solutions of DFF		Description
1. Physical devices	Laptop	Laptops used by all employees
	Tablet	Tablets for some employees
2. Secure access to resources	VPN	Cloud-based remote access solution
	Future ID	Single-sign-on and profile management
3. Internal and external communication	Voice calls and video conferencing	Calls and videoconferencing among DFF employees and with external parties through laptops, tablets and smartphones
	Instant messaging	Confidential instant messaging services
	E-mail	Outlook and other e-mail clients
4. Data sharing	Document sharing and storage	Ability to share documents across teams in shared folders accessible through VPN
5. Strategy and innovation	Strategic planning	Cloud-based planning and projects progress tracking tool
	Innovation platform	An online platform to submit ideas, concepts and proposals

Most roles at DFF can be performed remotely. Working a research paper, designing a webcast, leading a global coders program, drafting the technology strategy of the museum, creating a strategic plan, overseeing the budget, and many other roles do not require physical presence or specific tools. However, roles like the front desk, hardware IT support, facility management, onboarding and recruitment require at least some level of office presence.

Dubai Future Foundation will shortly launch a virtual help-desk where people can raise their questions and get support from the Office of the Future Team, the team responsive for facilities management, thus mobilizing a virtual front desk adapting to remote working. IT teams can solve issues and support the teams by accessing their computers remotely through a secure connection. For any hardware issues, a shipping company can be used for pick-up and deliveries between the employees and the IT team. Many employees were onboarded virtually at DFF during this time. Videoconferencing has proven to be a handy tool for interviews, and it may continue to be used for efficiency after

the COVID-19-related restrictions are lifted.

Dubai Future Research plays an essential role in defining the “new normal” even further and disseminating the definition into foresight and actionable next steps for Dubai’s decision-makers. They have already published a series of “future trends” reports on the potential impact of COVID-19 on select sectors.

DFR may form a virtual network of global futurists through a technological solution. Dubai Future Councils, on the other hand, may reap the benefits of remote-working and leverage the videoconferencing tools to meet more often than before.

The future content dissemination business unit, publisher of Marsad Mostaqbal and Dubai Future Talks, aims to disseminate COVID-19 related content to its viewers as soon as the content is created. In doing so, they may consider online crowdsourcing for content creation to increase the flow of quality information.

Dubai Future Academy may consider shifting towards an online education

model rather than a physical classroom. That move would require new internal capabilities. With an online education model, DFAC can reach out to a broader audience in a more efficient manner.

Dubai Future Accelerators had to run the last few weeks of an accelerator cohort virtually because the participants needed to return to their home countries due to the Coronavirus outbreak. This served as a valuable experiment on whether accelerator programs can be held virtually. DFA will assess the results of this experiment and act accordingly going forward.

The COVID-19 crisis increased the importance of Dubai Future Labs’ role for Dubai even further. DFL, through its robotics and 3-D printing capabilities, can play a rapid response role in the future outbreaks and disasters. The planned artificial intelligence lab, for example, can use population and health data to recommend quarantine zones for the healthcare officials. As such, in strategizing the future lab additions, DFL needs to consider future disaster scenarios such as virus outbreaks, economic downturn, heatwaves, and other natural crises.

DFF is a relatively young organization that keeps learning everyday.



Metropolitan Museum, Louvre and Galleria Uffizi are some examples of museums with online tours and experiences. The Museum of the Future also plans to ignite curiosity for the future and reach out to larger audiences through curated experiences for online viewing. The COVID-19 outbreak proves the value of this decision.

One of the most important challenges organizations can face in a remote working setting is to assess their employees' productivity and performances fairly and effectively. Employee productivity is the output generated by an employee in a specific timeframe.

Employee performance, however, measures the outcomes an employee has produced over a specific period. In an office setting, employee productivity can mistakenly be measured by the number of hours the employee stays at the office. In a remote working setting, the number of hours an employee works in a day or a month is nearly impossible to measure. Hence the

managers and supervisors must focus on the right things.

A sound performance management system in the "new normal" must focus on the outcomes rather than the number of hours or the level of productivity of an employee. Measuring the outcomes requires a significant amount of effort from the managers upfront. Defining clear goals and determining reasonable timelines are not easy tasks, but the leaders and managers need to master it to measure the remote employees' performances objectively.

Dubai Future Foundation is currently in the process of building a novel and best-in-class performance review framework. This framework needs to be designed with remote workers in mind and be led in coordination with the 3-year strategic planning process where the project managers, SBU leads, and the executive team agree on the project ownership, goals, and milestones.

The pressure to adapt to new situations is at an all-time high, not only due to the COVID-19 pandemic but also due to the unprecedented speed of technological and social changes. In Dubai Future Foundation's experience, agility at these difficult times was not only a factor of its investment in the right technologies but a factor of its empowerment and investment in its employees through well-being initiatives, encouragement and emotional support; and processes that help clearly define goals and milestones upfront.

Dubai Future Foundation is a relatively young organization that keeps learning everyday. It encourages testing new ideas and sees mistakes as learning opportunities. Its adaption efforts to remote working is an ongoing process. Dubai Future Foundation still needs to test many other methods, approaches and technologies. It still has processes to improve, ideas to test, mistakes to make and stories to share to collectively imagine, inspire and design Dubai's future.

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