

# Working from Home as a Human Resource Management Strategy during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Indonesian Workers' Experiences

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## ABSTRACT

*Working from home (WFH) is a relatively new phenomenon in Indonesia, sparked by the COVID-19 outbreak. Having family members at home and being isolated from coworkers and bosses makes WFH a different work situation. WFH's physical interaction limits may also negatively impact employee performance. Therefore, this research aims to explore the experience of Indonesian workers who performed WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic and to evaluate how this work configuration affected employees' performance. By utilizing phenomenology with 10 informants from several business sectors, we were able to focus on the common experiences of employees doing WFH during the pandemic. It was revealed that employees spent more time coordinating and communicating virtually during WFH, resulting in extended and even distorted work hours. Additionally, they ran into several challenges with their reliance on data to do their tasks. Then, in the absence of their supervisors, who are typically supervising of the work process, employees experienced a higher level of output control. Being at home also intensified work-family conflict, particularly for working parents. However, it was discovered that the workers' perceived flexibility was favorable when confronted with those previous conditions. Thus, while not all job objectives were met, perceived performance while working from home was comparable to working from the office. As a result, they intend to continue performing WFH, but in a hybrid way. With these findings, organizations may formulate a more comprehensive strategy for telecommuting as one of the global megatrends in human resource management (HRM).*

**KEYWORDS:** *COVID-19, employee performance, Indonesia, phenomenological study, , working from home*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *J22, M54*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

COVID-19's breakout has forced many Indonesian employees to work from home (WFH). WFH is more frequently referred to as telecommuting or teleworking in the field of human resource (HR) research, a term coined by Jack Nilles in the 1970s (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). This sort of employment was defined by the amount of time spent working (part-time or full-time), the location of work (mostly from home), and the usage of technology (Allen et al., 2015).

Unlike in the United States and the United Kingdom, where WFH is widely adopted (Hampton, 2017; Picu & Dinu, 2016), WFH is a pretty new phenomenon in Indonesia. Since the March 2020 COVID-19 pandemic outbreak, WFH has grown in popularity. Numerous

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institutions are obligated to employ this method in order to keep the virus from spreading. Nearly 75% of Indonesia's workforce is required to complete WFH (ICBS, 2020). This WFH arrangement may provide new experiences for individuals who have never worked in a similar arrangement before.

Adoption of WFH may entail adaptation to this new type of system. Additionally, when developing nations adopted WFH as their new style of working, they were found to be at the bottom of the list (Bana et al., 2020), attributed to household matters including more children and internet quality. Additionally, physical interaction between workers was restricted during the WFH adaption period, which may have impacted employee well-being, productivity, or performance (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Accordingly, supervisors expressed concern about their workers' performance when they telecommuted, particularly those who previously performed badly (Smith et al., 2019). However, WFH during a pandemic is considerably different from WFH in a regular circumstance in which all family members were at home and the situation created a range of distractions (Waizenegger et al., 2020). This finding underscores the importance of employee performance during WFH. Simultaneously, the employer must ensure that employee productivity and performance are maintained throughout this pandemic, during which many firms have fallen due to the weakening economic climate.

As a consequence, a thorough knowledge of the WFH's efficacy and how it influences performance is critical. Thus, this study aims to explore the experiences of Indonesian employees who practice WFH and to gain a better understanding of the impact of WFH implementation on employee job performance during the COVID-19 crises in Indonesia from a variety of perspectives, including job characteristics, leadership styles, and work-family conflict at home. To achieve this purpose, this study makes use of the qualitative method's inherent uniqueness, revealing the authenticity of key components and presenting a true and harmonious perspective on the WFH phenomenon from the perspective of those who encounter it (Neuman, 2014). Furthermore, phenomenology enables the researcher to concentrate on expressing the common experiences shared by all participants in regard to the WFH phenomenon (Creswell, 2013). The conclusions of this study provide a thorough understanding of the telecommuting concept's application in Indonesia during the pandemic, which will aid business organizations in formulating a comprehensive strategy for this work configuration. According to Minbaeva (2020), flexible work arrangements, including WFH, are one of the emerging global megatrends in human resource management (HRM). To embrace it, additional theoretical study in HR management should be conducted on the actors and behaviors related with flexible work arrangements in a variety of organizational forms.

The remainder of the article is as follows: The next section presents the theoretical basis for telecommuting and its influence on employee performance. Additionally, various factors affecting telecommuting and employee performance prior to and during the COVID-19 outbreak are thoroughly discussed. The next part discusses the methodology utilized in the research, which leads to the study's results, discussion, management implications, and conclusion.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Telecommuting**

Telecommuting practice and research have grown since its debut in the 1970s and continue to this day. Telecommuting is a work practice in which organizational members use a portion of their typical work hours (generally range from a few hours per week to nearly full-time) to

work away from centralized workplace, typically primarily from home, while interacting with others as necessary to complete work tasks using technology (Allen et al., 2015).

There are four ways to categorize telecommuting, as defined by Dahlstrom (2013): first, it can be full-time or part-time; second, it can have a fixed or flexible work schedule; third, it can be done from home or another office location; and fourth, it can be voluntary for the employee or an approach that is provided by the company.

Additionally, telecommuting brings several benefits and drawbacks (Allen et al., 2015). Telecommuting was deemed an effective HR policy for improving performance (Bloom et al., 2015; Dutcher, 2012). This may be connected to the fact that telecommuting affords employees greater flexibility and autonomy (Gajendran et al., 2015). Telecommuting's flexibility aided people in attaining work-family balance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Iqret et al., 2016; Kossek et al., 2006; Picu & Dinu, 2016). Previously, telecommuting was related with increased job satisfaction (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kazekami, 2020), improved employees' wellness (Vega et al., 2014), and decreased employee turnover (Gibson et al., 2002). Nonetheless, there were some drawbacks of telecommuting including decreased communication activities (Allen et al., 2015; Gibson et al., 2002), as well as professional isolation from coworkers (Bailey & Kurland, 2002).

## **2.2 Telecommuting and employee performance before and during COVID-19 pandemic**

In the context prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, many studies have been conducted to investigate the relationship between telecommuting implementation and individual or worker performance. From several previous studies, it has been found that WFH implementation positively correlated with supervisor-rated employee performance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden & Gajendran, 2019; Kossek et al., 2006) and task and contextual performance (Gajendran et al., 2015).

However, from the perspective of the employee, telecommuting implementation was inversely related to performance (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2019). Then, from a Systematic Review study, it was discovered that the findings regarding the relationship between flexible working arrangements and individual employee performance did not appear to be consistent (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011).

The nature of the job can also have an impact on the relationship between telecommuting and individual performance. From a previous study conducting experiment, it was discovered that 6-10% of subjects performing a dull or repetitive task were less productive when working outside. However, because the nature of the work was creative, 11-20% of subjects were reported to be more productive by telecommuting (Dutcher, 2012). Aside from the nature of the job, the presence of coworkers or colleagues at the office has a positive influence on achieving better employee performance (van der Lippe & Lippényi, 2019). In contrast, in an experiment in China involving 996 call-center employees performing repetitive tasks such as receiving customer calls, the employees' performance increased by 13% (Bloom et al., 2015).

In the context of COVID-19 pandemic, it has been discovered by Etheridge et al. (2020) that employees in the United Kingdom were as productive as they were at the beginning of year 2020, prior to the pandemic. Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi (2020) also discovered that the majority of Kuwaiti employees surveyed felt more productive at home than in the office, attributing to fewer distractions and greater flexibility with work hours. However, Okubo et

al. (2021) discovered that during the pandemic, teleworker performance in Japan fell by around 20% on average due to a lack of experience and barriers to teleworking, such as insufficient teleworking space and telecommunication devices, as well as general home conditions.

### **2.3 Factors influencing telecommuting and employee performance before and during COVID-19 pandemic**

It should be highlighted that the effectiveness of WFH in terms of employee performance was contingent on the nature of the organization's WFH scheme, employee perceptions of WFH, and the study's various variables (de Menezes & Kelliher, 2011). Bélanger & Collins (1998) proposed a framework for studying distributed work arrangements (DWAs), indicating that the effects of DWAs are dependent on organizational, individual, task, and technology factors. Moreover, telecommuting success is dependent on multifaceted factors, including the worker, work characteristics, and organization, as well as the supervisors' leadership style (Allen et al., 2015). As a result, this study analyzed the WFH efficacy in terms of performance from multiple viewpoints, including job characteristic, perceived leadership style, and work-family conflict, all of which represent the particular worker's home situation.

#### **Job characteristic**

Job factors such as high job complexity, lower job interdependence, and low social support all have a favorable influence on the relationship between WFH and employee performance (Golden & Gajendran, 2019). Because there is less distraction at home, WFH allows for the completion of more difficult tasks that need a high degree of focus. However, during this pandemic, there may be additional distractions at home from family members (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Additionally, individuals who work from home experienced an increase in workload during the COVID-19 lockdown (Ripamonti et al., 2020). In another instance, Utoft (2020) noted in her autoethnography that she was having difficulties concentrating to fulfill the target during pandemic periods, despite the absence of family members. With those conditions in existence during the pandemic, employees with high-complexity jobs may have difficulty completing their duties.

The following work characteristic is job interdependence, which is related with the coordination process within the organization's activities (Golden & Gajendran, 2019). As it is with WFH under normal circumstances, jobs with a lesser degree of interdependence will benefit performance, because WFH's experience in a pandemic crisis impeded the spontaneous coordinating process (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Additionally, throughout the process of adapting to WFH in a pandemic condition, the workers experienced challenges with virtual coordination (J. Pretti et al., 2020).

The last work characteristic is job social support which refers to the amount of assistance and support obtained from coworkers in order to complete the task (Golden & Gajendran, 2019). Due to the physical interaction limitations in a pandemic situation, job social support is acquired through an online system. Many employees struggled to work from home during this pandemic and encountered a lack of support from their colleagues (Hodder, 2020). It was also discovered that many employees adapting to WFH during pandemic did not feel as motivated by their coworkers as they did at the office (J. Pretti et al., 2020). Employee performance may suffer as a result of this diminished social support from coworkers.

### **Leadership style**

The Situational Leadership model was presented as a viable leadership model for use in WFH (Gibson et al., 2002). This approach, which combines supportive or relationship-based behavior with directive or task-oriented behavior, may be implemented and blended according to the employee's condition and preparedness (Donkor & Dongmei, 2018).

According to Cruz et al. (1999), directive leadership behavior was typically defined by a high level of control over conversation, dominating interaction, and directly guiding task completion. Then, Solís (2017) identified a negative correlation between supervisory control and performance of teleworkers in his study. Instead of monitoring and regulating individuals, supervisors must prioritize constant communication (T. J. Pretti et al., 2020; Solís, 2017; Sull et al., 2020), which is important during times of crisis (Ripamonti et al., 2020) such as current COVID-19 epidemic. As a result, supportive leadership behavior that prioritize communication may be more advantageous in the context of WFH (Dahlstrom, 2013), particularly during this pandemic.

### **Work family conflict**

In the context prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, Nakrošienė et al. (2019) observed that the potential of home workers caring for family members while working from home was associated with better self-reported productivity. In addition, Gajendran & Harrison (2007) found that telecommuting had a negative effect on work-family conflict. However, it has also been discovered that telecommuting, particularly intense telecommuting, reduces the likelihood of reconciling professional and personal interests and promotes work-family conflict (Sarbu, 2018). In line with this, in the context of WFH during COVID-19 pandemic, family matters become a barrier (Couch et al., 2020; Waizenegger et al., 2020). It makes sense since, during this pandemic era, the employees performing WFH were in a different state than usual WFH (Waizenegger et al., 2020). During the pandemic, most family members also stayed at home. Workers were obliged to manage their occupations as well as their families, particularly their children.

## **3. METHODOLOGY**

The purpose of this study is to obtain a critical knowledge of the vital role of WFH implementation in achieving individual performance. As such, this study will go into the details regarding the experience of Indonesian employees performing WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have seen that qualitative research is differentiated by the authenticity of the primary factor, which provides a true and harmonious viewpoint on the phenomenon for the persons who experience it (Neuman, 2014). Therefore, we thought that qualitative research is a viable option for examining the WFH phenomenon in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, we believe that employing a phenomenological approach is the best course of action. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology enables researchers to concentrate on expressing the shared experiences of all individuals in connection to a phenomenon. The main purpose of phenomenological research is to mitigate individual encounters with a phenomenon in order to ascertain its universal nature.

### **3.1 Sample demographic**

Purposive sampling was used in this research to assess a subset of the population that was at least partially practicing WFH as authorized by their organizations during the COVID-19

pandemic. Indonesian businesses are using the WFH system to comply with current government legislation limiting the percentage of workers who can work in offices to a certain percentage. Approximately 70-75 percent of workers of each company completed WFH during the period of widespread social restrictions, whether full-time (5 days per week) or part-time (a few days per week) in compliance with corporate rules.

The data were acquired via semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten informants who were included in our personal contacts list and with whom we have a good rapport. A sample of ten informants was deemed enough for a phenomenological study, which typically involves a limited number of participants, typically ten or fewer (Groenewald, 2004; Polit & Beck, 2010). Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the interviews were performed online using Google Meet video call, which allowed for the same level of interaction with the informants as when they were conducted in person. We could still make out their facial expressions and intonation in their voices. We interviewed each informant for 60–90 minutes. Following that, all interviews were transcribed manually. Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the informants.

**Table 1. Demographic profile of the informants**

No.	Sex	Age	Status	Education	Company sector	Company type	Previous WFH experience
I1	M	35	Married with children	Master	Education Service	Public	No
I2	F	32	Married with children	Bachelor	Wholesale and Retail Trade	Private	Yes
I3	F	27	Single	Bachelor	Transportation and Warehousing	Private	No
I4	F	32	Married with children	Master	Information and Communication	Public	No
I5	F	30	Single	Master	Processing Industry	Private	No
I6	M	32	Married with children	Master	Government Administration	Public	No
I7	F	28	Single	Bachelor	Financial Services	Public	No
I8	M	32	Single	Bachelor	Processing Industry	Public	No
I9	M	32	Married with children	Bachelor	Processing Industry	Public	No
I10	M	32	Married with children	Bachelor	E-commerce Service	Private	Yes

*Source:* data processed by the authors

### 3.2 Data analysis procedure

The data analysis technique followed Moustakas's (1994) methodology for performing the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2013):

1. Horizontalization: the practice of underlining significant statements that provide light on the informants' encounters with the phenomenon.
2. Textural analysis: the process of constructing a description of the informants' experiences using the significant statements acquired in the preceding phase.
3. Structural analysis entails the description of the context or setting in which the phenomenon was perceived by informants.

4. The essence of the phenomenon may be determined from the preceding stage.

Nvivo software was used to facilitate the data analysis procedure.

Reliability was maintained in this phenomenological investigation by maintaining accurate recording and manually transcribing the tape to highlight critical issues (Creswell, 2013). Then, to enhance the credibility of this phenomenological study, we used theory and measure triangulation, as well as member checking, by verifying our findings with several of our informants. Using these two strategies is regarded sufficient to boost a qualitative study's credibility (Creswell, 2013).

#### 4. RESULTS

Several significant statements relevant to the study's aims were uncovered throughout the interviews with all informants. The analysis of these significant statements identified eight themes pertaining to the participants' experiences with WFH implementation during the COVID-19 pandemic, as can be seen in Table 2 below.

**Table 2. Categories of common themes**

No.	Common themes
1	Employees' online communication and coordination process
2	Distorted working hours
3	Employees' dependency on data
4	High output control and low supervision by supervisors
5	Work-family interference
6	Flexibility
7	Working from home performance in the COVID-19 pandemic
8	Preference for working from home post-COVID-19 pandemic

*Source:* data analysis by the authors

##### **Employees' online communication and coordination process**

The majority of informants discussed their employment, which are characterized by a high degree of interconnectedness with other units, either internal or external. Due to the substantial dependency on other functions, extensive communication and coordination procedures are required. All processes were completed online during the WFH in this pandemic context.

“The first activity in my job is composing teaching material. I must coordinate with the team, to define the syllabus, the goals of the course, etc. And now it's all conducted online” (I1)

“I know the production and the inventory level, so I always coordinate with external units, with producers and customer”. (I5)

“I must think how to deliver my product to the customer or end user. To do this, I must make a document with the team from other functions which are finance, legal, sales, and sales” (I8)

All informants had certain difficulties throughout the process of online cooperation and communication. According to informants, coordinating activities using the online system took

longer since ensuring that all employees understood the problem at hand was more challenging. They were unclear of their coworkers' position on the subject at hand.

“Through a telephone, we cannot see face reaction, how their stance towards the topic. They are also not always available. So, this process has become much longer. In the office, it's easy to reach people. During this WFH, things usually settled in five minutes, and now they need thirty minutes.” (I2)

The online communication method is entirely verbal, with no visual cues from colleagues' expressions or gestures that aid in comprehension of the conversation topic.

“Now, we conduct only verbal communication. Sometimes to understand the topic, the communication process takes a longer period to only make sure the purpose of the what's being discussed, due to different perceptions or misunderstanding of the point.” (I8)

Several respondents reported that the online communication process reduced the occurrence of spontaneous cooperation with coworkers, which they conducted often in the workplace. This unplanned or spontaneous coordination may be carried out online, however, it takes longer due to all of the device configuration processes.

“So, the coordination process is different. In the office, communication is more like something that is not planned. Sometimes I'm the resource person, or sometimes I go to that person, so it's mostly unplanned.” (I8)

This decreased spontaneous communication activities may have impacted information exchange among coworkers.

“We used to be able to talk about one issue in the office, even during breaks. And now, although this is also feasible with Microsoft Teams, there is sometimes knowledge that hasn't been shared yet.” (I9)

During WFH in the context of pandemic, the decreased of spontaneous communication were substituted by the scheduled formal online meeting. And because the virtual communication activities were lengthier, and there were many things to coordinate with other divisions, the workers experienced an increase in meeting frequency that was even greater than what they did in the office. Some of informants experienced virtual meeting fatigue due to this circumstance.

“Sometimes I feel overwhelmed when there are heavy meetings that are usually held face to-face, and during WFH meetings that are conducted online, I feel drained.” (I2)

Additionally, due to the increased meeting frequency, it was possible to have double meetings. This means that the employees are virtually attending two sessions concurrently and may be utilizing separate devices.

“In WFH during the pandemic, we are used to longer work hours. There may be more time to work, but people tend to arrange double meetings. As a consequence, we cannot focus.” (I8)

“So, in arranging a meeting, we hold the schedule of top management first, others will follow that schedule, because aligning all people's schedules must be difficult. If we have another meeting to attend, there is no choice. Either we reschedule or attend a double meeting.” (I9)



Certain employees considered it ineffective since they were unable to concentrate on the meetings. However, they frequently did not have a choice when it came to top management's schedule. They will often be more involved in one meeting and passive in another.

### **Distorted working hours**

This issue of distorted working hours was mentioned by the majority of informants as a continuation of the preceding theme's discussion of the increasing time required for online coordination.

“If it’s getting dark, zoom meeting was difficult to stop. Even it wasn’t a zoom meeting, chat group was very busy asking about work.” (I3)

“The average working hours is excessive. So, while we're at office, we all go home at 5 p.m., however when we're performing WFH, there's a sudden zoom till 8 p.m.” (I5)

“During this WFH, I experienced that I open my laptop when I just woke up in the morning. And we supposed to finish working at 5 pm, but there is still work to do in the evening, I still get called. Even there was a formal meeting, which was supposed to do during work hours. But there was a meeting scheduled at 9 pm.” (I7)

Apart from the fact that workers had meetings more frequently than they did at the office, there was an increase in their duties since their corporate sectors were affected by the pandemic. For instance, there was a business sector that required more engagement with the Indonesian government over Covid-19 countermeasures such as banking service, or there was a business sector that was growing as a result of the home isolation condition, such as e-commerce. As a result of this circumstance, their work hours were expanded.

“Half of these meetings are regular with the team, while the other half are ad hoc in response to the pandemic, to discuss demand and supply challenges in each brand.” (I2)

“We are doing WFH because of the pandemic. My firm, on the other hand, is severely impacted by the epidemic. My managers have now been invited to a number of meetings, either with the government or with other stakeholders, to discuss the sector's response to the epidemic.” (I7)

Due to the employees' high level of job dependency, along with an increase in workload during the pandemic, they experienced the issue of distorted working hours. There was no obvious distinction between work and personal life. For informants who were single, the issue of blurred working hours did not appear to be as serious as it was for married informants with children who were also juggling other home responsibilities.

“Then, for reasons of urgency, there are people who set up meetings at night, despite the fact that we have duties as moms.” (I2)

This atypical arrangement of working hours during WFH is also related to the workers' physical health. As previously stated, numerous informants reported experiencing virtual meeting fatigue. Several of them are also exhausted as a result of their excessive and twisted work hours. Additionally, it has been shown that this circumstance resulted in anxiety issue.

“Seriously, when you are working from home, it is like no limit to working time. There are also people who are used to working at night since they have been doing WFH for a long time. My supervisor told me to respond first thing in the morning the next day. But after reading it before going to bed, I couldn't get a good night's sleep. My anxiety level increased.” (I10)

### **Employees' dependency on data**

Based on the interviews, it has been discovered that the interdependency was not just with other job functions, but that the informants also indicated their strong dependence on specific data required to complete their task when they were doing WFH.

“I can do my work given all the data I need is available, then I process the data and compose some management strategies” (I4)

Due to the situation of the organization, which was not very advanced in terms of data digitization, some informants continued to rely on physical documents kept in their office.

“Well, I believe it's the same when we work from home, but the worst part is that we need physical documents” (I3)

In another instance, because the organization was not entirely information technology-based, several informants doing WFH encountered the same difficulty with document authorization that required signature from authorized individuals.

“I think one of the obstacles when doing WFH is when you have to get a signature for the agreement document. Electronic signatures are not currently in use at my firm.” (I4)

Additionally, they employed digital signatures as a temporary solution for some documents and subsequently visited each director and general manager once a month to obtain signatures on physical documents.

“We are now compensating by using digital signatures first. My staff will then collect the actual documents from the board of directors and the general manager once a month.” (I8)

Apart from physical documents, several informants encountered the issue of data that could not be accessed easily from their homes due to the requirement for an intranet network. In this example, certain companies let their employees to access data over VPN, while some others did not due to the material's high level of confidentiality.

“So, I need the data, about banking, to see the portfolios, and it only can be accessed through intranet. Sometimes, when I did WFO, I save all the data that I need when I do WFH. Or if sometimes I forget to do that, I must get help from my friend in office to get me the data.” (I7)

### **High output control and low supervision by supervisors**

The majority of informants reported experiencing similar treatment from their supervisors, who were supportive, indicating that communication and coordination were adequate during WFH. On a weekly or biweekly meeting basis, they performed formal communication and coordination activities online. However, informal collaboration with supervisors was frequently used when such matters needed to be handled.

“The coordination with supervisor was not too strict, tended to be quite independent.” (I1)

“We often convey information about our job or duties at weekly meetings. Apart from that, he normally contacts me once or twice a week.” (I8)

In all of the conversations, the informants stated that they felt they had little monitoring or control over the process of task completion because their supervisors were not in the same location as them when they were doing WFH. Actually, in this WFH during pandemic, especially in the beginning period, some leaders tried to implement such a higher level of process control. But, as time passed, that was no longer done. The supervisors tend to make

sure that their workers have completed their works by checking the results. During the Covid-19 pandemic, supervisors at WFH were more focused with result and output control than process control. Typically, supervisors will check on the job progress of their subordinates on a weekly basis.

“Our work process has never been monitored, the important thing is the result” (I2)

“So, it's not monitored all the time how it works, no, she just asks about the results” (I6)

“Now, he sees it only from the results. He doesn't mind the process. For example, there is a work deadline tomorrow at 9 am, so it's free if you want to do it tomorrow at 7 to 9 am, it's okay.” (I9)

To manage and finish their job while their supervisors were away and implemented relatively low supervision level, the majority of informants conveyed that they were more determined in carrying out their responsibilities at home. They had more autonomy over how they managed their job. Therefore, the workers inevitably practiced resolving certain difficulties before asking the leader's opinion or consideration.

“The positive point is that I can be more decisive. For example, I can decide which work I will finish today.” (I2)

“During this WFH, if there is a problem in our team, our supervisor doesn't know right away at that time, so I and my team try to handle the problem. If we are stuck with it, we will report it to him.” (I3)

### **Work-family interference**

During WFH, some of the employees had work-family difficulties, particularly those who were married to a working spouse and had at least one kid. When they worked from home, they had to deal with both domestic and work-related issues concurrently.

“It's actually quite chaotic. I start to work at 9 am, and my son start to school at 7.45 am, so I have time to accompany him. But after 9 am, it is difficult to handle so I will leave him. If he has a problem, I will come if I can.” (I2)

“I have two children, it's quite crowded actually. Sometimes they want to play with me” (I6)

In case the workers were still single, it turned out they also faced a family-related problem if they still live with their families at home. Furthermore, there might be the case that the workers had to deal with family members who were positive for Covid-19.

“Well, when my father was positive for Covid-19, it was complicated. We have to check regularly, prepare for the meals, and so forth” (I7)

Then, according to the findings of the interviews, in addition to family issues being a cause of conflict, there was also work-family conflict that stemmed from the working conditions experienced during WFH. It has already been mentioned that there has been an increase in the problem of distorted working hours during WFH in the context of the pandemic, and some informants have reported work-family interference, particularly in terms of spending quality time with children. However, it has been revealed that there was a factor that allowed the workers to handle work-family conflict more smoothly while simultaneously focusing on their work. That was the support system at home. For example, there were workers' parents who helped them in taking care of their children. Another option for a support system is a third party, such as a babysitter or household assistant.

“Yes, I have a helper at home. Thank God. I think it would be very hard if I didn’t have one during this condition.” (I2)

“We and our children are still living with our parents. They helped us.” (I6)

### **Flexibility**

All informants said that they took advantage of flexibility when performing WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given the longer and blurred work hours and work-family interference highlighted in earlier themes, they attempted to address these issues by optimizing the temporal flexibility available during WFH. They are often flexible in terms of how and when they perform their duties, as long as they are able to complete it in a timely manner.

“I think WFH provides flexibility to complete my work. Despite the fact that my work begins at 7 a.m., I can start working later when I feel the urge to do the task” (I5)

“The WFO mindset that used to be strict has now shifted, so WFH should be flexible.” (I8)

Numerous informants utilized their time flexibility to manage work and family responsibilities, such as child care. There was one instance in which certain informants were required to prioritize their work first in order to address their children later. In another instance, some informants were able to care for their children while working, as long as they completed their tasks in a timely manner.

“The next thing is time management. My schedule is from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. so the interaction with my child is very limited. Usually, I can fully take care of my child in the evening.” (I2)

“My son came to play with me while I was working. Finally, I spent time with him first, then returned to work after he fell asleep. It's all about how we manage our time.” (I4)

“I can accompany my kid to play when things were not too hectic. My first kid sometimes requests that I read her a book.” (I6)

On top of dealing with family concerns, managing flexibility during WFH was done so that professional and personal activities could be balanced. This was particularly important given the amount of personal time that was required for additional work during this pandemic-WFH.

“Because my personal time was taken, sometimes I compensated for it with work hours. In the beginning of WFH, I was very strict. If I had free time during the work hours, I still worked or followed up on my team’s work. But now I am more flexible. If I must work tonight, I will use some time tomorrow morning for my personal matters, of course if there is no meeting I must attend.” (I8)

Then, having additional free time that was previously spent travelling from home to workplace and vice versa, increased the informants' ability to manage all of their responsibilities. In terms of flexibility, some informants reported that they utilized previously unoccupied commute time for various activities.

“Now, after my son finishes his school online, we have to accompany him to play, but I think this time is compensated for by the time we usually spend transporting from home to the office.” (I1)

“Travel time from home to the office is around 2 hours. It can be used to do other things. For example, I do stationary cycling or outdoor cycling sometimes.” (I6)

### **Working from home performance in the COVID-19 pandemic**

For most of the informants, implementation of WFH during the Covid-19 pandemic was a new experience. For them who have not been in normal WFH situation, this might be such difficult experience at the beginning. As time went by, it has been revealed from the experience of the workers that WFH during pandemic has forced them to adjust their way of work. All communication and coordination were conducted online, as discussed in the previous theme section. There is also no other choice for employees except to do balancing between work and family. In the interviews, all informants were asked regarding their job performance during WFH from their perspectives. The responses were pretty consistent; the majority of respondents said that they could attain roughly the same level of performance if they worked from home, provided they made certain adjustments.

“Yes, my performance is the same as usual, because there are plus and minus in doing this WFH.” (I3)

“So far, I think I can deliver all the targets, well, compensated by long hour work and double meeting. I think that is the adjustment I did to reach the same productivity as I did in WFO.” (I8)

“Overall, I think job performance can be achieved. However, as I have stated, the number of discussions with colleagues has been reduced. But still, I think there is no problem with this WFH” (I9)

With all the distractions at home and the occurrence of extended work hours during this WFH due to the pandemic, as well as the absence of physical monitoring by managers, the majority of informants identified self-motivation as a critical factor in achieving the expected performance.

“In the beginning, I was confused about how this WFH works, but after several weeks, I have found my own motivation and rhythm, so I can work as usual.” (I1)

“I think I tend to have an internal motive, so I can be still productive at home.” (I8)

“The atmosphere in the office encourages us to work and is different from it at home. I think we will need self-initiative to continue working as normal at that point.” (I9)

Additionally, practically all informants attempted to create a comfortable workplace in order to increase their concentration in completing their tasks. They separated this workspace from the communal area of the house in order to minimize distractions from children or other family members. Furthermore, they purchased additional equipment to assist them in doing their duties at home.

“I use an ergonomically working desk and chair. For me, it’s not effective to work in bed, so I must use the right desk and chair to work. And also the other equipment, such as a proper headset suitable for WFH” (I2)

“I have a decent workplace, desk, chair, monitor, and I also separate my workplace from other common rooms so I can be more focused and the ambience is not too homey.” (I9)

However, with all the adjustments they did, some objectives were not met, such as software development that had to be performed in the office, visit activities to monitor some firms, and training activities that had to be completed offline. Employees completed the activities for all of these aims during the WFO period, when the Covid-19 pandemic situation was improved, or they found other substitute activities to achieve the same goals.

### **Preference for working from home post-COVID-19 pandemic**

With all of the circumstances at home, all informants considered WFH as an acceptable type of system. When asked if they intended to continue doing WFH even after the COVID-19 pandemic ended, all informants stated that they would do so if their employers offered this option. They did, however, express a desire to continue socializing with their coworkers. As a result, they wish to continue to work in the office, for example, on at least two days every week.

“I'd like to do WFH on a regular basis, but not every day. Maybe I'll work from home two days a week and go to the office the other three days.” (I3)

“I want to keep doing WFH, but it could be a hybrid version because I miss socializing at work.” (I8)

## **5. DISCUSSION**

This study contributes to the telecommuting concept, particularly its adoption in developing nations that are ranked poor in terms of their adaptability (Bana et al., 2020). This phenomenological study established the essence of ten employees doing WFH in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic.

In the first theme, it was discovered that employees encountered differences in terms of coordination and communication during WFH. The workers' jobs characteristic required a high level of coordination process, which were unfortunately perceived as longer when carried out virtually during the pandemic. It was because workers may not be aware of their colleagues' perspectives on the issue being discussed. It was possible to miss some important social or body language sign during virtual communication (Grant et al., 2013). There was also a risk of miscommunications and misunderstandings as a result of the lack of face-to-face interaction (Picu & Dinu, 2016). Previous study also found that many workers saw coordinating processes through online systems as a challenge during the transition phase of doing WFH during a pandemic (J. Pretti et al., 2020). Apart from that, because employees were not in the same location, they discovered that they communicated less spontaneously during WFH. As Waizenegger et al. (2020) mentioned, this occurred as a result of the forced eradication of working environment contextual cues; knowledge workers no longer naturally interact to participate in ad hoc conversations. Additionally, this casual contact was frequently supplanted by formal organized meetings. The analysis also reveals that sometimes, workers also experienced virtual meeting fatigue because of video conferencing (Waizenegger et al., 2020). Additionally, there were instances when employees were required to attend two meetings concurrently. As a consequence, we feel that efficacy should be investigated, as it is difficult to remain engaged in two meetings, especially when the topics are fundamentally different. Actually, while we work from the office, there are also times when two meetings take place at the same time, and we are invited to both. However, we are generally unable to attend both in person. As a result of WFH circumstances and technology, this double meeting situation is occurring today.

Then, as previously stated, the longer coordination procedure resulted in extended and even distorted working hours in the WFH phenomenon during the COVID-19 pandemic, as the second theme revealed in this study. Employees were still contacted about their job beyond office hours. This finding is consistent with the result of a previous study, which concluded that as a result of the pandemic, all these sudden, involuntary changes in working lives may result in the blurring of work and personal life boundaries (Hodder, 2020). However, this fact

about distorted working hours must be taken carefully to avoid physical or mental health concerns for employees.

Another common theme that emerged from this study's research is employees' reliance on data during the WFH in this pandemic environment. In this theme, some issues were elaborated such as employees frequently encountered difficulties obtaining physical documents that require review in non-information technology-based companies. Then, this research found that the majority of companies are inexperienced with electronic signatures, which created difficulties for employees during the WFH. Employees also encountered issues accessing data from their homes that was already in digital form but required intranet access. All of these concerns lead to a single factor: technology, which is also a critical enabler of telecommuting and WFH concept implementation (Allen et al., 2015). This topic rationally represented the process of adaption to the WFH mechanism, given the fact that employees and employers in Indonesia had little prior experience conducting WFH.

The fourth theme is high output control and low supervision by supervisors during WFH in this COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of leadership style, the supervisors were known to be supportive, by maintaining sufficient communication with the employees (Dahlstrom, 2013). It has been revealed that controlling of work process was difficult to be conducted because supervisors and employees were not in the same place. Therefore, emphasizing on output control was the best choice. This is in accordance with a previous study by Groen et al. (2018) stated that teleworker experienced increase output control when they work from home. Furthermore, because their supervisors had a low level of process control, the workers had more autonomy in managing their jobs. Previous research found that the level of perceived autonomy was a mediator between WFH and employee performance (Gajendran et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). This autonomy encourages employees to practice problem solving and complete their tasks independently before consulting with the boss.

Regarding the fifth theme, work-family interference, working parents with children tried to keep their children occupied while they worked, but sometimes the disruptions from their children made it impossible for them to focus on their work or meetings (Waizenegger et al., 2020). In addition, it was found that work hours positively related to work-family conflict (Kossek et al., 2006), which in this case, the workers faced a relatively longer working hours as consequence of Covid-19 outbreak. However, there is one aspect that contributes to minimizing work-family interference: the presence of a support system. In Indonesia, a collectivist country (Artina et al., 2020), it is customary for employees' parents to live in the same house to assist with grandchildren' upbringing. Additionally, Indonesians are fairly accustomed to having a domestic helper assist them with cleaning and even childcare. Working parents benefit from having a domestic helper who can aid them in concentrating on their home duties. Previous study has revealed that employees from collectivist cultures face less adjustment difficulties than those from individualistic ones (Biron et al., 2020).

The sixth theme concerns the degree of flexibility faced by employees during WFH. This study discovered that, in presence of longer and distorted work hours and intense work-family interference, flexibility in how and when employees finish their job is really rather beneficial for conducting WFH. In keeping with this, flexibility was also seen favorably as a means of improving productivity during WFH (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020). Then, as a result of recent study by Ripamonti et al. (2020), time management was identified critical during WFH, particularly in juggling job and personal obligations. Additionally, employees' flexibility was increased by having additional free time formerly allocated for commuting.

This finding is consistent with recent research, which discovered that home workers often use their commute time to spend time with their family (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020) or to engage in other constructive activities (Kazekami, 2020).

After discussing the circumstances under which employees were exposed to WFH in previous themes, we turned our attention to employee performance throughout this COVID-19 epidemic's WFH in the seventh theme. Even though employees' work characteristics looked to be difficult to perform online, added with the extensive work hours and household matters, they sought to finish their duty despite the difficulties. Although not all work objectives were met, all workers said that they performed at about the same level as they did while working from the office. In accordance with this conclusion, Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi (2020) discovered that employees were more productive at home than at work during the COVID-19 pandemic-WFH. Along with the flexibility discussed in the previous theme, self-motivation was identified as a critical competency for doing WFH (Grant et al., 2013). Then, in order to maintain concentration on the job, employees set up the workstation. This conclusion corroborated recent study by Nakrošienė et al. (2019), which showed that workplace compatibility boosts employee productivity.

The last theme highlighted by the data analysis is a preference for remote work after the COVID-19 pandemic. Hybrid WFH arrangements, such as two or three days per week, appear to be more convenient for employees in the future, once the pandemic has passed. This is a somewhat positive tone regarding WFH deployment, given that 80% of informants had no prior experience with WFH. By using hybrid WFH, employees may maintain a productive and flexible work schedule while still managing household responsibilities. Additionally, they can work from home on certain days while maintaining contact with their coworkers. This hybrid WFH option was selected since it is a win-win situation for both the employee and the firm, when an employee was also more satisfied with their work as they spent less time in the office and could still handle their household duties (Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020).

### **5.1 Managerial implications**

Flexible working arrangements will be a future trend in human resource management (Minbaeva, 2020). All of informants also expressed a positive interest in continuing WFH once the pandemic ends. It is good opportunity for companies to develop a comprehensive policy for this work configuration, considering the real circumstances at home. There are several recommendations are suggested by this study for employers. First, employers must be aware that when doing WFH, working hours remain the same, only the location changes so they need to arrange WFH policy that prevent or minimize of distorted working hours. Second, companies must plan how to support their employees to have appropriate workplace setting, work equipment, and technological support at home (Sadhna et al., 2020). Third, employers should implement a comprehensive and equitable performance management system that prioritizes an output control system (Chang et al., 2021) so that employees' performance can be measured objectively and equitably across all job kinds.

## **6. CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

This research elucidated the essence of WFH implementation in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic by identifying eight common themes that addressed our research objectives. For the first research objective, describing Indonesian workers' experiences doing WFH during the COVID-19 pandemic, it was discovered that they confronted a number of



challenges linked to virtual communication and data dependency that were considerably different from what they did in the office. These circumstances led in extended and distorted work hours, during which employees were contacted regarding their duties even after office hours. Additionally, it was discovered that supervisors employed a higher level of output control during the pandemic-WFH. Additionally, being at home clearly resulted in work-family interference, particularly for working parents. The second objective of this research is to acquire a better understanding of the influence of WFH adoption on employee work performance in Indonesia during the COVID-19 crisis. The findings suggested that, despite the aforementioned circumstances, the workers performed at approximately the same level as they did while working from the office. Flexibility, the presence of a support system, and self-motivation were all deemed advantageous for assisting employees in performing effectively.

After delving into several fascinating themes, this research does have a limitation. Despite the fact that the informants come from a variety of different business sectors, it turns out that they are all in the millennial generation's age range. As a result, future study can examine other generation categories, including the X and Z generations. During the COVID-19 pandemic, workers from previous generations may have a different perspective regarding this WFH. Following that, further research may concentrate on one of the study's results and go deeper into it. For example, in light of the discovery of a focus on output control during WFH, study related to the development of output control systems for a variety of job kinds is an appealing issue.

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