

The Impact of Work Stress Post COVID-19 on Psychological Well-Being (Eudaimonic): Moderated by Social Support

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Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the effects of work stress on psychological well-being (eudaimonic) during the shift from COVID-19 pandemic phase to the endemic phase with social support as a moderator. The sample of this study comprised 150 employees who hold various positions at both executive and support levels in the public and private sectors. Hypothesis testing was conducted using the Smart PLS 3.0 software by utilizing the regression analysis test to examine the direct relationship and moderating relationship. The results of the study showed the existence of a negative relationship between work stress and psychological well-being (eudaimonic), while social support moderates this relationship. This study can provide valuable input to managements to strengthen social support as a moderator for employees' stress level through motivation and training, given that a large number of employees face work stress when they are handling the challenging transition from COVID-19 pandemic to endemic phase. This study will empirically prove the significant effects of work stress which impair employees' psychological well-being, specifically on the eudaimonic perspective, while strengthening the literature on the underlying mechanism of social support (superiors, co-workers, family, and friends) during the challenging time (endemic phase). By studying workplace stress, researchers, policymakers, and organizations can work collaboratively to identify effective strategies for prevention, intervention, and creating healthier work environments. Ultimately, examining the impact of workplace stress on eudaimonic psychological well-being provides a richer and more nuanced understanding of what it means to lead a fulfilling and meaningful life. This field of research contributes to a

more thorough understanding of human flourishing by providing a deeper and more holistic view on human well-being.

Keywords: Psychological well-being (eudaimonic), Work Stress, Social Support, Endemic Transition Phase, Employees

Introduction

Despite the transition of Malaysia from the COVID-19 pandemic to the endemic phase, 2022, this has not alleviated the workplace stress experienced by Malaysian employees since they compelled to work overtime to meet the rising cost of living caused by the unstable economy. This is a real-life problem that affects not only organizations, but also employees' well-being. According to Kundi et al (2021), work stress is now a normal element in organizations, and it impacts employees negatively rather than positively. Stress at the workplace has been declared as harmful to employees' physical and emotional reactions and has a negative effect on their performance (García-Sierra et al., 2016; Soman and Mohanan, 2022). Besides, the impact of work stress is the biggest concern because it can have a negative effect on employees' psychological well-being (Tee et al., 2016; Yildirim and Aziz, 2017).

Psychological well-being is a broad concept that covers emotional and mental conditions, level of work satisfaction, and individuals' overall quality of life. Individuals' overall effectiveness in the aspect of psychological function is defined by psychological well-being, which is utilized specially to measure the level of hedonic and eudaimonic values (Oruh et al., 2021). As part of efforts to improve psychological well-being (hedonic and eudaimonic), preventing and treating mental and behavior disorder is very important, as well as efforts to reduce stress due to surroundings or mental pressure at the workplace (Harding et al., 2019). Organizations need highly performing employees (Kuranchie-Mensah and Amponsah-Tawiah, 2016) to sustain themselves in a highly competitive business environment (Sulaiman et al., 2021). However, it would be challenging for employees' performance to be maintained if a volatile external situation causes the employees to experience stress, which could affect their psychological well-being (Kundi et al., 2021; Ismail et al., 2019) especially eudaimonic well-being.

Therefore, social support is highly required by employees as a moderator for their psychological well-being (eudaimonic) so that organizations can protect their employees and sustain their overall performance. Social support is a type of support received by individuals where they feel that they are loved, appreciated, and respected by other people (Mehta and Sharma, 2021). It includes emotional support, tangible support, and information support (Connell et al., 2001). To handle work stress, employees need sufficient support from their supervisors and colleagues at the workplace, and outside the workplace, they need support from their family members and friends (Savage and Bailey, 2014). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to test whether social support is able to improve employees' psychological well-being (eudaimonia approach) when handling work stress due to the volatile environment during the shift from pandemic to endemic phase.

Literature Review and Hypotheses Development

Psychological Well-being

Psychological well-being refers to a positive mental health Loon et al (2019), which comprises both the hedonic approach and the eudaimonic approach. The hedonic approach focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment Kahneman et al (1999), while the eudaimonic approach focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-

being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Waterman et al., 2010). According to Waterman (1993), the eudaimonic conception of well-being encourages people to live in accordance with their spirit or true selves. He proposed that people experience eudaimonia when their activities in life are most consistent with or mesh with sincerely held beliefs and are holistically or fully engaged. People would feel extremely honest and alive in such situations, existing as who they truly are. Although hedonic and eudaimonic indicators are positively connected, given that both indicators measure well-being, it has been demonstrated that they are empirically distinct and may even occasionally be at conflict with one another (Keyes et al., 2002).

In the past, hedonic research on well-being predominated, with little focus given to the eudaimonic approach. Eudaimonic well-being, as a component of positive psychological well-being, has since drawn more attention (Waterman et al., 2010) as scholars have begun to recognize the need to expand the definition of well-being beyond feeling good and to include functioning well. There is growing interest in what eudaimonic well-being may contribute, particularly in the workplace, where people are dealing with work stress, constant technological advancements, and societal changes that affect how they work (der Kinderen and Khapova, 2020).

Stress and Psychological Well-being (eudaimonic)

Prior studies have empirically proven there to be multiple reasons that could lead to stress at the workplace. These include workload, roles, uncertainties, and conflicts at the workplace (Rosse and Rosse, 1981). Work stress is also present when the employees' skills are inadequate to meet the demands of the job and if there is a mismatch between efforts presented against the rewards received. These are among the normal factors that may induce work stress (Jamal et al., 2021). Furthermore, work stress inhibits an individual's self-efficacy and as a result, employees may feel that they lack control over their own work (Camargo, 2019). The lower level of self-efficacy causes gaps in communication, and this harms the relationship with colleagues and managers. Other than sources of stress at the workplace, changes in work environment can also trigger work stress among employees (Yunita and Saputra, 2019). Uncertainties and threatening situations in external environments could impair and harm the employees' work pattern (Kinyita, 2015). For example, work stress became worse and widespread in the work environment during COVID-19 pandemic (Padilha et al., 2021). Similarly, when facing a situation of phase shift from pandemic to endemic, employees are not able to escape from a threatening environment that could trigger stressors and induce stress at the workplace (Zhou et al., 2022).

Work stress can have a negative effect on an individual's psychological, behavioral, and physiological status (Gauer and Germann, 2022; Lee, 2021). Employees who are stressed may suffer from depression and would not be able to focus on their work, resulting in a decline in their work performance (Yunita and Saputra, 2019). Work stress can also have a negative effect on employees' psychological well-being (Jamal et al., 2021). Psychological well-being is conceptualized as a construct that is different but related to strain because it is connected to psychological health disorder (Didymus et al., 2021). Previous studies revealed that stress at work may negatively affect an employee's psychological wellbeing (Rajeswari and Magesh, 2017) and bring about other psychological effects such as depressive illnesses, mood disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Ceri and Cicek, 2021). A recent study of eudaimonic well-being revealed that individuals with positive psychological functioning would notably increase their use of highly adaptive strategies in response to the stressor events (and vice versa) (Freire et al., 2019).

H1: There is a negative relationship between work stress and psychological well-being (eudaimonic).

Social Support as a Moderator

Work stress cannot be avoided or ignored in organizations since the management must always monitor the condition of their employees (Kundu et al., 2022). If employers discover that the level of work stress among their employees are high, they must look for solutions to ensure that their employees are able to handle their work stress and can perform their tasks well for the benefit of the organization (Rožman and Čančer, 2022). Among the efforts that can be undertaken is to provide social support to these employees. In general, social support is an interactional process that increases self-confidence, perception of competence, provide efficient coping strategies, and the capacity to demonstrate actual competence or accept change from physical or psychosocial sources (Cohen et al., 2000). Social support has been advocated as a safeguard against the detrimental consequences of stressful situations at the workplace (Dworkin et al., 2018; Stanley et al., 2019). In addition to creating strong interpersonal relationships and meeting people's requirements for relatedness, competence, and practical coping methods, prior studies have shown that social support can also provide people with emotional support and encouragement (Tian, 2016). Additionally, social support enables them to see themselves favorably and have more faith in their ability to face difficult situations (Zhou et al., 2019). Therefore, social support at work can strengthen interpersonal connections and help to reduce psychosocial stress (Blanch, 2016).

Instead of direct effect, social support may mitigate the association between stress and psychological well-being (eudaimonic) and protect against the detrimental effects of stressful life events (Cohen and Wills, 1985). Therefore, social support will act as a moderator in work stress interactions. According to Brough et al. (2009), individuals with significant support can stave off the detrimental consequences of stress. For instance, der Kinderen et al. (2020) investigated the role of servant leadership and a civil work climate in shaping eudaimonic well-being in organizations. They found that servant leaders, who support the attainment of organisational objectives through facilitating the growth and potential of employees, impact their followers' eudaimonic well-being (Trastek, 2014). According to the conservation of resources (COR), in order to survive, employees must accumulate and safeguard "resources" (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). "Personal resources" (individualistic and internal) and "conditioned resources" are common categories of resources (environmental and contextual). Employees will accumulate an excess of these resources in order to safeguard themselves from stress and probable loss of resource in the future (Cohen and Wills, 1985). These tools are essential for dealing with challenging situations and encouraging psychological well-being (Reis et al., 2015). It is also claimed that social support is a conditional resource that represents the amount of help provided to a person by their social network (Cohen and Wills, 1985).

H2: There is a positive relationship between social support and psychological well-being (eudaimonic).

H3: The relationship between work stress and psychological well-being (eudaimonic) is moderated by social support.

Research Methodology**Sampling and Procedures**

This study has employed the quantitative approach to test the hypotheses developed based on the objectives of the study. The population of the study is made up of employees who are working in both the public and private sectors in Klang Valley, Malaysia. This study is conducted through survey research which employed self-governed questionnaire method. Questionnaire forms were distributed to employees using the convenience sampling technique and the surveys were conducted online using a Google Form. Initially, the questionnaire which can be accessed through a Google Form link was emailed to existing networking contacts (friends). Then, the chain continues from each subject (snowball) who shared the Google Form link with other referral. A total number of 180 questionnaires were distributed, however, only 150 responses were received, which translates to 83.3% response rate. The obtained data were analyzed via the SPSS and employed Partial Least Square-Structural Equation Modeling (PLS- SEM) to test the measurement model and structural model.

Concerning the profile of the respondents, 48.7% were between the ages of 41 to 50, followed by the ages of 31 to 40 (28%), and 23.3% were more than 50 years old. In terms of gender, 48.7% of the respondents were male, while 51.3% were female. In terms of race, 66.7% identified as Malay, followed by Chinese (21.3%), Indian (6.7%) and others (5.3%). As for marital status, 88% of respondents were married while 9.3% were single, and 2.7% were divorced. In terms of education, 36% were educated up to STPM level, followed by bachelor's degree (32.7%), 22.7% were diploma holders, 6% were educated up to SPM level and below, and 2.7% had master's degree. In terms of their current occupation, 53.3% of respondents were employed in the public sector, while 46.7% were employed in the private sector. Next, most of the respondents were at the executive level in their current position (63.3%), 29.3% were at managerial level, while 7.3% were support staff.

Measurement

All the measurement instruments used in this study were adapted from previous research which have been tested and validated by several researchers. The measurement instrument that was originally written in English was translated into Bahasa Malaysia to make it easier for respondents to understand the items included. However, to maintain the authenticity of the measurement instrument, this questionnaire has been prepared in both English and Bahasa Malaysia so that respondents can answer the questionnaire in either language.

Respondents answered all the questions using a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). To examine employees' work stress, there are 14 items cited from Cohen et al. (1983), a sample item is 'How often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?'. This research measured employees' psychological Well-being (eudaimonic) with 21 items adopted from Waterman et al. (2010). A sample item is 'I believe I know what my best potentials are, and I try to develop them whenever possible'. And a total of 12 items adopted from Zimet et al. (1988) to assess social support, a sample item is 'I can count on my friends when things go wrong'.

Results**Data Analysis**

In the descriptive analysis, the findings involved the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation values (See Table I). The mean value for all variables exceeded the mid-scale for each measurement scale. Furthermore, it is found that the standard deviation value for each

variable is less than 1.0, which is in the range of 0.314 to 0.390, indicating that the dispersion rate is generally low.

Table 1

Descriptive Analysis

| Construct | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------|-------|--------------------|
| Psychological Well-being (eudaimonic) | 3.30 | 5.00 | 4.454 | 0.390 |
| Social Support | 3.60 | 5.00 | 4.462 | 0.317 |
| Work Stress | 3.33 | 4.89 | 4.366 | 0.314 |

In the assessment of reflective measurement, three main assessment criteria are needed. These are internal consistency, convergent validity, and discriminant validity. Internal consistency was determined using constructs' composite reliability (CR) values, whilst convergent validity was determined using item loadings and average variance extracted (AVE) values. As shown in Table II, all loadings met the recommended threshold of 0.708 (Hair et al., 2017); hence, all except the items with low loadings were maintained. Additionally, if the construct met the AVE requirement of 0.5, certain items with loadings less than 0.708 were retained. Following that, all constructs had CR values of more than the minimum threshold of 0.7, and all AVEs were greater than 0.5 following item deletion (Hair et al., 2017). Thus, the constructs met the criteria for reliability and convergent validity.

Table 2

Measurement model, item loadings, construct reliability, and convergent validity

| Construct | Indicator | Loading | AVE | CR |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------|-------|-------|
| Psychological Well-being (eudaimonic) | PWE1 | 0.839 | 0.590 | 0.958 |
| | PWE10 | 0.843 | | |
| | PWE11 | 0.768 | | |
| | PWE12 | 0.747 | | |
| | PWE13 | 0.743 | | |
| | PWE14 | 0.823 | | |
| | PWE15 | 0.785 | | |
| | PWE16 | 0.800 | | |
| | PWE17 | 0.797 | | |
| | PWE18 | 0.716 | | |
| | PWE 19 | 0.709 | | |
| | PWE 20 | 0.740 | | |
| | PWE 21 | 0.727 | | |
| | PWE2 | 0.732 | | |
| | PWE3 | 0.753 | | |
| | PWE5 | 0.758 | | |
| | PWE6 | 0.704 | | |
| PWE7 | 0.772 | | | |
| PWE8 | 0.737 | | | |
| PWE9 | 0.709 | | | |
| Work Stress | WS1 | 0.814 | 0.598 | 0.953 |
| | WS10 | 0.830 | | |

| | | | | |
|----------------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| | WS11 | 0.788 | | |
| | WS12 | 0.792 | | |
| | WS13 | 0.572 | | |
| | WS14 | 0.445 | | |
| | WS2 | 0.864 | | |
| | WS3 | 0.761 | | |
| | WS4 | 0.816 | | |
| | WS5 | 0.811 | | |
| | WS6 | 0.833 | | |
| | WS7 | 0.837 | | |
| | WS8 | 0.683 | | |
| | WS9 | 0.857 | | |
| | SS1 | 0.775 | | |
| | SS10 | 0.781 | | |
| | SS11 | 0.775 | | |
| Social Support | SS12 | 0.769 | 0.602 | 0.947 |
| | SS2 | 0.785 | | |
| | SS3 | 0.564 | | |
| | SS4 | 0.823 | | |

Table 3 depicts a method of discriminant analysis using Fornell-Larcker Criterion. The indicator should load more strongly on their constructs compared to other constructs in the model (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Table III indicates that all constructs exhibit sufficient or satisfactory discriminant validity.

Table 3

Discriminant validity using Fornell-Larcker Criterion

| | Psychological well-being | Social Support | Work Stress |
|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|-------------|
| Psychological Well-being | 0.768 | | |
| Social Support | 0.753 | 0.776 | |
| Work Stress | 0.709 | 0.680 | 0.773 |

Structural Model Assessment

In the initial stage of accessing the structural model, it is important to address the lateral collinearity issue. To assess the collinearity issue, the VIF value needs to be less than 5.0 (Hair et al., 2017). Based on the analysis, all the inner values for the independent variables are less than 5.0, indicating that the collinearity issue is not a concern (Hair et al., 2017).

Next, this study developed three hypotheses between the constructs, with one moderating hypothesis. In order to test the significance level, t-statistics for all paths were generated using Smart-PLS bootstrapping. Based on the assessment as set out in Table IV, the hypotheses supported were $t\text{-value} \geq 1.645$; the significance was at a 0.05 level. Specifically, work stress significantly influences psychological well-being (eudaimonic) ($\beta = -0.275$, $p = 0.000$). followed by the relationship between social support and psychological well-being (eudaimonic) ($\beta = 0.174$, $p = 0.009$). Next, for moderating effect, the interaction between work stress*social support is positive, thus it can be said that the negative relationship between work stress and psychological well-being would be stronger when social support is lower.

Table 4

Structural path analysis

| Hypothesis | Relationship | Std Beta | P-value | Lower level | Upper level | Decision |
|------------|---|----------|---------|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| H1 | Work Stress→Psychological Well-being | -0.275 | 0.000 | -0.357 | -0.195 | Supported |
| H2 | Social Support→Psychological Well-being | 0.174 | 0.009 | 0.065 | 0.318 | Supported |
| H3 | Work Stress*Social Support→Psychological Well-being | 0.076 | 0.006 | 0.031 | 0.133 | Supported |

Next, assessing the level coefficient of determination (R^2) in evaluating the structural model. R^2 is used as an indicator of the overall predictive strength of the model. Based on the rule of thumb, according to Hair et al. (2017), the cut off R^2 is as follows: (R^2 0.75 → Substantial, R^2 0.50 → Moderate, R^2 0.25 → Weak). As shown in Table 5, the R^2 value is 75% for psychological well-being (eudaimonic) and can be classified as substantial effect based on the above cut off values. In addition, the effect size is also assessed by f^2 . Table V shows that the effect sizes (f^2) of the predictors ranged from 0.062 to 0.409, indicating the presence of small to large effects (Sarstedt et al., 2011). Lastly, the predictive relevance assessed by Q^2 shows that the endogenous construct in this study had a Q^2 value larger than zero, namely 0.364. This demonstrates the exogenous constructs' ability to predict the endogenous construct.

Table 5

Effect Size (f^2), R^2 and Q^2 (Stone-Geisser)

| | f^2 | R Square | R Square Adjusted | Q^2 |
|--------------------------|-------|----------|-------------------|-------|
| Psychological Well-Being | | 0.746 | 0.738 | 0.364 |
| Social Support | 0.062 | | | |
| Work Stress | 0.409 | | | |

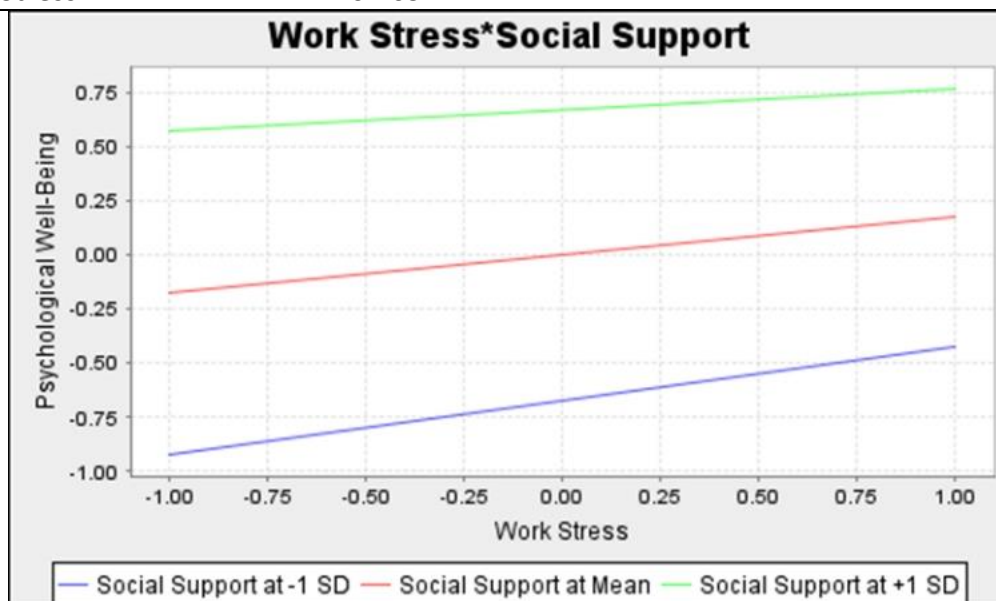


Figure 1. Moderating effect of Social Support

Conclusion**General Findings**

This study has empirically proven that employees are suffering from work stress post COVID-19, and the stress has caused a negative effect on psychological well-being (eudaimonic), therefore H1 is supported. It is also found that stress from external environment (Yunita and Saputra, 2019; Zhou et al., 2022) has resulted in stress at the workplace because employees have to face worrying situations that are beyond their control. Eudaimonic well-being has been described as promoting a long-term, active state that can be equated with the need to be future-focused, adaptive, and in a state of growth (Koprowski, 1981). As a result, when work stress has a detrimental impact on employees' eudaimonic well-being, they will not be able to function at their full potential, they will persist in undesirable behaviours, and possibly exhibit mild depression symptoms. Additionally, when stress at work reduces eudaimonia, it lowers employees' potential to reach their highest levels of self-actualization.

Turning to social support, it is evident that social networks (such as friends, family, and/or significant others) may have an impact on a person's psychological well-being (eudaimonic); as a result, any initiatives meant to encourage the accessibility of social resources are probably advantageous (Holliman et al., 2021). The findings of the studies support H2 which proves that social support has a significant positive relationship with employees' psychological well-being (eudaimonic). Developing support and coaching programmes with supervisors and organisations' top management (Zeytun and Aycan, 2021) is crucial to ensure recovery of employees' psychological well-being (eudaimonic). Social support is proven to be an important factor in promoting psychological well-being (eudaimonic), as it can help employees feel more connected to others, provide a sense of belonging, and offer practical assistance in times of need. The ability to cope with stress and hardships is facilitated by social support, which can heighten one's sense of meaning and purpose in life.

The results of this study have also found that social support is a basic mechanism that can mitigate the negative effects caused by work stress on psychological well-being (eudaimonic) when facing the endemic phase shift, where H3 is supported. This finding is consistent with the conservation of resource theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018), which contends that resources, such as social support (conditional), are a critical defence against present and future stress. Social support also makes it easier to successfully manage stressful situations in the future (Dollete et al., 2004). Therefore, those who have more resources are likely to have more favourable state of psychological well-being (eudaimonic) (Cohen and Wills, 1985; Buzzai et al., 2020). Employees in the post-pandemic phase require support from family and friends in addition to their superiors and co-workers at work because the challenges from the environment have disrupted both their job and personal life. Social support can help people build good interpersonal relationships and meet their needs for relatedness, competence, and useful coping strategies, as well as provide them with emotional support and encouragement.

Theoretical Implication

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by outlining several theoretical and practical implications. The result of this study has contributed to COR theory. Stress is a key factor in COR theory, as it can deplete individuals' resources and lead to negative outcomes. This study has proven that stress can be harmful to eudaimonic wellbeing by diminishing people's resources when it is connected to enduring life obstacles such as endemic phase and job expectations. Additionally, the findings imply that resource loss brought on by stress may have cumulative effects over time, making it harder for people to recover and recoup their

resources. This research also has proven the importance of formal and informal social support because stress at the workplace can spill into other areas outside of working hours. The results of this study have also strengthened the COR theory which found that social support is a resource needed by employees to assist them in handling stress at the workplace.

Practical Implication

The shift from a pandemic to an endemic situation in Malaysia has had a significant effect on the work and lives of employees, which results in concerns, frustration, and exhaustion, that eventually leads to health issues which impair employees' psychological well-being. If organisations are not able to provide social support to their employees, this may cause employees' involvement to be reduced and their quality of work to deteriorate, which will eventually threaten the sustainability of the organisations in this challenging time. A strategy that can help the management to face this difficult period is to build a safe and secure work environment as well as to provide access to social support.

The management must monitor and understand the behaviour of their employees especially when they are struggling with stress from external environment. The management should provide training, motivation, and counselling to help employees handle their stress. Organisations can also implement flexible work schedule or practise Flexible Working Arrangement (FWA) especially for employees who need help with their work-life balance, as well as provide autonomy by encouraging employees' involvement in decision-making relating to work. Close and frequent communication between management and employees can also create a harmonious and caring work environment which can serve as a preventive step to assist employees in achieving a healthy state of psychological well-being.

Limitation and Future Study

However, this study has several limitations. Firstly, this study utilised a sampling method rather than probability with a small sample size of 150 respondents. Therefore, it may not be accurate to generalise the results of the study to apply for the working population of study. Future studies need to consider using the random sampling method with a larger sample size. Secondly, the questions designed in this study were based on respondents' perceptions and feelings, therefore it is difficult to assess this study without the personal answers from the respondents themselves. However, future research can compile data from other sources by utilising multiple stage analysis including to seek feedback from employers. Further, this study has utilised only a basic mechanism in the form of a moderator. Future studies can expand on the basic mechanism by examining the roles of multiple variables which can perform as mediators and moderators in order to provide a bigger practical contribution, so that organisations can make better preparations in handling new challenges in the endemic era.

Informed Consent: Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement: Data is unavailable due to privacy and ethical restrictions.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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