

Workplace Policy Implementation and Organizational Efficiency from The Perspective Work from Home (WFH)

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Abstract

Year of 2020 has witnessed a rapid change in employee's working pattern. Work flexibility has evolved significantly over the years, with the past and current scenarios reflecting changing attitudes towards work arrangements. Many organizations now offer flexible work hours, allowing employees to adjust their schedules to better suit their personal needs and preferences. However, the inequalities in digital technology and the nature of work throughout the world ensure that this working arrangement is uncertain for most employees in Malaysia to be the "new normal". Work From Home (WFH) or telework is considered as an alternative way to organize work. The purpose of this study is to investigate the workplace policy implementation and organizational efficiency from the perspective WFH based on identified factors. The adaption level of flexibility arrangements is continuous after the outbreak from last few years. The samples of employees who WFH and above 18 years old were given questionnaire via Google Doc. Based on a quantitative survey on 353 employees in Malaysia, using eViews are found technological, individual, family, and organizational factors by Baruch and Nicholson are significantly impact on employees' work performance.

Keywords: Work from Home, Flexibility Arrangements, New Normal, Technological, and Work Performance.

Introduction

COVID-19 stands for Coronavirus disease whose initial outbreak began in 2019. This disease has been declared pandemic by World Health Organization in March 2020 (WHO, 2020). As more people have been allowed to return to work by the recovery Movement Control Order (MCO), workers are expecting for more flexible work, even as some businesses report improved teleworking productivity 2020. The Star The outbreak has accelerated the adoption of remote work, with many employees preferred flexibility in work arrangements. The abundance of WFH is opening up a new set of possibilities for the way organizations work and

organize themselves. For both corporations (employers) and staff, WFH may offer a wide variety of opportunities, but it needs to be properly handled to succeed (de Vries, Tummers, & Bekkers, 2019).

Telework is best described as work carried out from various locations (like the one at home) that allows employees to use information and communication technology to access their work activities (Nilles, 1997; Perez Perez et al., 2003). The pandemic has shifted the WFH arrangement from an idea for the few to a needed requirement in general regardless of readiness or desire. The employees' performance of WFH has been the focus of intensive concerns in recent times and it affected to all people across the globe and changing working pattern.

The method of telework has been adapted to modern working life. In a concern where the workers do not have to move to a central and single place of employment, WFH is referred to as the idea of flexible working arrangements. It is sometimes referred to as remote work and telecommuting. In the last decade, telecommuting has seen an increase in popularity (State of Remote Work, 2019; Future Workforce Report, 2018; The Latest Remote Work Statistics, 2019). Advances in technology and affordable rates for mobile connections have increased the availability of telecommuting for workers worldwide (Allen et al., 2015). It is growing rapidly in developing countries. Teleworking is still not commonly accepted in Malaysia (Ng et al., 2004) and is rising at a slow rate. The consequences of these agreements, however, consist of both positive and negative results. There is research proving that Malaysian businesses and staff have recognized teleworking, WFH or telecommuting (Asari and Karia, 2001; Karia and Assari, 2003; Karia and Asari, 2006). The outbreak has significantly remodeled the workplace policy and the efficiency of it (Mehmood et al., 2023) and hence many other studies have examined that telework typically enhances job performance and productivity (Wright, 2015).

As noted by Ravi Gajendran, Assistant Professor in the Global Leadership and Management Department who conducted the study, the study found that telecommuting does not negatively affect job performance for most job characteristics examined in their studies, and for some job features, performance is better with more comprehensive telecommuting and the effect is neutral in others. The purpose of this study is to have better understanding on workplace policy implementation and organizational efficiency from the perspective WFH.

This study offers the impacts to the existing literature by looking at the scenario on the implication of WFH on employees' performance which categorized into three main issues as mentioned in the following section. Lastly, this study concentrates on employees who are flexibly working in services sector in Malaysia. The study findings shall provide insights to the service sectors to establish a better workplace policy and organization environment to improve their employee's welfare and job performance.

Overview and Impact of WFH on Employees' Work Performance

This section will answer objective one which is to review the scenario on the implication of WFH on employees' performance in Malaysia. This objective was achieved based on reports published from Ministry, Agencies, International and Local companies, and news. This part will be categorized into three main issues impact of "WFH" which are technology and connectivity; productivity and performance and lastly working situation and sectors affected.

Technology and Connectivity

The previous novel outbreak of coronavirus Covid-19 prompted national governments around the world to instruct people to WFH in mid-March 2020, unless they had high-necessity jobs. The new normal is unexpectedly to be asked WFH as many companies and employees attempt to continue functioning under the social distance limitations required to stamp out the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

WFH is more collectively referred to in the United States as 'telecommuting' and in Europe as "*teleworking*". These words reflect that the use of telecommunications also enables WFH and jobs for which ICT use (such as computers, the internet, and telephones) accounts for a large proportion of the work content and are usually more likely to be performed from home. The crisis has profoundly scored the world's workforce as many would have predicted, with whole sectors forced to temporarily shut down, stall or cut off the jobs provided by these industries.

Not everyone has the same level of connectivity in Malaysia, as much as one would like to say that pandemic has spurred the drastic growth in digital technology, giving rise to programmes such as Zoom/Google Meet. This means connection stability is a concern for a lot of people. Work productivity has decreased since working at home has become the norm, he says. The lack of a proper workstation makes it hard for employees to carry the same mindset. (The Malaysian Reserve, 2020). According to the president of Permodalan Nasional Berhad (PNB), Given the advanced technologies and digital transformation, but be conscious that WFH may not be suitable for all. PNB is studying closely how, even after the MCO, to incorporate WFH and more flexible working structures in a very conducive way. One of the main enablers is to have the correct technological capabilities for WFH to be effective. To ensure smooth interaction on digital platforms, secure high-speed internet access is necessary, and this may not be feasible at this juncture for all. But there are means of getting around it. He also suggests that this must also be 'balanced' by the fact that WFH may not be a viable long-term solution for all workers to take. (Weekly by Edge Malaysia, 2020).

The director for Asia Pacific mentioned that the "*flexible work*" for junior employees in Malaysia, experience may have a clear meaning and assume that through remote work, junior employees become more accountable. There is also a belief that flexible working forms a new form of relationship between line managers and members of their team. 46% of respondents agree that location helps sustain a relationship that is more professional. It's easy and family friendly to operate from home. But other places to work from should be considered even with a near-perfect home-work setup. It has not been home working, it has been versatility, the effect of portable devices and widespread connectivity. Multi-location working is becoming the norm (Digital News Asia, , 2020).

Productivity and Performance

A study shows that teleworking normally enhances job performance and effectiveness. Telework is a model or way of working where, with the aid of telecommunication technologies, workers achieve the versatility of working in terms of location and time of work. A survey conducted by KPMG in Malaysia received positive feedback from many workers participating in flexibility arrangements. During the MCO time, the survey was conducted from April 7 to May 19, 2020, around three thousand respondents participated, and 69 percent said WFH should continue post-MCO as part of the new coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic standard.

A study was administered on the effect of COVID-19 on the management activities of industry and human resources. It outlined that 40% of Malaysian businesses are going to offer allowances for office-based workers who are now working from home, such as Wi-Fi and/or utilities. Half of Malaysian organizations also state that assessing and enhancing the work effectiveness of remote workers is their greatest human resource (HR) problem. To achieve optimum employees' performance, employers who allow WFH over a long-term period will need to take into account different factors. (Online Borneo Post, 2020).

As noted by Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), to reduce the issues, employment laws, policies, and coverage from the Social Security Organization (SOCSO) would have to be more flexible and include those who are working from home. Employment in our country has always been focused on on-site situations, and this will need to be relooked at, to address concerns that arise from working at home, such as health or safety scenarios. Once these are addressed, then chances are productivity will also increase even though reduced productivity is the main issue faced by employers during this outbreak. (The Malaysian Reserve, 2020).

No indication is if flexibility arrangements result in a net productivity loss. Instead, it is important for organizations to recognize the right productivity drivers when transitioning to an increased WFH pattern. There is one study presented on WFH in a business, the transition to WFH resulted in a gain of between 20% and 30% in the overall productivity factor, which was credited to an improvement in employee performance due to WFH by 13% (UNDP, 2020).

Working Situation and Sectors Effected

According to the JobStreet (2020), in Malaysia, 29% of all job candidates were impacted by COVID-19. 18% were permanently retrenched and 11% found themselves temporarily not working.

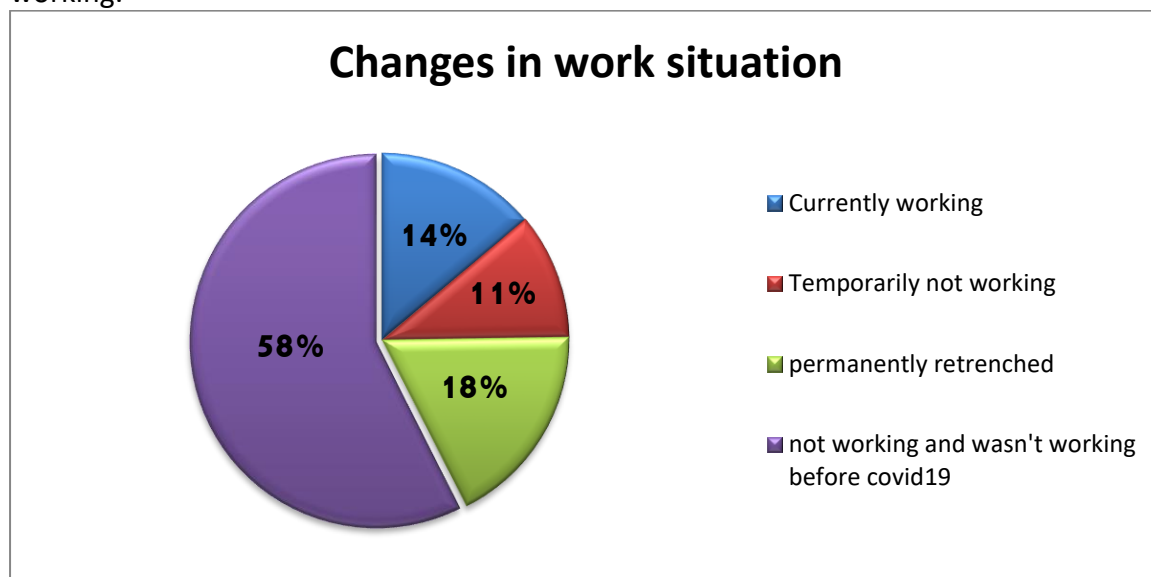


Figure 1: Changes in Work Situation

Source: JobStreet (Sept 2020)

This confirms that their livelihoods have been disrupted by almost one out of three jobs. Short-time workers, those who did not work full-time, and who served in companies with fewer than 50 employees were the hardest hit among those permanently reduced or temporarily not employed. The tourism/travel, hospitality/catering, food & drink, mass transportation, education, and retail sectors have been the hardest hit industries in terms of

permanent or temporary unemployment. The tourism/travel, hospitality/catering, food & drink, mass transportation, education, and retail sectors have been the hardest hit industries in terms of permanent or temporary unemployment.

Summary of Objective One

Based the reports and secondary publication such as TalentCorp, DOSM, newspapers, three emerged issues in Malaysia that affect work performance are technological and connectivity, productivity and performance and lastly working situation and sectors affected.

Demographic Factors and WFH Performance

This section will answer objective 2 which are to examine the relationship between demographic factors and employees WFH performance. This objective was achieved by using cross tabulation analysis where the significance of each demographic factors on the work performance. Based on Table 1, out of fifteen variables, only four have a significant effect on the employees’ WFH performance. The factors are ethnicity, education level, sectors of employment and do they have a problem of internet connectivity issues. This section provides information regarding the findings on quantitative analysis of job efficiency on employees WFH performance. Factors that under observation in this section are demographic using chi square analysis. The second objective of this study is to identify the demographic factors that influence employees WFH performance. In this analysis, the correlation between demographic factor and work performance will be analyzed. The question for the frequency was determined by the Linkert scale method. It was originally a scale of five that consisted strongly disagree, disagree, disagree or disagree, agree and strongly agree. However, in order to regroup the data, the scale needs to be rearranged.

Table 1
Demographic Factor and WFH Performance
 Source: Based on Survey

Variables	Category	I can do my job more efficiently during the WFH				Sig.
		Disagree (1)		Agree (2)		
		N	%	N	%	
Gender	Male	20	14.6%	117	85.4%	0.289
	Female	41	19%	175	81%	
Age	18-25	14	20.6%	54	79.4%	0.566
	26-35	26	15.2%	145	84.4%	
	36 and above	21	18.4%	93	81.6%	
Ethnicity	Malay	53	20.5%	205	79.5%	0.008***
	Non-Malay	8	8.4%	87	91.6%	
Education Level	SPM/STPM/Diploma	10	9.9%	91	90.1%	0.068**
	Bachelor’s Degree	39	20.2%	154	79.8%	
	Postgraduate	12	20.3%	47	79.7%	

Marital Status	Single	28	16.7%	140	83.3%	0.771
	Married	33	17.8%	152	82.2%	
Sectors	Manufacturing/ Construction	7	10.4%	60	89.6%	0.006***
	Mining and Quarrying/ Agriculture	5	26.3%	14	73.3%	
	Academic Services / Self- employed /Own	15	34.1%	29	65.9%	
	Business	34	15.2%	189	84.8%	
Years of Employment	0 to 4 years	29	19.2%	122	80.8%	0.175
	5 to 9 years	17	14.5%	100	85.5%	
	10 to15 years	9	28.1%	23	71.9%	
	15 years and above	6	11.3%	47	88.7%	
Monthly Income	RM3,000 and below	21	22.1%	74	77.9%	0.143
	RM3,001 to RM5,000	17	12.3%	121	87.7%	
	RM5,001 to RM7,000	13	23.3%	43	76.8%	
	RM7,001 and above	10	15.6%	54	84.4%	
Do you have children	Yes	28	19.3%	117	80.7%	0.400
	No	33	15.9%	175	84.1%	
Number of Children	None	34	16.4%	173	83.6%	0.156
	1	11	28.9%	27	71.1%	
	2	10	18.5%	44	81.5%	
	3 and more	6	11.1%	48	88.9%	
I do have caring duty at home such as taking care of?	Sick / Special Needs	6	26.1%	17	73.9%	0.393
	Young Children	16	21.6%	58	78.4%	
	Elderly	5	16.1%	126	83.9%	
	Not Applicable	34	15.1%	191	84.9%	
Age of young children	0 to 12 months	9	29%	202	71%	0.343
	2 to 4 years	6	17.1%	22	82.95	
	5 to10 years	7	15.2%	29	84.4%	
	Not Applicable	39	16.2%	39	83.8%	
Do you stay with your parents or in-laws?	Yes	21	14.2%	127	85.8%	0.192
	No	40	19.5%	165	80.5%	
Do you have a problem of internet connectivity issues?	Yes	16	27.1%	43	72.9%	0.029**
	No	45	15.3%	249	84.7%	
Currently staying in	Rural	7	11.5%	39	13%	0.691
	Urban	54	88.5%	253	87%	

*** Significant at 1%, ** Significant at 5%, * Significant at 10%

Table 1 indicates that sectors of employment, ethnicity, do they have a problem of internet connectivity and educational background are the crucial factors that influencing employees' WFH performance.

The demographic factor of sectors of employment has an influence towards employees' WFH performance where flexible working arrangement been used the most. As stated by Autor and Handel (2013) the viability of working from home in developing countries is partly explained by occupations, noting their significance for structuring job outcomes. Other than that, ethnicity is also play an important role towards WFH performance.

Moving to the respondents has the problem of internet connectivity issue. It shows that respondents that have internet connectivity tend to influence WFH performance. Lower internet connectivity can affect employees' WFH performance.

Educational level also plays an important role towards WFH performance. The most respondents saying they can do job efficiently at home mostly having a Bachelor's Degree. The respondents in this demographic can do job efficiently because they are well-educated and skilled employees' and well trained which they can balance their work-life.

Others demographic factors such as gender, age, marital status, years of employment, monthly income, do they have children, number of children, do they have caring duty at home like taking care of young children, sick/special needs, and elderly, do they stay with own parents or in-laws and lastly where are they staying in are seems not give an impact towards WFH performance.

Summary of Objective 2

According to chi square analysis result, there are four demographic factors that are significant to examine the relationship between demographic factors and employees WFH performance. Dependent variable question of "*I can do job more efficiently during WFH*" were used as a proxy to measure the dependent variable of work performance. This objective was achieved by using cross tabulation analysis where the significance of each demographic factors on the work performance. The factors are ethnicity, educational level, sectors of employment and do they have problem of internet connectivity issue. Variables sector of employments and ethnicities are significant at 1% significance level, variable do they have problem of internet connectivity issue is significant at 5% significance level and lastly variable education level is significant at 10% significance level.

Conclusion

From the findings above, it shows that the new norms of working from home became an attention during the crisis. Some employees who had worked from home following the Conditional MCO agree that would be a much solution to keeping families secure and proposing that it becomes a new normal in a COVID-19 era post (The Star, Oct 2020). Most enterprises remained closed for the entire length of MCO, with the exception of essential services. Some firms, however, were still able to survive as workers were able to work remotely, or "WFH" (WFH). As of May 17, some 10.25 million people, or 67.2 percent of the workforce, had returned to work, up from 6.64 million people or 43.6 percent, according to Finance Minister Tengku Datuk Seri Zafrul Abdul Aziz (May 10). These estimates, citing data from the Statistics Department, took account of those working from home and included different sectors of the economy, such as services, agriculture, manufacturing, and mining and quarrying. The increase in the number of employees returning to work indicates that the government's opening up of the economy on May 4 has so far been gradual in encouraging

workers to earn their livelihoods. There is no new definition for the WFH movement. The Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development outlined this business model within Malaysia back in 2013, but the project did not get a strong response and input from employees who still prefer to work in offices.

Earlier studies have shown that telecommuters are both more satisfied (e.g., Pratt, 1999) and more efficient than conventional employees (e.g., Baruch, 2000; Golden and Veiga, 2008). However, due to lower visibility while teleworking, they might also face lower job opportunities (Khalifa and Davison, 2000; Maruyama and Tietze, 2012). The variables underlying these telework outcomes, however, remained unclear. This study therefore supports the results of previous research on the importance of the workplace for the effectiveness of teleworkers (De Croon et al., 2005) and demonstrates that it is important to understand the establishment of a workplace at home as an important issue in telework arrangement.

The outcomes of this survey found strong evidence the theoretical proposals of Makarius and Larson (2017) on the importance of the role of the supervisor in the development of telework in organizations. A significant precedent of overall satisfaction with telework was found to be organizational support, and supervisory support was specifically linked to perceived job opportunities. The report sheds light on the controversy regarding teleworkers' minimal relationships with their co-workers. The results indicate that decreased contact time with co-workers improves teleworker efficiency and can be seen as a counter-argument to the psychological distress of teleworkers, which is frequently highlighted as one of the drawbacks of telework (Baruch, 2001; Wilson and Greenhill, 2004).

For the second objective, the chi square proves that there are four demographic factors that are significant to determine WFH performance. Demographic factors such as ethnicity, sectors of employment, do they have a problem of connectivity issues and educational level are the factors that influence employees WFH performance. Two variables are significant at 1%, also one variable significant at 5% level of significance and one variable is significant at 10% level of significance.

The ethnicity does prove that Malay respondents can do job efficiently while working from home for 73 per cent, meanwhile Non-Malay contribute least about 27 per cent which constituted of Chinese and India. Sectors of employment also prove that it does affect WFH performance. The most flexible working arrangement of WFH been used is sectors of services/self-employed/own business which about 64 per cent. And the least is for mining and quarrying/ agriculture sectors of only 5 per cent. One of the reasons is why sector of services/self-employed and those who have their own business used flexible working arrangement the most is because they are using technology and electronic devices, and that particular sector can adopt with modern working life. As mentioned, since technology plays an important role, thus internet connection comes in a matter and issues. This demographic aspect should be taken into consideration if the internet access requires workers to telework (Bloom et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Leung & Zhang, 2017; Zhu & Mason, 2014). A rise in job efficiency would result in a secure internet connection. Lastly, the variable of education level has a significant effect on work performance. In this era, well-educated and well-trained employees' does matter. It is very important to have all those criteria of employees as they can be independent and adapt to the unexpected situation in any condition of working environment. For instance, like during the pandemic of Coronavirus (COVID-19) where everyone is being asked to WFH and adapting to the new norms.

Recommendation

The results of the study show that technical variables have a clear and important relationship with the success of WFH. Luckily, technology has helped workers stay linked and efficient to the point that major technology firms expect to continue the trend of remote work further than pandemic. COVID-19 has brought an unparalleled amount of instability to the planet over the past few months and forced the massive majority of individuals to operate from home (Engineering.com, June 2020). In driving organizational change, technology has played a big role. Legacy IT has migrated to cloud computing; machine learning, artificial intelligence and intelligent automation have progressed; and IoT has led to the transition of generations. Network connectivity developments, digital devices and applications have allowed companies to respond to the changing work setting.

As recommendation, firstly it is recommended to managers and corporate management that teleworking practice should always take into account the telecommuters' personal motivation and sense of space as it has the potential to impact the quality of their work and job performance. Computing out-fits managers should stick with the policy that requires workers to operate at the accepted location as it has been found to have important job performance relationships, but also to guarantee that there is a clear system on the pavement to track the telecommuters' activities. This study has a huge impact because working from home greatly affects job performance. Among the factors are technological, individual, family, and organizational, technology plays an important role in determining the level of work performance from home. Therefore, more organizations should look into implementing WFH as their workplace policy.

In the future studies, the researcher can include other factors that represent all aspects that influencing work performance while WFH. Different parts of the country have different factors. There are other factors that were not included in this research such as human factors, environmental factors, psychological factors and many more. It can be an important factor that influencing employees' work performance in Malaysia. The advancement of technology and strong connectivity is playing a vital role in determine employee's performance. Lastly, more research is needed as mostly past studies and research are more concern about well-being and productivity. It is extremely encouraging to see more research and studies on implication of WFH on employees' work performance as it became a big matter during this crisis. However, academic institutions should provide more initiatives to encourage more academicians and future researchers study on this topic with regards to gather information in terms of preparedness towards new working pattern.

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