

Predictors and Moderator of Telework Adjustment among Labour Union Members During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Conceptual Paper

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Abstract

The pandemic catastrophe caused by covid-19 poses unprecedented problems and has far-reaching ramifications for how people working life. Digital technologies have been critical in preserving corporate continuity since lockdown tactics drove employees worldwide to telework, frequently leaving them ill-equipped and unprepared. Thus, labour union members as active employees have been forced to adapt to changing work conditions and practices, as articulated in the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA). This article suggests that gender may be used to moderate the impacts of trade union support and professional isolation on labour union members' telework adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic. This conceptual paper posits that telework adjustment may be researched by utilising a local union sample. Additionally, this article serves as a conceptual framework for future study by drawing on theoretical and empirical findings from essential works in adjacent domains.

Keyword: Telework Adjustment, Union, COVID-19, Professional Isolation, Gender

Introduction

COVID-19's pandemic disaster offers significant health and socio-economic concerns and has far-reaching implications on how people live and work across the world. Throughout this volatile time, digital technologies have been crucial in maintaining social relationships between family units and communities and guaranteeing organisational continuity (Fana, et. al., 2020). From the employee viewpoint, governments' introduction of lockdown measures coupled with an abrupt and sudden move to teleworking frequently putting workers not ready and vulnerable to cope with sensitive family/home situations. Employees have been compelled to respond and adjust to changing work environments and practices, as defined in the TWA (Dawis, et. al., 2000). Prior to the covid-19 pandemic crisis, an organization's capacity to sustain business operations and guarantee business continuity was highly dependent on its workers' capacity to migrate from conventional to more virtual work modes successfully.

Adjustment to changing work environments entails adjusting to new environmental demands due to changes in the work is organised and the nature of human relationships. By June 2021, despite hints of progress, and given the gradual easing of lockdown limits in some countries, teleworking is a still daily reality for the most of the workers, as authorities have advocated businesses to continue remote-working wherever practicable and for an indefinite duration (Carillo, et. al., 2020). There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has left an indelible mark that altered how employees work, reshaped employer-employee relationships, and reaffirmed the crucial importance of information and communication technologies in work practices. The reshaped employee-employer relationship has created a significant avenue for a labour union to play a significant role in the work design aspect, particularly the telework adjustment. In this pandemic environment, finding and understanding what factors influence union members' ability to "adapt" would aid in the establishment of telework solutions (Agba, et. al., 2021). The effective, practical, and empathetic solutions, not just during the current COVID-19 pandemic and the post-lockdown phase, it may also benefit in the event of a new epidemic possibility (Belzunegui-Eraso and Erro-Garcés, 2020; Wang, et al., 2020). By drawing on the TWA, this paper takes an individual adjustment viewpoint on labour union members (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). The research identified an apparent theoretical gap in the prior research concerning telework adjustment. The theory on telework adjustment is relatively new, and the current studies bear the fruit of this theoretical gap. The TWA has received less attention in the labour union sphere, notably (Allen, et. al., 2021; Chang, et. al., 2021; Carillo, et. al., 2020). This theoretical gap provides an opportunity for future exploration by attempting to address the following research question: *What factors affect labour union members' telework adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic?*

Furthermore, previous theoretical models need to embrace contemporary research in telework adjustment among labour union members during the pandemic to provide a more robust theoretical basis for studies. Also, based on the review of the prior studies, there is a population gap. Some of this sub-population has been under-researched. The telework adjustment appears to be essential and worthy of investigation in the context of labour union members during the COVID-19 pandemic (Benavides, et. al., 2021; Buomprisco, et. al., 2021; Sládek and Sigmund, 2021). Hence, in this paper, the terms employee and labour union members will be used interchangeably. Telework adjustment during COVID-19 has become a concern because of its operational nature. Rodinova, et. al (2021) iterate that in comparison to telework conducted in a typical setting pre-COVID-19, telework triggered by an epidemic possesses intrinsic characteristics. Telework's purported flexibility of location and working hours is no longer permitted in the COVID-19 environment. Home confinement is enforced, teleworking is made compulsory on a full-time basis, and teleworkers frequently face aggravated professional and personal time management concerns (Raghuram, et.al., 2019). Telework generated by a crisis has unique work environment characteristics due to its execution and the crisis setting in which teleworkers operate (Carillo, et. al., 2020). Work adjustment has a lengthy history in the realm of human resource management. Raghuram et al (2001) conceptualised and operationalised virtual work adjustment in the shift from conventional to virtual ways of work. They evaluated this idea by looking at crucial employee adaptability indicators to new work shifts, and they see adaptation to virtual labour as an encompassing criterion of flexibility that most accurately represents people's ability to respond to external stressors. They advocate for conducting telework adjustment research with data from multiple groups, which may include labour union members and in compulsory

telework settings that is more relevant for telework adjustment, as experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic in a developing country such as Malaysia (Azizan, et. al., 2021; Ma, et. al., 2019).

Literature and Hypothesis Development

Telework Adjustment

This study takes a work adjustment approach to examine how workers respond to the changes in the working environment caused by the events in the Covid-19 pandemic that have compelled them to work virtually. Following TWA, the lockdown and following telework surge look like a radical change in the working environment that has changed the interaction between the employee and the environment, leading people to adapt to this challenging scenario. The concepts presented below have conceptual roots in the TWA (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984) and respond to the Corillo et al. (2020), focussing on the organisational and job variables and individual variables affecting subsequent telework adjustment. More specifically, the researchers define mandatory telework adjustment in the course of the COVID 19 pandemic in line with Raghuram et al. (2001) to be the level of adaption of employees to new environmental demands in the emerging setting of a worldwide epidemic crisis (Corillo, et. al., 2020; Caranto, et. al., 2020; Lott, et. al., 2020).

Perceived Labour Union Support

Even though labour unions do not provide direct technical or operational support in teleworking during the pandemic, the unions have the bargaining power to demand a more humane teleworking arrangement. Also, labour unions can demand special Internet data-related allowances, continuous training, and technical support from their employers. External efforts in the form of perceived labour union support for change might serve the same function in addition to internal attempts to manage a new situation. In the context of our study, perceived labour union aid for change is defined as perceived facilitation by the union to facilitate the adaptation of the labour union members to new teleworking-related changes. Changing to a new method of working with a new system calls for direction and appropriate learning resources. Enabling change through mechanisms like training and the provision of resources might impact union members' response to new changes in digital technology. With increased support for change for the perceived work union, users might respond less adversely and generate less opposition towards installing a new teleworking system (Ma, et. al., 2019; Berg, et. al., 2014).

Just as technology management assistance enhances the simplicity of the technology's use, perceived support from the labour union for changes in training and resources might minimise the perceived difficulty of adjusting to the pandemic-induced teleworking arrangement. More excellent organisational support for change might lessen the time and effort that members need to transition to learn the new functioning method. Therefore, union support for change might indirectly reduce customer resistance by reducing the impression of the switching costs, separate from its direct influence (Chang, et. al., 2021).

Professional Isolation

Professional isolation is a mental condition or an idea that someone is out of touch at work (Kim, et. al., 2021; Bérastégui, 2021; Bilotta, et. al., 2021). The fundamental effort and need to feel connected to society at work has been suppressed. Although not all teleworking

workers report being professionally isolated, research may show that they frequently lack "social barometers" with which to relate themselves to others. (Thomas, et. al., 2021; Beauregard, et. al., 2019; Raghuram, et. al., 2019; Golden, et. al., 2008). Because of these attitudes, professional teleworking employees might have less trust in their talents and knowledge and have a discrete drawback in their work. For instance, interpersonal ties and interactions with people might be less efficiently managed in order to coordinate complex, puzzling activities and increase understanding via sharing and improving tacit knowledge. Based on the same rationale, the situation during the pandemic may or may not be worse.

During the COVID-19 epidemic, telecommuting staff may risk experiencing professional isolation. They must preserve their organisational links, and labour unions can play a vital part in achieving this goal. It might be essential to develop and sustain organisational connectivity in a telecommunications environment, as informal interaction between supervisors and staff is less common. One of the most commonly expressed concerns for teleworkers is that their rare presence in the company might render them "out of sight, out of sight," thereby impeding their progress in their careers (Raghuram, et. al., 2001). Such professional isolation might hinder prospects for virtual employees to participate in and benefit from organisational membership. Corporate connectivity might depend on the communication and socialising behaviour of individual virtual workers. Some may be better than others to retain touch with interaction partners through media like telephones or emails or by attempts to create connections when they encounter face-to-face interaction partners. Teleworkers with poor organisational connectedness may lack insight into desirable actions necessary to achieve immediate performance or career possibilities. However, suppose they have good organisational connectedness. In that case, they are likely to be vital to and associated with the company that can encourage corporate commitment and alleviates their career development worries (Wang, et. al., 2020; Golden, et. al., 2008; Raghuram, et. al., 2001).

Gender as a Moderator

By enabling people to work from home, teleworking intrinsically impacts the link between work and non-working jobs, making it more straightforward for one position to overlap with another. Men and women can play these roles relatively differently and hence have various demands in a virtual environment that may lead them to respond differently to employees' telework adjustment variable (Agba, et. al., 2021; Agba, et. al., 2020). In particular, women might respond more positively to variables that define the field of work explicitly by giving women more significant influence over the work to balance the strain of their non-work commitments. On the other hand, men may consider themselves to be working from a non-traditional place. When a result, males might respond more favourably to characteristics that allow organisational participation to be maintained even as they leave their homes (Abed, 2021; Biron, et. al., 2020; Crooks, et. al., 2020; Zhang, et. al., 2020). Under this rationale, researchers predict women's telework adjustment to be impacted more strongly by characteristics like stated performance requirements and more autonomous activities that make personal control easier and clearly define the boundaries of the work role (Lott and Abendroth, 2020). In other words, men's teleworking adjustment might be impacted more strongly by the interpersonal confidence and connectivity that allow the company to have a strong bond even when they are not physically there (Khan and Umer, 2021; Carillo, et al., 2020; Raghuram, et. al., 2019).

Research Hypothesis

Subsequently, this research attempts to employ the TWA to understand better telework adjustment among labour union members during the COVID-19 pandemic. Accordingly, this research aims to suggest that gender may be used to moderate the impacts of perceived labour union support and professional isolation on labour union members' telework adjustment during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, based on the above preceding discussion, the following research hypotheses will be addressed such as:

- H1: There is a relationship between professional isolation and telework adjustment among labour union members during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- H2: There is a relationship between perceived labour union support and telework adjustment among labour union members during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- H3: Gender moderates the relationship between professional isolation and telework adjustment among labour union members during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- H4: Gender moderates the relationship between perceived labour union support and telework adjustment among labour union members during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Proposed Conceptual Framework

This paper proposed a conceptual framework to analyse the relationships between gender, professional isolation and perceived labour union support with telework adjustment among labour union members during the COVID-19 pandemic (Figure 1)

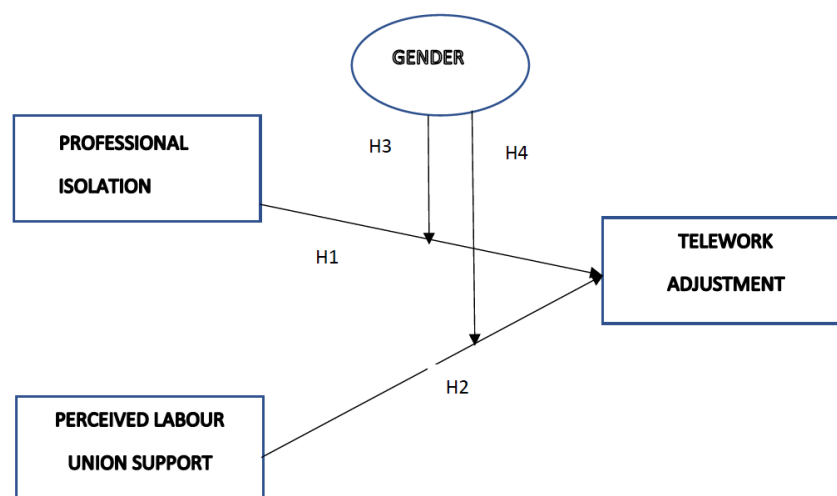


Figure 1: Conceptual framework with factors that influence Telework Adjustment

The proposed conceptual framework will aid scholars, practitioners, unions, and organisations in better understanding the telework adjustment and the role of gender in this mechanism so that all parties involved can contribute to society by creating a productive and conducive telework environment. The findings of this study will theoretically enhance the TWA with the inclusion of union-related variables. Also, the findings will enable a better understanding which telework adjustment in various settings and situations. Additionally, We sincerely hope this paper will help organisations better deal with the current situation and prepare them for dealing with the potential future pandemic.

Proposed Research Methodology

The current research will engage a pluralist perspective of industrial relations. In parallel with the pandemic setting, all parties must play an active role, and within this very perspective, labour unions play an active role in employee-employer relations. The research will employ a quantitative research design with a systematic sampling technique. The survey design will further enable a comprehensive assessment of the elements determining the best possible adjustment by union members to a rapid change of telework in an pandemic. The survey instrument will be adapted from previous studies, and the research instrument will be in the Malay language to accommodate the local Malaysian respondents. The research questionnaire scale will be designed, developed, pretested, and validated based on Rasch Model prior to data collection. The research will ensure the result quality and the inferences made by focusing to the data convergent validity and discriminant validity. The data analysis plan will utilise descriptive statistics and Structural Equation Modelling (SEM) to obtain a good fit of the full-fledged structural model.

Conclusion

In conclusion, given the growing importance of teleworking in the lives and operations of businesses, this research will allow practitioners to re-examine the concept of organisational borders and the nature of labour. The empowering of telework practices among labour union members necessitates a rethinking of organisational boundaries and a rethinking of physical and virtual boundaries. Furthermore, the results on various kinds of crisis may have once again to be generalised prudently as crises all have distinct health, social and economic effects. They tend to be distinctive and have special characteristics. In addition, crises such as health pandemic, as the physical and technological infrastructures of the organisation are left intact, vary from other crisis types. Meanwhile in the event of a natural catastrophe or conflict, the question of guaranteeing company continuity through teleworking is only closely connected to the phenomena studied in this very study.

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