



Work from Home During the Covid-19 Pandemic in Civil and Public Service Context What Could Be Learned From It?

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Abstract. The Covid-19 pandemic has forced people to discover a new way to work, study, learn and socialize. The terminology “work from home” is not new in the literature and practices; however, it became more and more popular around the world during the Covid-19 pandemic. The present research aims to explore work from home practices during the Covid-19 pandemic. It specifically reviews work from home practices in the civil and public services context and then discusses its implication for Human Resources Management. We employed a descriptive qualitative research approach by gathering data through literature review and conducting interviews. We identified factors that may affect the success of work from home practices in the civil and public services context and how Human Resources Management should handle the future challenges. Finally, the research limitations and suggestions are discussed at the end of the paper.

Keywords: Work from home · HRM · Covid-19 Pandemic

1 Introduction

The Covid-19 outbreak was officially declared as a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on March 11, 2020. As has been mentioned by the WHO Director-General during a newsbreak, “Over the past two weeks, the number of cases outside China increased 13-fold and the number of countries with cases increased threefold [1]. Consequently, the public was urged to fight virus transmission more aggressively by following the health protocol, social distancing, and staying at home. Since then, public activities such as schools, public services, traditional and modern markets, government, and private offices have been temporarily closed. The public has been forced to work from home to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 cases.

The “work from home” terminology is not new in the literature and practices; however, it became more and more popular around the world during the Covid-19 pandemic. Offline activities such as buying-selling, schooling, and working change to online activities to limit human contact [2]. Obviously, these changes have a significant impact on the society around the world, including people in Indonesia.

Discussion work from home practice during emergencies such as the Covid-19 outbreak is gaining high interest from academicians, researchers, and practitioners, especially from the Human Resources Management context. It has a high impact on human

resources practice, not only for private organizations but also for government ones. There has been increasing attention to work from home since “greater technological connectivity facilitates this process by enabling work to be carried out wherever workers happen to be and whatever the time” [3, 4]. Nevertheless, those changes are not easy to handle because working from home needs a robust supporting system to connect between organizations, customers, and other parts of the organization to reduce physical contact.

This paper is interested in looking at work from home practice during the Covid-19 outbreak in civil and public services. It explores the research findings of work from home implementation, specifically in Indonesia’s civil and public services context. There are two reasons why we do focus on it. First, public perceptions view that public system administration could not provide good service to the public. “It was viewed as slow and lacking concerning transparency and accountability” and therefore needs to be reformed [5]. The Covid-19 outbreak has had a massive impact on how civil and public services are delivered to the public.

Second, work from home implementation should not hinder providing an excellent service to the public. It must offer a ‘win-win’ situation in which both employers and employees gain” as well as a citizen as the final customers/beneficiaries [3, 6]. Particularly in civil and public framework, public or citizen as customers is “the king” who must be served well, as being stated in the Republic of Indonesia constitution where public welfare is one of the national purposes.

Based on the two reasons above and the growing practice of working from home as a new way of working in government and private organizations, this research are interested in examining the recent research finding on the work from home implementation in the civil and public services context. The research also identifies challenges and outcomes of work from home practices, then summarize the key success factors of work from home implementation.

2 Research Methods

The paper aims to explore work from home practices during the Covid-19 pandemic and what could be learned from it, specifically for Human Resources Management practices. It specifically reviews work from home practices in the civil and public services context by examining recent research findings and synthesizing the results. In order to obtain the research papers, we utilized the Google Scholar database by using keywords, such as “work from home”, “WFH”, “civil service”, “public service,” and/or its combinations. In addition, we also conducted interviews with several participants in order to collect their ideas and thoughts about work from home implementation in the civil and public services.

3 Results and Discussion

The social distancing policy has been implemented and confined employees to their homes throughout 2020 and 2021. In line with the concept of volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA), the Covid-19 pandemic has been identified as an initial

exogenous shock that has changed the business landscape for both government and private organizations. None could predict that the Covid-19 outbreak would happen, and they even did not have emergency strategies before the pandemic [8]. On the one hand, the policy implementation itself fits primarily with a public health measure; however, on the other hand, the policy had a profound economic effect [9]. The “work from home” is not a new concept, and it has been implemented with different terms/variants, such as flexible working arrangement, flexible work, remote working, and flextime [3, 10, 11].

Working from home practice in Indonesia has been commonly implemented by private companies, such as start-up technology companies. They allow their employees, such as programmers and graphic designers, to work from their homes, cafés, or co-working spaces [12]. Indeed, technology and the internet make work from home and other locations possible. These advanced technologies help both employers and employees to communicate and deliver the job output and deliver the job output without time and place boundaries.

Before the Covid-19 outbreak, it was a discussion and debate about the work from home implementation in the civil and public services context [11]. However, the implementation was not executed yet. After the Covid-19 outbreak, work from home is gaining more attention and is being implemented in civil and public services contexts [13]. Nevertheless, the primary purpose of working from home during the Covid-19 pandemic for civil and public service was to reduce coronavirus infection and implement social and physical distancing.

Due to the recent technological and internet development, work from home may be either partly or fully implemented in the civil and public services context. Learning from past and present research, we underline that the work from home implementation in the civil and public services context must pay attention to some important aspects. This can be useful for human resources management practice.

First, work from home has two opposing parties. On the one hand, working from home is good for family and work as it integrates working and family. It promotes a way of increasing work-life balance because employees independently have their work schedule and can balance between work and family [4, 14, 15]. Based on Syaefudin [12], “others portray it as “cutting my own throat” because of the negative intrusions on work in-home” and also some disadvantages [16]. Indeed, those two different views must be considered to mitigate the opposing sides of working from home implementation, hindering productivity and performance.

Second, work from home implementation must gain a win-win solution for both employers and employees. Consequently, intensive communication and coordination between employers and employees are vital to monitoring progress and performance. Consequently, regular meetings via video conference such as Zoom Meeting, Google Meet, and any other applications are being held to communicate and coordinate. During a talk to civil services, they have many schedules for an online meeting when they are working from home; nevertheless, these can be drawbacks for health because of too much sitting and working in front of a computer monitor.

Third, in line with electronic-based government systems and electronic-based human resources management (e-HRM), supporting tools are necessary to support work from home implementation [16, 17]. These can be applications and web-based tools which

employers and employees can use to support daily job activities such as a location-based presence application, e-performance, e-travel, etc. In the civil and public services context, the government develops applications that can be used to support public service digitalization and business process digitalization [18]. However, during a discussion with some civil services, many applications support work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic, but the applications are not integrated. Consequently, these confuse them; for instance, they have many usernames and passwords to access the applications. Sometimes, they forget their usernames and passwords.

Fourth, information technology literacy/mastery is essential to running and operating the applications. Thus, the technology transformation would succeed when it is supported by people who have information technology literacy. The literacy includes information technology competency and information technology security literacy. Accordingly, training and development on information technology competency and literacy are needed.

4 Conclusion

The volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) era is inevitable. The advancement of technology has a massive impact on the private and governmental sectors' business processes. The Covid-19 pandemic has sped up the global changes; thus, we need to adapt to the changes.

In civil and public services, citizens/public are the customers who must be well served. Regarding the new ways of working, the work from the office and home has a different nature. Subsequently, the human resource policy between them is different. For instance, training and development of information technology literacy must be prioritized, primarily due to generational differences between generation X and the millennial generation. The high information technology literacy must follow the users' growth of electronic-based government systems and electronic-based human resources management.

This study suggests that working from home has a positive relationship with work-life balance, but some also have an opposite view. The role of human resources management is how to mitigate the possible negative side of working from home and motivate the employees. This could be regular monitoring and evaluation to discuss any issues and motivate them to work more productive and maintain performance and effectiveness, for instance, through compensation, incentives, and benefits, as well as reward and punishment [19].

Our paper has a limitation regarding the number of papers that we collected from the Google Scholar database. Future research must find more papers from other international databases. In addition, more empirical research needs to be done to examine the issues raised previously, such as information technology literacy and work-life balance among generational differences when they work from home.

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