



TIME OUT?

SME ADVISOR MIDDLE EAST, IN CONJUNCTION WITH TICKBOX SURVEYS MIDDLE EAST, CONDUCTED A SURVEY OF ITS READERS TO FIND OUT THEIR VIEWS ON ANNUAL LEAVE WITHIN THEIR COMPANY. THE AIM OF THESE MONTHLY SURVEYS IS TO PROVIDE A SNAPSHOT OF THE CURRENT PRACTICES IN THE MARKET.



Working for an SME has a number of advantages but there are also some disadvantages, a notable one being that they usually work in isolation. On average most typically consist of less than 20 employees and hence the level of interaction can at times be limited.

Another important aspect is that SMEs tend to have very different work trends or patterns compared to larger companies. Evidence shows that larger firms have more specialised staff, each focusing on a certain area of responsibility. However, such luxury is seldom afforded by SMEs and employees tend to cover a number of responsibility areas. The wide coverage implies that they are spread rather thin on the ground and may have to work a lot harder than peers in larger organisations. Such a work pattern may impact greatly on the employees' work life balance.

The work life balance essentially implies that an employee should be able to adjust work with their other responsibilities or aspirations. This balance is especially important for SMEs due to the fact that 98.5% of firms in the UAE fall under this category. Also, their dominance in the employment market implies that if they are to retain and attract the best employees and hence lead to a

growth in the sector as well as the UAE economy this is one area that needs to be addressed.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the work life balance becomes increasingly important at certain times of the year when an employee's personal life issues become more important than those in the work place.

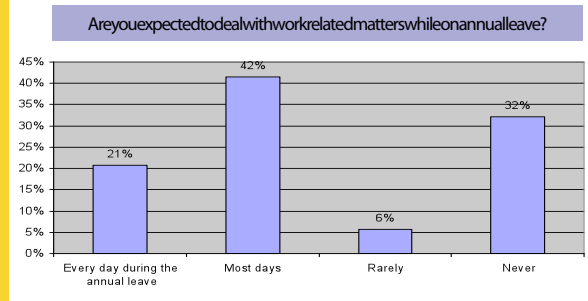
Despite the importance of this issue very little research has been carried out in the UAE looking at the work life balance for SMEs. In order to address this serious deficiency in the current knowledge of practices, Tickbox Surveys Middle East conducted an extensive study using the readers of SME Advisor Middle East as their sample. The survey was sent to SME Adviser readers between May 15th and June 15th.

The results of the survey are as follows:

Working during annual leave

The first question that was asked was whether employees worked during their annual leave. The survey found that almost two thirds of the employees carried out some form of work related activity during their annual leave. An incredible 42% of employees worked every single day of their annual leave. On the other extreme, a third of employees never worked during

their annual leave, while a further 6% worked intermittently during their annual leave.



Reduced leave

The survey shows that not only are employees working during their annual leave and in most cases each day of their holiday, but they are also required to forego their holiday entitlement. The survey found that almost two thirds of the sample did not take up their full entitlement of annual leave. In fact, 19% of the sample never took their full entitlement of annual leave, while a further 40% of the sample at some point in the recent past were not able to take their full entitlement of annual leave due to work related issues. Only 38% of the sample took their full annual leave entitlement each year.

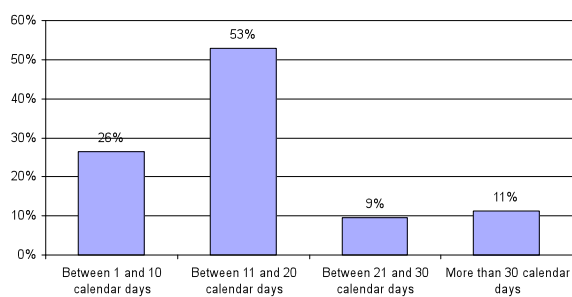
Length of annual leave

The smaller size of an SME implies that staff may not be able to take long periods of annual leave. The survey found that three quarters of the sample plan to take a three weeks or shorter leave during this summer. Just over 53% plan to take between 20 and 30 calendar days of annual leave while 26% plan to take only up to ten calendar days annual leave this summer. If the employees have children in school then it implies

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that they are not able to spend the entire summer with them. The survey found that only 9% is able to take one month annual leave while 11% plan to take more than a month.

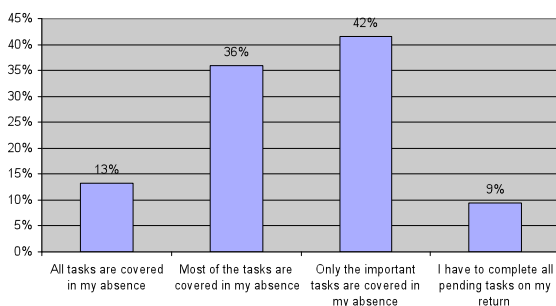
How many calendar days leave do you expect to take between 1st June and 30th September 2011?



Are the tasks covered?

One normally assumes that annual leave is exactly that; a break away from work. However, what the survey tends to find is that although the employee may have taken time off work, the tasks are not covered. Half the sample has their pending tasks waiting for them on their return. The survey found that 49% of the sample had all or most of their tasks covered. Interestingly, 9% did not have any cover during their annual leave and were required to complete all outstanding tasks on their return.

Are your tasks/duties covered during your annual leave?



Leave cut short

Planning for an annual leave is considered to be something that most people look forward to however the survey finds that two thirds of the sample were asked to cut short their annual leave in recent years. In addition to this, a further 28% reported their annual leave to be cut short a regular occurrence. Only 32% of the sample has never had their annual leave cut short.

Technology and annual leave

The survey sought to identify the manner in which employees keep in contact with their place of work while on annual leave. The most common mode of communication for keeping in contact with the office was the email with a combination of a messenger service.

In fact, 83% used email and messenger services largely due to the cost and availability of handset systems. To a certain extent this result is supported by the fact that only 8% use a combination of email and telephone.

Although not directly questioned in the survey, anecdotal evidence suggests that companies provide their employees with email and messenger enabled handsets so as to induce them into working while away from their place of work. Such handsets also allow for informal conversations that normally take place on the telephone to take place via the messenger system. The survey found that 9% used other methods which include only telephone calls, fax or a combination of both of these methods.

The survey sought to understand if technology has improved the working life of employees in SMEs. The survey

revealed that a little over two thirds found that modern technology allowed them to keep in touch with the office while on leave.

Therefore, modern technology may have eased some of the work pressures while on annual leave. Interestingly the survey found that a quarter of the sample found that modern technology has forced them to work while on annual leave and viewed it as an unnecessary evil.

The Tickbox Surveys Middle East study shows that employees in SME are certainly working during their annual leave and may also have to cut short their holidays. Even if they tend to have a break it appears that the non-important tasks are waiting for them on their return. Modern technology has gone a long way to ease the process of employees keeping in touch with their place of work.

In some sense this may be a realisation that in the modern commercial world employees are expected to be contactable and may need to respond to urgent issues even if they are on annual leave. The real question, however, is what is the long term impact of such behaviour on the individual employee and their personal relationships as well as on the ability of the SME sector to retain and attract talented employees who also value their personal life?

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ABOUT:

Tickbox Surveys Middle East specialises in market research surveys for the consumer, B2B, investor, community and employee segments. Tickbox Surveys Middle East specialises in helping companies to identify appropriate interventions for improving customer and employee satisfaction as well as loyalty through using surveys and statistical analysis.