WORK-FROM-HOME EXPERIENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON EMPLOYEES' INTEGRITY

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1. INTRODUCTION

Remote working is a working method that helps in executing work outside the traditional office environment. Globally, remote working existed even before the 1980s where management was entitled to work remotely by only 10%. However, with the outbreak of Corona Virus Disease 2019 (Covid-19), remote working has become a new normal. Large tech employers such as Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Facebook were among the first to work up remote work plans for many of their employees around the globe (www.shrm.org). As Covid-19 continues to spread and vaccination was not available in early 2020, work from home (WFH) appears as the best remote working option for many countries throughout the world following the decision for total lockdown. International Labor Organization (2020) defines WFH as a working arrangement in which workers fulfill the essentials of his/her job responsibilities at home with the assistance of information and communication technology (ICT). Malaysia is no exception. To contain the spread of disease, the Malaysian Government announced Movement Control Order (MCO) in March 2020 (Prime Minister Office, 2020). The order includes the closure of public and private premises except for several essential services. Consequently, many workers are forced to shift to WFH basis. When the government decided to tighten MCO due to the existence of more aggressive new variants with high infection rates, the WFH policy make compulsory WFH for 40% of private-sector employees and 80% of government employees (Public Service Department, (PSD) 2020), affecting 750,000 government staff and about 6.1 million private-sector workers (Ministry of Defense, 2021). While adapting to WFH basis, there is increasing concern on whether employees have been successfully fulfilling their responsibilities when working from home. With considerably reduced capacity for direct supervision of staff which may pose a high risk of unethical behavior, the integrity of remote workers has become a topic of debate. On this basis, this paper is written to examine employees' experience of working from home and its impacts on employees' integrity.

2. METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional survey involving 165 respondents in the National Institute of Public Administration (INTAN) Main Campus Bukit Kiara who were greatly affected by WFH policy. A convenient sampling technique was adopted for this study. The WFH experience was measured from six dimensions which include employees' experience on the role of leadership during WFH; WFH policy and guideline; communication channel available during WFH; clarity of roles and responsibilities; and employees' psychological and emotional being. On the other hand, employees' integrity was measured based on four dimensions covering respect of time, responsibilities, commitment, and professionalism. Due

to limited studies available on WFH experience, the items were developed based on a recent WFH guide and policy developed in response to the outbreak of Covid-19 both at global and Malaysian context (ILO, 2020; PSD, 2020). All respondents were responded to a five-point Likert Scale measure question where 1 = strongly disagree and 5 = strongly agree. The data gathered was analyzed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software. A mean analysis was conducted to know the WFH experience and the present state of employees' integrity. On the other hand, correlation analysis was performed to examine the impacts of WFH experience on employees' integrity.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 3: Mean Analysis Results

	N	Mean Statistics	Std. Deviation
Independent Variable:			
Work-from-Home Experience	83	4.0276	0.71061
Dependent Variable:			
Employees' Integrity	83	4.2530	0.61863

Table 3 presents the mean statistics score for the independent variable that is WFH experience and the dependent variable that is employees' integrity. The overall mean score for the WFH experience is 4.0276 reflecting employees' positive response towards WFH policy. This finding confirms many recent discussions on positive reaction and support towards WFH arrangement among employees amidst the pandemic (KPMG Survey, 2020; Employee Survey, 2021). As WFH becomes the best alternative working arrangement during the pandemic, quick and practical responses on how WFH protocols are going to be implemented are undoubtedly critical, specifically concerning the new normal adjustment. On the same token, the finding reveals that the overall mean score for employees' integrity is 4.2530. This shows that employees are still able to respect working time, committed to performing their responsibilities, as well as observe the workplace professionalism despite the flexibility they enjoy while working at home. Few reasons explain this. Firstly, their nature of work allows them to continue to work from home. Furthermore, the advancement of technology and digitalization can be also said as the key enabler for work to operate as usual. The pandemic has hastened the development of many new digital technologies.

Table 2: Pearson Correlation Results

Work-from-Home Experience	Employees' Integrity
Pearson Correlation (r)	0.565**
Sig. (2 tailed) (p)	0.000
N	83

The study also found that there is a significant and positive relationship between WFH experience and employees' integrity ($r= 0.565$**, $p= 0.000$, $p<0.05$). It is not an exaggeration

to say that positive sentiments on WFH arrangements have significant impacts on employees' morale and integrity.

4. CONCLUSION

This study is carried out to examine the WFH experience and its impacts on employees' integrity. The finding shows that positive response and experience towards WFH arrangement significantly affects employees' integrity in terms of respecting time, commitment to perform assigned responsibilities, as well as commitment in observing the workplace professionalism despite the WFH flexibility. The implication of this finding emphasizes the need for effective leadership during crisis, clear WHF policy, and guidelines, effective communication channels while working remotely, and strong emotional empathy to help employees struggling to adjust to WFH.

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