

THE IMPACT OF EMPLOYEES' WORK LIFE BALANCE REVIEWED FROM WORK FROM HOME DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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1. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus widespread at end of December 2019 has forced most public and private agencies worldwide to limit face-to-face interaction by allowing the employee to work from home (WFH). The new norm required an employee's ability to balance between work-related demand and non-work-related demand or known as work-life balance (WLB). Ideally, work from home can bring positive effect on the work-life balance of the employees during covid-19 because they can strengthen the family relationships, have their own time personal space such as to maintain body, mind, and spirit, make employees feel satisfied, increase team performance, and can increase employees work-life balance. (Bataneh, 2019, Khotimah & Yusuf, 2021). Even two-third of the Malaysian workforce supports the continuation of work from home arrangement during the post-movement control order (MCO) period (The Star, 2020). However, there was a different scenario on the work-life balance of employees in Malaysia during the covid-19 pandemic. According to the 2019 work-life index, published by tech company Kisi, Kuala Lumpur was found to have the worst work-life balance out of 40 major cities around the globe. The employees in Malaysia experience a bad work-life balance due to the new occupational setting where work from home is a challenge for them (Bernama, 2021). Those who work from home faced higher levels of stress as they need to encounter different kinds of challenges at home (New Straits Time, 2020). Thus, the purpose of this paper is to highlight the findings based on the review of the literature related to the impact of work from home on the employees' work-life balance during the Covid-19 pandemic. The findings led to suggestions on what needs to be done by the employer in facing this new work setting.

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper is prepared base on secondary data which review both local and international past literature. Analysis and discussion are based on published articles, journal articles, government reports, and newspapers related to work from home how it has an impact on employee's work-life balance, the challenges of work from home during Covid-19, the acceptance of the employees towards work from home and how employers can assist employees to work-life balance. All the sources that have been used in this paper are from the year 2016 until 2021. This study focuses on both employees in the public and private sectors in local and international countries. As the researcher referred to recent past literature that was updated within the last 5 years, the findings data were still valid and not outdated.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Work from home is where employees need to switch their work from office to home. Working from home, also best describe as remote work, mobile work, outwork, flexible workplace, telecommuting, teleworking, homework, and home office (Bellmann & Hubler, 2020). Due to the emergence of new working environment, some agency like UOB bank has developed a hybrid working model in which employees are eligible to have the flexibility to work either in the office or remotely once the COVID-19 pandemic has passed (Jerene Ang, 2021). The term "working from home" during the pandemic is used to refer to the alternative working arrangements which demand shared responsibility and commitment by both employers and employees to ensure business survival and employment (International Labour Organisation, 2020).

Work-life balance refers to a person's ability to balance their work and family commitments or non-work responsibilities and activities (Delecta, 2011, as cited in Wolor et al., 2020). Work-life balance is also a way to build a healthy and supportive work environment that allows employees to achieve a healthy life balance, improving employee performance and fulfill personal responsibilities (Delecta, 2011 & Dhas, 2015, as cited in Wolor et al., 2020). Work-life balance can be achieved by focusing on three forms of work-life balance which are time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance. Time balance is referred to the flexible scheduling and autonomy in planning their daily lives, and the ability to balance their time between work and family (Lupu, 2017, as cited in Esra Thorstensson, 2020). Moreover, involvement balance is defined as an equivalent level of psychological contribution in the job and family aspect (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003 as cited in Wong, Fatimah & Jamayah, 2017). Additionally, WFH gives more freedom to the employees about their work times so it can reduce work-life conflict and increase employees' job satisfaction (Esra Thorstensson, 2020). Satisfaction balance means equal satisfaction expressed towards his work and family roles as an individual. A better work environment can make employees feel more satisfied with their jobs and the safety of individuals and families (Donny Susilo, 2020). Post covid 19 makes work from home the only option among employees to continuously perform their job responsibilities, providing service to the public or customers, sustaining their monthly income, and secure a job. 81% of Malaysian employees were required to work from home during the pandemic hit and expected that their work-life balance would be improved since they have the freedom to manage their working hours. The view was highest among Generation X (94%), followed by Generation Y (88%) and Generation Z (87%) (Jerene Ang, 2021). Work-life balance is a new phenomenon that needs to be tackled to enhance healthy life among the workforce in Malaysia.

Work-Life Balance can be achieved by certain factors which are time, information, and communication technology (ICT) and co-workers. Time is referring to the way employees utilize and spend their daily life within 24 hours per day. It is important to balance time between work and personal life because when the employees' time is not stable and they spend more time working, it will lead to mental illnesses like stress and anxiety due to lack of rest and work overload. Besides, a study revealed that the number of working days and the time a person spent in teleworking also has an impact on work-family conflict (Martín Salazar Solís, 2016). Even though working from home gives a lot of benefits, but it can fall into danger whereby, without the physical limits of the workplace, employees tend to fall into an unhealthy balance between working and home hours as well as lead to family relationship problems (The Star, 2020). Work-life balance can be accomplished by working for around 6 hours every day

whereby, there will be 10 hours spent outside work activities and 8 hours sleeping (Amanda Putri & Ali Imran, 2021).

ICT is another variable that can impact the WLB of the employee during WFH. Advances in ICT have made it possible to work virtually, and resulting in increased work efficiency (Rachmawati et al., 2021). However, it is critical to recognize that there are also negative effects of ICT in the workplace, even though ICT, such as smart mobile phones, can provide a vital link between those working remotely and their supervisors and co-workers, as well as significant productivity benefits (Scott, 2020, as cited in Walter Matli, 2020). In Malaysia, there is 59% of the employee are having problems with internet speed and access to the company system and 49% of the employees' experience reduce access to resources when they work at home (New Strait Times, 2020). Development of ICT at the workplace can enhance service delivery and ease all work processes, however, when employees are required to work from home, they either have no or limited access to office documents (FastLane, 2020, as cited in Lina Vyas & Nantapong Butakhieo, 2020). This can decrease the employees' satisfaction in performing their job.

Not only that work from the home limit relationship with the co-workers and synonym with social isolation and create lack of communication among co-workers which resulting in lower job satisfaction and perceived development chances (Nakrošienė, Ilona Bučiūnienė, & Bernadeta Goštautaitė, 2018, Wilson & Greenhill, 2004, as cited in Chunnaiyah & Smt. Chythra, 2020). WFH can lead to lacking opportunity to have an informal communication network with colleagues. When the employees do not have such interactions, they may feel alienated (Esra Thorstensson, 2020). It is assumed that the more the workers work from home, the less possibility they have of gaining support from others at work (Lapierre et al., 2015, as cited in Audronė Nakrošienė, Ilona Bučiūnienė, & Bernadeta Goštautaitė, 2018). Furthermore, when co-workers work from home, it is less likely that someone would notice and assist the employee with any issues that arise (Golden, 2007, as cited in Tanja van der Lippe, & Zoltán Lippényi, 2019).

In summary, if employees fail to handle all the factors discussed it will negatively affect work-life balance. In facing this scenario, the employer needs to realize what should be done to help employees to achieve job satisfaction, job enjoyment, and job fulfillment which will lead to work-life balance. Even though employees work from home, safety and health still need to be taken care of by looking into the assigned task is not exposed to any risk and danger. Not to also mentioned the responsibilities of employers to provide necessary tools, equipment, supplies, and technology such as a laptop, computer monitors, software, phone, access to the internet, headset, access to host applications, technical devices, and other applicable equipment. Employers should revise their spending policy and allocate a budget to pay or reimburse employees expenditures associated with internet costs, tablets, personal computers, and purchase of any applicable appliance and software (International Labour Organisation, 2020).

4. CONCLUSION

In a nutshell work from home, create positive and negative impact to employees' work-life balance. Both employee and employer play their distinct roles to face the new occupational setting. It is essential to conduct an empirical study to verify and the determine relationship between the factors influencing work from home (time, ICT, and co-workers) and work-life

balance (time balance, involvement balance, and satisfaction balance) which can lead to a healthy lifestyle and reduce family conflict.

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