

## Motivators and Demotivating Factors for Work from Home

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### Abstract

As work from home and other working flexible models such as telework, or telecommuting become more widespread with the new advancement in digitalization transformation, work from home (WFH) arrangement on an unprecedented global scale has been adopted by many organizations. WFH is one of the alternatives of working model occurrence emanating from the Covid-19 pandemic as the lockdown or stay-at-home measures entered force. Nevertheless, employees faced up and down motivation during WFH, and triggered the studies series on motivator and demotivating factors for WFH. However, previous studies have only discussed the topic theory-wise and not into factors that motivate or drawback from employees' views. Provided that, this paper aims to fill in the gaps by examining the motivator and demotivating factors of WFH. Using a quantitative approach, 58 workers from public local universities who have WFH experience participated in the survey and the response was analyzed with Descriptive statistics using SPSS software. The study identifies both flexibility and work-life balance as motivator factors while work performance is a demotivating factor for WFH. The outcome of this study can be of strategic importance for higher education institutions to improve the WFH standard operating procedure structure in the future where further research can scrutinize the demotivating factors from a different perspective to provide a better solution for WFH. Moreover, this study can analyze gender and married with single to get multiple responses for benefitted party and finally further research on WFH operation level efficiency.

**Keywords:** Working from Home, Working Flexibility, Work-Life Balance, Performance, Motivators Factor, Demotivating Factors

## Introduction

### Background of Study

As we step further into the Millenium Era, digital transformation is enabling economic development on a path toward green, resilient, and intensive economic growth. Many private and public organizations have been radical in the uptake of investment in digital solutions. Thus, it causes a growing number of tasks can be performed and served well where and anytime with the help of digital technologies and transit the labor market to the more flexible model of working conditions (Gallouj et al., 2015; Holtgrewe, 2014; Messenger & Gschwind, 2016). The Covid-19 epidemic impact has expedited this flexible telework as working place uses a physical separation approach to avoid the risk of a pandemic (Ilmi et al., 2020).

Working from home (WFH) is a phrase that has become more popular also commonly known as remote work, teleworking, or telecommuting because of the Covid-19 pandemic (Hasan & Nuruddin, 2011; Kramer & Kramer, 2020). In a study conducted by Sayer et al (2005) and Wong et al., (2020), the terms refer to the working day spent in the home environment where the work takes place rather than in the office. Additionally, employees with the same facilities continued to do, homework and were occasionally extremely mobile in multiple locations at work outside the office (Kapsos et al., 2011).

It is worth mentioning that the most popular term used synonymously and interchangeably is remote work. The figure below Google Trends of searches made globally in the past four years (January-2019 – July-2022) indicates that remote work was used more frequently. Thus, the study on search WFH is still scarce and inconclusive from various fields and perspectives. Hence, the aim of this article is to contribute to these debates focusing on the motivator and demotivating factors for WFH.

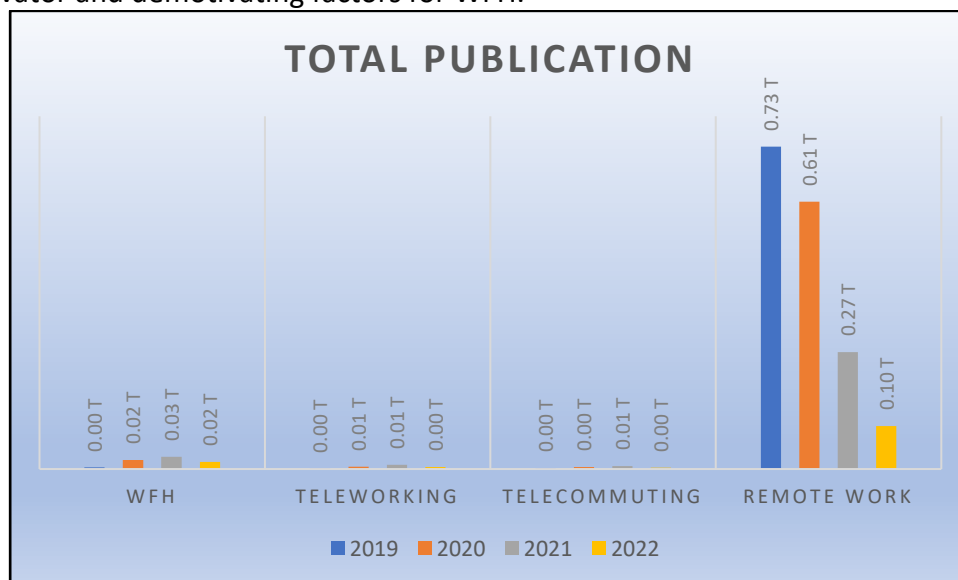


Figure 1: Total publications on WFH and other terms search in Google Trends

In Malaysia, WFH has different practices between public and private organizations (Tambou et al., 2021). In the public sector, with the continuous rising of Covid-19 active cases from March 2020 to 25 March 2021, civil servants are permitted to WFH. As the country moved forward into the endemic stage with the National Recovery Plan, almost 80% of civil servants WFH are permitted to work at their premises (Abu Bakar et al., 2022). On the

contrary, the private sector in Malaysia implements the practice on a different basis due to the need to avoid an economic shutdown (Tambou et al., 2021). Moreover, according to the SME Association of Malaysia president, it is strongly urged for employees to work from factories and offices at 100% onsite capacity and will close an option to temporarily WFH if there is in need (<https://hrmasia.com/malaysia-lets-employers-choose-whether-to-allow-wfh/>).

With Malaysia now transitioning toward treating Covid-19 as an ongoing endemic, restrictions have become more relaxed, and many companies are able to resume business as per usual while following Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) lined out by Health Ministry. Given the situation, it is difficult to state the WFH arrangement will become the dominant trend in Malaysia rather than the traditional office routine since there's a new variant emerging every now and then. However, WFH do have pros and cons perceived differently by everyone regarding their personal feeling towards their working environment and performance. As employees are the main reason for organization operation, the motivating and demotivating factors will critically decide an organization's success (Guide, 2001).

According to Frederick Herzberg well known Two-Factor Theory designed in 1959, there are motivator factors that will increase an employee's job performance while demotivating factors are less to contribute to employees' motivation needs. Combining Herzberg's theory with the WFH factors by Abdullah et al (2020), therefore, the research presented in this paper will address the following objective: to identify motivators and demoting factors of WFH that deserve more attention in future research.

### **Statement of Problem**

The sudden outbreak of COVID-19 in 2020 has led governments all over the world to declare restricted movement and quarantine inane efforts to curb the pandemic. People were not allowed to leave their homes to go to work or school and had to stay at home for months. As a result, the economy suffered as people could not go out to earn a living or spend their money. To generate the economy and survive the pandemic, many organizations started to allow their employees to work from home. For example, in the education sector, classes are conducted online where the lecturers would be conducting the class from their own homes while the students join the class from the comfort and safety of their own homes. In Malaysia, work from home gained its momentum when the Ministry of Health (MOH) released the advisories on the 2020 Movement Control Order (MCO) under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Disease Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967 which allows for people to work from home (Mat et al., 2020). For many, this is their first time trying to work and study from their place which also proves to be a challenge to their productivity and motivation (Verma et al., 2021).

The ability to work from home has its pros and cons. Some of the advantages found are improving family bonding and increasing work performance (Mat et al., 2020), and increasing employees' job satisfaction levels (Schall, 2019). In contrast, a study by Mustajab et al (2020) found that there was a decline in the productivity of most employees in Indonesia who had to work from home. Having to balance the work and house chores at the same time leads to fatigue which affects the employees' work motivation. This is in tandem with findings from Verma et al., (2021) who found that employers in India who were required to work at home

due to COVID 19 faced an increase in the work commitment that led to distress and proved to be a challenge to their productivity and motivation.

Therefore, this study is conducted to examine the motivating and demotivating factors for working from home. This research is conducted to answer the following questions.

RQ1- What are the motivators for working from home?

RQ2- What are the demotivating factors for working from home?

## **Literature Review**

### *Characteristics of WFH*

Over the years, WFH has been described in a variety of ways including working remotely, flexible workplace, teleworking, telecommuting, and e-working (Klopotek, 2017; Rahmat et al., 2022). Even though these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, it is still important to determine the characteristics of the terms that are most used to describe this type of working arrangement such as telework, telecommuting, and homework or work from home (WFH).

The International Labor Organization (ILO) has defined 'teleworking' as "a form of work in which work is done in a location away from a central office or manufacturing facility, separating the employee from personal contact with colleagues; and the new technology allows for that separation by facilitating communication" (Ruiz & Walling, 2005, as cited in Beno, 2018). Up until before the emergence of COVID-19, this definition appears to be the most widely accepted definition of the term 'telework'. As for the term 'Telecommuting', which is sometimes called 'work at home' or 'homework', Madsen (2011) explains it as using information and communication technologies to bring work to the employee. The term 'working from home, on the other hand, is recognized as a type of flexible work arrangement that permits employees to work from home or another remote location (Masuda et al., 2017; Feleen & David, 2021). But perhaps the description of WFH provided by Rahmat et al (2022) is a more comprehensive one, defining it as a modern working strategy made feasible by the internet and accessibility that permits a worker to work from home regardless of their location.

From what can be seen, it can be concluded that no matter what term is used over the years, the main characteristics of WFH are the use of technology to complete work tasks and the ability to work from any remote location. This shows that besides the flexibility of work location, the presence of technology and the internet is also important to enable WFH to be efficient for employees. The results of the study by Afrianty and Burgess (2022) on determinant factors that influence the productivity of academic staff working from home amidst the COVID-19 pandemic highlight how crucial it is for employees to have a strong digital orientation as it has a substantial impact on the individual's digital capability.

This in turn affected the individual's productivity. When Rahman and Arif (2020) studied the satisfaction, challenges, and productivity of employees during the COVID-19 pandemic, they too found the internet is the driving force behind the work-from-home notion, noting that teleworkers can collaborate remotely using a variety of internet applications, making their work more productive.

### *Challenges and Problems with WFH*

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, many people's goals of working from home have become a reality. However, employees who worked from home said they had greater trouble winding down and stayed at work later than usual. Working from home may be challenging for anybody, but it can be especially challenging for parents of young children due to interruptions from other family members, neighbors, and friends.

Being absent from the office may also result in a lack of visibility, which increases workers' anxiety that being invisible will reduce their chances for advancement, awards, and favorable performance reports (Dans, 2020). To successfully balance work and life, it is important to practice self-discipline, self-motivation, and effective time management (Richardson & McKenna, 2014). However, for many workers, it is more difficult to unplug and detach from work due to the blurring of the lines between work and personal life (Routley, 2020). People could therefore find it challenging to put their work aside after hours.

### **Past Studies**

#### *Past Studies of Advantages of WFH*

Many Studies have been done to investigate the benefits of working from home. The quantitative study by Ipsen et al (2021) looked at people's experiences with WFH during the pandemic and pinpointed the primary benefits and drawbacks of working from home. An online survey with 23 questions was completed by 5748 European professionals and management workers who participated in the study. The findings showed that most people generally had a favorable experience working from home during the lockdown as opposed to a bad one. The primary benefits of WFH are represented by three elements: i) a better work-life balance; (ii) more productivity; and (iii) more control over one's work. Meanwhile, the major drawbacks were: iv) limitations on home offices, v) job insecurity and vi) insufficient tools.

The implications of this study indicated that people will be able to manage distance work in the future as the disadvantages of WFH outweigh the benefits. The next study done by Liwanag (n.d) looked at the satisfaction level with work-from-home arrangements, and the advantages, and challenges faced by the workers. 340 teaching and non-teaching staff from Bulacan schools participated in this study by answering the survey questionnaire. The findings concluded that the respondents are somewhat satisfied with their existing work-from-home arrangement. Besides that, less money spent on commuting, parking, and work attire was the most significant advantage during WFH and a reduction in overhead facility costs was the main advantage for businesses. While the biggest difficulties during WFH for workers are the implications of having little contact with the management in their careers.

A study by Purwanto et al (2020) focused on identifying the information on advantages and disadvantages of WFH during the pandemic COVID-19. Six respondents consisting of teachers and parents from Tangerang City were chosen as the sample size using the purposive sampling method. Research approaches using qualitative case study methods and the case study technique of exploration were used to identify the advantages and disadvantages of working from home. The study results showed that the benefits and harm were balanced. The benefits include greater flexibility in how work is completed, a lack of dependency on office hours, a lack of expenditure on gas or transportation, a reduction in stress levels, and more

leisure time. While the disadvantage of WFH is that it can lose motivation to work due to the high cost of the internet and electricity, and it might also result in data security difficulties.

To perform the best, employees still have a lot to learn about how things work. The last exploratory study by Epasinghe and Karunathilaka (2021) dived into the drawbacks and advantages of WFH policies in relation to employees' job satisfaction in Sri Lanka's crushing industry. This qualitative study has been followed by a thematic analysis of the material from the in-depth interviews with eight randomly chosen employees of the top crushing firms in Sri Lanka. Findings revealed that most female employees are not supportive of WFH practice because it has led to their job dissatisfaction, while the majority of male employees do not see a substantial difference in their level of job satisfaction. The results of this study have provided future researchers with a conceptual framework for understanding employees' job satisfaction by outlining the main advantages and disadvantages of WFH policies. Therefore, this study helps employers and policymakers evaluate essential areas to focus on when designing organizational processes at the industry level.

### *Past Studies of Challenges of WFH*

The expression “the new norm” is associated with social distancing, wearing of face mask, checking body temperature, and so on. In the context of employment, the new norm is related to employees working from home (WFH). Now that we're in an endemic phase, things are slowly returning to the 'old norm'. However, many organizations still allow their employees to attend WFH. Although WFH has its advantages, there are still many challenges. Abu Bakar et al (2022) conducted a study on employees' perceptions of Work-From-Home during movement restriction orders in Malaysia”. The study found that transitioning from traditional jobs to telecommuting is difficult for Malaysian workers. With everyone working from home, employees feel like they can't stay on the same page due to different times and tasks. They fear less guidance and oversight from management. Geographical split also means that remote workers can quickly sense events occurring within the organization outside the loop.

A study by Al- Habaibeh et al (2021), found that the main challenges are of a psychological nature such as being lonely and lack of daily face-to-face discussions and informal meetings. While a lack of physical activities and the challenges of key factors such as childcare and workload management have been also identified.

### **Conceptual Framework**

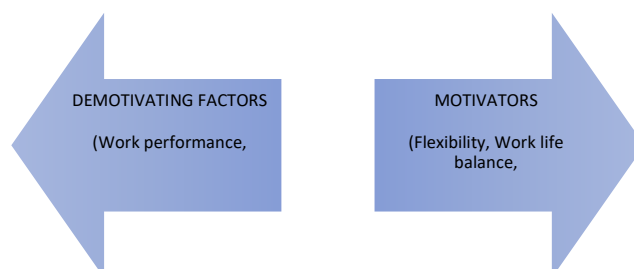


Figure 2- Conceptual Framework of the Study- Motivators and Demotivating factors for Work from Home

Figure 2 shows the conceptual framework of the study. The framework is rooted from motivating and demotivating factors by Herzberg, Mausner, and Snyderman (1959). The two factors are then combined with the homework factors of (Abdullah et al., 2020). In the context of this study, motivators include Flexibility and Work-life balance. Next, demotivating factors include Work Performance.

### *Motivators of WFH*

There are numerous past studies done to investigate the motivators of WFH. Two important factors are flexibility and the work-life balance offered by WFH. These two motivators are closely related as the flexibility to work from home allows the employees the chance to have a work-life balance. WFH offers employees the flexibility to work in their own time and place (Nur et al., 2020). Flexibility means that employees have more freedom to decide where and when they want to work. Instead of being confined to the office space, employees can decide to work in their bedroom, living room, or even in their own kitchen. In addition, they are not bound to office hours, so they are free to start and stop working according to their own schedule.

There are several other advantages that come with flexibility. First, flexibility offers convenience to the employees. For example, they do not need to spend their energy bracing traffic jams to get to their office. As people have the convenience to do their job wherever and whenever they want, this increases their work productivity (Nur et al., 2020). Second, flexibility also offers autonomy to the employees in doing their work which allows them to be able to balance their work and their own personal life (Schall, 2019). They have more flexibility to take care of their family affairs such as sending their children to school or taking care of ailing parents while at the same time doing their job like conducting meetings or answering emails.

As a result, greater job satisfaction could be achieved when the employees are able to schedule one's own time to fulfill work responsibilities and take care of their personal obligations. Third, flexibility may increase the employees' independence and self-directed decisions on how to carry out their job (Schall, 2019). Furthermore, many employees believe that WFH offers them a balance in carrying out their work and personal life as they can arrange their time between their work and personal life (Mustajab et al., 2020). This is supported by Dockery and Bawa (2018) who found that WFH improves the family relationship to be better as there are balance and fairness in dividing the family tasks and work responsibilities.

Apart from the reasons mentioned above, WFH also provides the employees with comfortability to work in their own space (Mustajab et al., 2020) and employees' morale is found to be improved when they do WFH as they achieve work-life balance (Weerasinghe & Jayawardana, 2020). In conclusion, having the flexibility to work wherever they want and the opportunity to have work-life balance are found to be the two main motivators for WFH.

### *Demotivating factors of WFH*

As motivator factors mentioned above are taken from Herzberg Theory, demotivate or factor in this study work performance initiated from most of the work and family literature. Individuals experience stress when their responsibilities are not compatible (Greenhaus &

Beutell, 1985). In the study by Abdullah et al. 2020, working performance was supported by flexibility and no distraction factors. Flexibility can increase performance due to employees can work according to their best convenience (Singh et al., 2017; Church, 2015; Bloom et al., 2015). Further, no distraction due to less break time, often contact with co-workers and comfortable working space is another factor that can increase employee performance during the WFH phase (Nakrosiene et al., 2019; Garg & Van Der Rijst, 2015).

Even though the relational factors have a positive relation to both elements, the negative impact of WFH still exists and will outweigh the positive impact depending on employee perspective and experience. This is supported by Ojala et al (2014); Song and Gao (2018), who reveal that WFH increases stress and less happiness. Additionally, Bloom (2015) also found that the employee promotion rate conditional on performance fell for WFH employees.

### Methodology

This quantitative study is conducted to examine the motivating and demotivating factors for WFH, and the participants were intentionally selected from a public university in Malaysia. The instrument (see table 1) used is a survey adapted from an in-text citation adapted from (Abdullah et al., 2020). In addition to the demographic profile of Section A., there are 3 other sections. Section B contains 10 items on flexibility, Section C has 10 items on work-life balance, and Section D has 10 items on work performance.

Table 1

#### *Distribution of Items in Survey*

SECTION	FACTORS	NO OF ITEMS
B	Flexibility	10
C	Work-Life Balance	10
D	Work Performance	10
	TOTAL NO OF ITEMS	30

Table 2

#### *Reliability Statistics*

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.924	.928	30

Data is collected via google form and analyzed using SPSS version 28. With reference to table 2, the SPSS analysis revealed a Cronbach analysis which is used to assess the reliability of the internal consistency of a set of scale or test items. In other words, the Cronbach analysis is used to measure how closely related a set of items. Theoretically, a generally accepted rule is that  $\alpha$  of 0.7 and above indicate an acceptable level of reliability. This study showed 92% of Cronbach's result, thus showing high internal reliability for the instrument. Data is presented in terms of percentage for the demographic profile and mean scores to answer the research questions.



**Findings**

Findings for Demographic Profile

Table 3

*Summary of socio-demographic characteristics*

Category	Type/group	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	31
	Female	69
Age group	1 (20 to 29 years old)	10.3
	2 (30 to 39 years old)	65.5
	3 (40 to 49 years old)	22.4
	4 (50 to 59 years old)	1
Academic Level	SPM	8.6
	Diploma	5.2
	Degree	13.8
	Master	62.1
	Phd	10.3
Marital status	Married	74.1
	Single	25.9
Employment sector	Academic	67.2
	Non-academic	32.8

This section showed the results of socio-demographic characteristics of the respondent for both academic and non-academic staff. In general, presents the percentage for the gender of the respondents. 69% of most of the respondents were female. Only 31% of the respondents were male. The age group of respondents showed most of the respondents are 30 to 39 years of age (65.5%), followed by 22.4% of the respondents who are 40 to 49 years old. 10.3% of respondents are from the age 20 to 29 and the least (1%) is from 50 to 59 years old.

The third characteristic described the academic level achieved by the respondent in this study. The highest number of respondents are master's Holders with 62.1%, 13.8% of the respondents are Degree holders, followed by Ph.D. holders (10.3%). SPM holders state 8.6% and the lowest is Diploma holders (5.2%). The next characteristic is marital status among the respondents where 74.1% of the respondents are married and 25.9% are single. The last demographic characteristic showed the distribution of respondents based on their Employment Sector. Most of the respondents are working in the Academic Sector (67.2%) and the rest are from the Non- Academic Sector (32.8%).

*Findings for the Motivating Factor*

This section presents data to answer research question 1- RQ1- What are the motivators for working from home? In the context of this study, motivators for working from home are (a) flexibility and work-life balance.

**(a) Flexibility (F)**

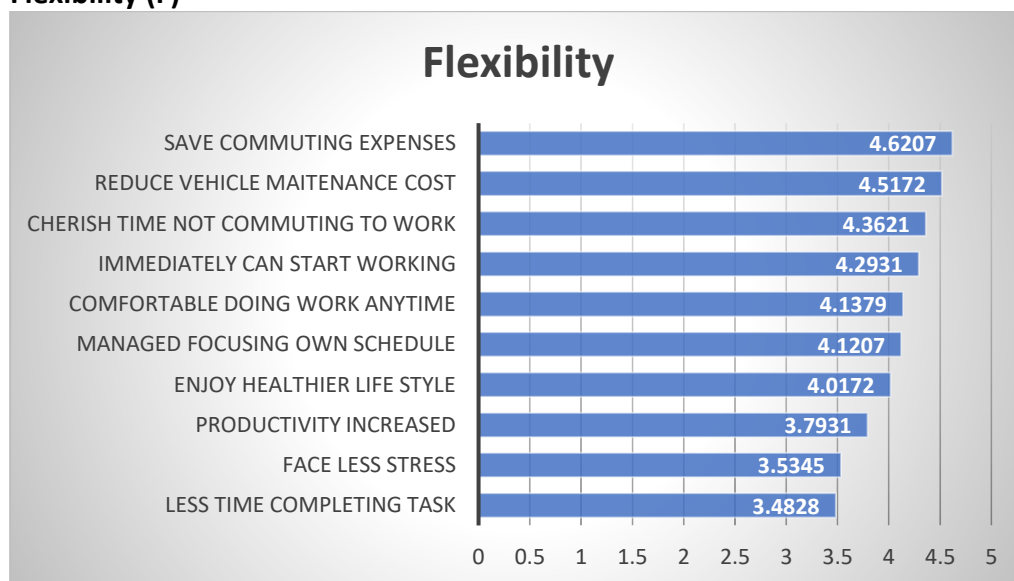


Figure 3- Mean for Flexibility

Figure 3 shows the response of respondents on ‘Flexibility’ as a motivator for working from home. From the graph above, we can see that the highest mean score (4.6) recorded is for ‘Save commuting expenses. Following that with only a slight difference, is the second highest mean score (4.5) for ‘Reduce vehicle maintenance cost’. These results tell us that cost associated with commuting and vehicle maintenance is a major factor of Flexibility that affects the motivation of respondents to work from home. Nevertheless, ‘Less time completing task’ and ‘Faceless stress’ have been deemed the least significant factor of Flexibility that affects the motivation of respondents to work from home as both recorded the lowest mean (3.5).

**(b) Work-Life Balance (WLB)**

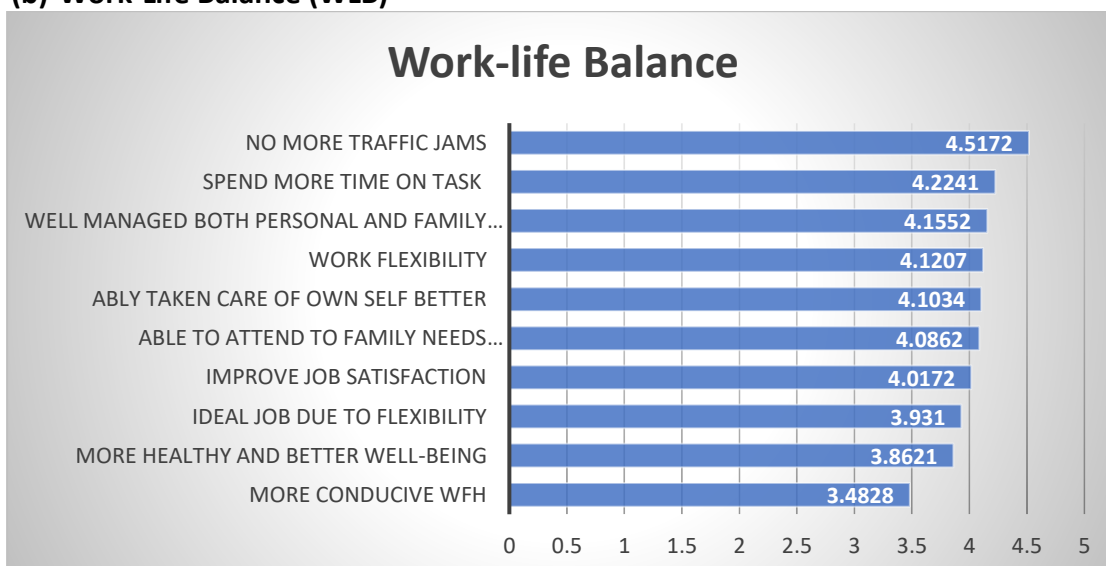


Figure 4- Mean for Work-Life Balance

The chart presents the mean score for Work-life Balance. The highest mean score is 4.5 which is ‘No more traffic jams’ followed by ‘Spend more time on task’ with a mean score of

4.2. Meanwhile, item 'More healthy and better well-being' scored the second lowest mean score of 3.8, and item 'More conducive working from home has the lowest mean score of 3.4.

#### Findings for Demotivating factors

This section presents data to answer research question 2- RQ2- What are the demotivating factors for working from home? In the context of this study, the need for work performed while working from home can be demotivating for some employees.

#### (c) Work Performance (WP)

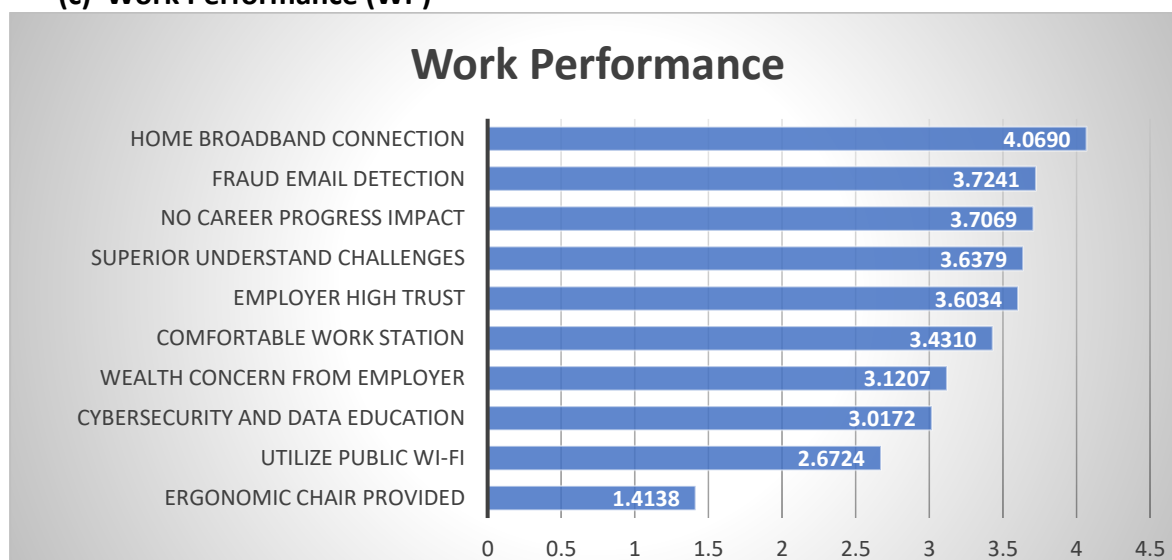


Figure 5- Mean for Work performance

To understand the current working performance of the employee, ten items concerning the overall work performance were included in the questionnaire. As is shown in Figure 5 above, out of 10 items, the respondent level of work performed on six items is strong or highly experienced employees. Those six items range with a mean from a maximum of 4.06 to a minimum of 3.43. Between this range, the factor of home broadband connection scored a high mean with 4.06 and the lowest score was comfortable workstation to perform work at home with 3.4 scores. This show that, using home broadband highly increased their work performance during WFH. The same underlying meaning for those six items is between this range. The rest items that score between 3.1 to 1.4 score indicated lowly occur to employees where there is no such experience at all during WFH. These items were no wealth concern from the employer, lack of training or education regarding cybersecurity and data protection, not utilizing public Wi-fi freely and employee not being provided with an ergonomic chair during the WFH phase. Since that item is not liable to the employee, obviously these were factors that demotivate employees during WFH.

#### Conclusion

##### *Summary of Findings and Discussion*

The analyzed result using the Mean score in the study reveals motivator and demotivating factors of WFH. This study reveals that WFH does influence flexibility, work-life balance, and work performance. Flexibility at WFH is achieved by an employee who can save all the costs and time relating to commuting and vehicle. Despite saving cost, and flexibility that comes with WFH, employees feel comfortable doing work at any time while focusing on

to own schedules and enjoying a healthier lifestyle. This study identified flexibility as a motivator factor for WFH in line with (Schieman and Glavin, 2017; Kim et al., 2020).

Next, work-life balance can affect the employee positively or negatively. The work-life balance in this study. With the strong positive response from the employee who scores more than 3.5 this factor confirms as a motivator. These results indicate that employee enjoys a work-life balance with WFH by not facing traffic jam and being able to take care of and manage both personal and family need even WFH. This result is support by (Nakrosiene et al., 2019; Cohen and Liani, 2009; Chung, 2018; Coenen and Kok, 2014; Contreras et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2009; Ellis and Webster, 1998; Fedakova and Istonova, 2017).

Lastly the response to work performance which the study regarded as a demotivator factor. The result showed for factor scores between 1.4 and 3.1 were low responses or not experienced by employees during WFH. The factor was no health concern from the employer, lack of training or education regarding cybersecurity and data protection, not utilizing public Wi-Fi freely, and no ergonomic chair or other aids tool provided. As we can see, there is a conflicting issue between employee and employer where less interaction and this will be a potential issue to lead to social isolation and worsen individual and group performance as supported by (Sparrowe et al., 2001). Based on the finding presented, it can be concluded that most of the respondents agree that there are both factors that motivate and demotivate the employee for WFH.

#### *Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions for Future Research*

Based on the summary of finding about the motivator and demotivating factor WFH, although it was in expectation by the researcher, it provides the implication for all institutions in general. Firstly, the standard operating or working procedure should be improved and scrutinized between both employee and employer. It can give a clear guideline from the perspective of reward and work productivity.

Next, the interaction with co-workers and manager as well as the employer should be checked out. Without harmonious interaction whether for the sake of the organization's benefit or individually, it will affect the evaluation and opportunity for promotion. Furthermore, no harmonious interaction between co-workers will affect group performance generally as in line with (Weinert et al., 2015; Bailey and Kurland, 2002). This study has emphasized the motivator and demotivating factor of WFH among Malaysian employees specifically in public higher learning institutions. Therefore, further research can look into the demotivating factor from a different perspective to provide a better solution for WFH. Other than that, this study can be expanded and analyzed between gender and married with single to understand multilevel responses from both employees, employers, and co-workers. Furthermore, the efficiency level of operation during WFH can be analyzed based on input provided by the employer and output delivered by the employee.

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