

EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVES ON THE TRANSITION OF NORMAL WORK RETURN AFTER FLEXIBLE WORKING PERIOD



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Abstract

This research aims to provide an alternative narrative about the employees' perceptions and experiences regarding the transition to a normal working mode after experiencing a period of flexible work on a return-to-work (RTW) policy. This research uses a qualitative method with an interpretivism approach. Utilizing semi-structured in-depth interviews with 17 participants that were selected by using purposive sampling from various professions and companies. The findings of this research reveal difficulties encountered during the implementation of work changes among employees. These difficulties are evident through observed patterns of thinking and resistance stemming from the loss of opportunities to engage in flexible work arrangements. The implications of this study hold relevance for governmental bodies and organizations as they seek to establish congruence between their objectives and the interests of employees. By considering the insights gained from this research, decision-makers can foster an environment that harmonizes the needs of both entities, contributing to enhanced organizational outcomes and employee satisfaction. Emphasizing employee narratives as change executioners during work transition, this study further looks at attributes workers displayed during three distinct change period phases. This study contributes to the subject of organizational management by extending prior research on the return-to-work process across various contexts and situations.

Keywords: Return-to-Work, Employees' Perspective, Flexible Working, Adaptation, Rejection

INTRODUCTION

The Year 2022 is seen as a transition from the flexible working system, known as work from home (WFH), back to the normal work-from-office (WFO) setting (WHO, 2022). The return-to-work (RTW) phenomenon, marked by the improvement in the COVID-19 pandemic situation, has resulted in employees gradually returning to office-based work environments. The Indonesian Government has issued regulations on allowing non-essential offices to implement work-from-office (WFO) arrangements with a maximum attendance of 100 percent (Menteri Dalam Negeri Republik Indonesia, 2022). The transitioning situation has also been implemented by civil servants way before under the Ministry of Administrative (2022) and Bureaucratic Reform Enforcement mandating immediate return as the social restriction community activities lifted.

The need to return to the normal workplace in a corporation or other organization has been emphasized by business professionals. According to Rhenald Kasali, organizations must resume office hours due to the urgent necessity to complete specific duties, especially in the service and banking sectors. (Brilian, 2023) Employee preferences have, however, changed as a result of the pandemic's adaptability to flexible working arrangements. The "Great Resignation" phenomenon, which saw 11.5 million American workers voluntarily leave their jobs, was brought on by the pandemic's altered work dynamics and emphasized the value of work-life balance (Montaudon-Tomas et al., 2023) Employees prefer to return to regular jobs only if they offer options for flexible work arrangements, according to a follow-up study called "Great Resignation Reality Check," which was carried out in Southeast Asia (Walters, 2022)

The dynamics of work process change are closely related to time considerations and contextual occurrences. Employee-driven initiatives that began to emerge in the 1970s provided the push for changing traditional work norms, such as the 9-to-5 paradigm. The necessity for an adjustment to flexible work arrangements, involving digitalization, remote work approaches, and informal settings, that give employees the ability to have control over their work processes featured by criticisms raised against the usual 40-hour workweek (van Meel, 2011). The idea of flexible office work came forth as a result of scholars' conceptual comparison of office work to factory labor in the 1990s (van Meel, 2011). Traditional

workplace environments came under criticism and required fundamental changes because they were characterized by inflexible cubicle arrangements, ingrained hierarchical systems, and boring daily schedules.

The investigation of return-to-work (RTW) in organizational settings holds paramount importance, necessitating further scholarly inquiry and improvement. The historical understanding of transitioning or returning within organizations, along with the success rates and influential factors, calls for comprehensive research endeavors. Existing literature has predominantly concentrated on the medical aspects of employees' RTW, focusing on physical limitations, survivorship, injuries, and specific illnesses. These studies have shed light on the significance of sociodemographic, clinical, economic, and psychological factors as determinants of successful RTW (He et al., 2010). Moreover, recent investigations have primarily addressed the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting the need for multidisciplinary, contextually diverse, and conflict-ridden studies to provide a broader knowledge base on the RTW process (Guidetti et al., 2022)

Organizational entities consist of individuals and groups characterized by disparate interests, values, and objectives. Consequently, it becomes imperative for change management practitioners to acknowledge the significance of perspectives, which stem from the socialization process and personal experiences. In doing so, change managers can effectively comprehend and address the emotional responses of employees. By recognizing that motivation acts as a positive resource, contributing to employees' willingness, commitment, and support during organizational transitions, managers can facilitate successful change implementation (Palmer, 2017).

Understanding how employees see themselves as key actors in the implementation of such policies can reveal different takeaways on post-pandemic return-to-work policies, especially from those who have derived advantages from flexible work arrangements. This study aims to comprehend the experiences of employees experiencing work change and their effects on the organization as a whole and the individuals involved. The research will concentrate on gathering various narratives, especially alternative narratives, to offer insightful information about the application of current policies. This study intends to bring value to the ongoing process of policy implementation by examining these various narratives. Furthermore, this

study tries to understand how resistance in order manifests itself as an intersubjective and embedded phenomenon within particular social situations.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Approximately 255 million jobs have been lost as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to data released by the United Nations, and there have been substantial economic disruptions in many different regions. The epidemic has caused significant changes within the organization context, particularly in the adoption of new work paradigms like remote work with hybrid models. Employees generally agree that remote work is important for ensuring stable work performance and improving employee well-being, especially for women who find it easier to manage household duties and childcare obligations (Su'adah et al., 2022).

Prior studies on the idea of RTW have concentrated on the procedure designed to make it easier for employees to return directly to work, especially after a particular condition like illness or disability. According to Fiabane (2013), RTW is multimodal, with psychosocial variables having a bigger impact than just medical ones. Studies analyzing the process have determined four demographic traits have a significant impact on the procedure's success and failure (Foreman et al., 2006). These traits include of age, gender, marital status, and level of education. According to research, female employees in particular (Berecki-Gisolf et al., 2012) and older employees tend to have difficulties with the RTW process (He et al., 2010).

Organizational change is examined as a reaction to a crisis that is marked by uncertainty and the need for adaptability. Utilizing the theories of Armenakis and Harris (2002), organizational transformation is viewed as a group effort involving employee engagement inside an organization to accomplish common goals. This cooperative effort requires several adaptations in reaction to shifting societal dynamics caused by things like changing consumer preferences, rivalry, technology breakthroughs, and emergencies. Organizations must demonstrate agility and efficacy in responding quickly to shifting market conditions, especially in difficult situations like crises, to ensure their existence. The need for prompt and suitable actions is emphasized in this article's thorough research of organizational

change dynamics in crisis scenarios, which highlights the need for ongoing market competitiveness.

This article emphasizes the significance of work process change as a vital measure for improving organizational performance. To improve organizational performance, work process reform is a key endeavor that calls for a methodical and well-thought-out approach (Kotter, 2012). Work process change, according to Parker and Wall (1998), takes place when businesses adapt their operating procedures and processes to meet specific goals. It refers to shifts in organizational structure, technological advancements, and internal human behavior that is connected (1998; Tushman, 1995). Work process change, also known as transformation, takes the shape of altered tasks, hierarchies, and procedures that affect how people behave at work.

Understanding work process change, then, requires realizing that it is a concerted effort to improve organizational performance and advance the organization by bringing about changes in a variety of areas. Nevertheless, not all planned changes can be successful and accepted. Balogun (2008) indicate that the failure rate of organizational change processes reaches 70%. This suggests that the success of change initiatives depends on how employees respond to them, as each individual has a unique perspective and approach towards change (Lines, 2004). Not all employees exhibit positive reactions; some may respond negatively, which is commonly referred to as resistance to change (Piderit, 2000).

Perception is a multifaceted process influenced by numerous factors that shape individuals' understanding, organization, and interpretation of information derived from their surrounding environment. As elucidated by Robbins (2018), perception represents a cognitive process whereby individuals selectively attend to, structure, and assign meaning to environmental stimuli, thereby constructing their comprehension of the world around them. Regarding changes in work processes, employees' perceptions involve several distinct stages, including the recognition and comprehension of the changes, evaluation of their impacts, and subsequent adjustment processes (Tampubolon, 2020). Furthermore, Blank (2008) highlight the positive relevance of education and marital status to the success of RTW.

However, the implementation of change initiatives can encounter resistance, emanating from both individual employees and the broader organizational context, due to the

inherent difficulty of breaking away from entrenched patterns. Employees may actively challenge changes they perceive as deviating from established norms, employing a positive form of resistance characterized by assertively expressing disagreement, substantiated by compelling rationale and supporting evidence. Conversely, negative resistance manifests passively, wherein employees exhibit behaviors such as noncompliance with managerial directives, feigning ignorance or disregard of orders (Tepper et al., 2001).

Setting boundaries and offering assistance during reintegration are key factors in the return to work process, which in turn affects employee well-being (Vooijs et al., 2015). In this context, management is emphasized as an essential factor in success, focusing on the impact of employees' psychological conditions on the process of returning to work. This includes concern over the demands of the job, managerial support, anxiety, and stress throughout the transition back to work (Lamore et al., 2019). However, the actual implementation of RTW leaves little room for a thorough examination of the effects that employees experience in particular circumstances during the transitional period of work process changes post-COVID-19 pandemic. This study aims to address the literature gap by investigating the perceptions of employees during the transition to the new work normal following the COVID-19 pandemic.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study lies in an interpretivist epistemology, which asserts that individuals actively construct and give meaning to their realities regarding events, actions, processes, ideologies, and conditions in the world (Patton, 2014). Interpretivism recognizes the existence of multiple subjective realities, emphasizing that individuals interpret and perceive the world based on their unique perspectives and experiences (Atkinson, 2012). By adopting an interpretive lens, this study acknowledges the subjective nature of human perception and seeks to understand how individuals construct their understandings of the post-pandemic work transition process. Hence, an interpretive qualitative research approach was chosen as the methodology, allowing the researcher to explore the understanding and interpretation of the meanings and intentions underlying human interactions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

We recruited participants via broadcasting messages targeting employees within the working period at their organization from before the Pandemic until the post-pandemic situation. The exploratory survey using an online Google form aims specifically to filter those employees' characteristics. Participant involvement was entirely voluntary, where they chose happily to the option to be interviewed and participate in this study. The interview process all conducted using online Zoom as a tool to accommodate the locations of the participants and consider the return-to-work conditions. The analysis is based on interviews with 17 participants selected from various professions and companies. They include 3 participants working in government, 4 participants in state-owned enterprises, and 10 participants in the private sector. The interviews focused on eliciting people's understanding of the transition in work changes by referring to their day-to-day experience. An interview guideline was used while also recognizing the need for flexibility. The interviews were digitally recorded with the duration of 45 to 60 min for each interview that was held from January until March 2023.

The data analysis in this study utilized the thematic analysis method developed by Braun (2019) which consists of six phases: data familiarization, initial coding, theme searching, theme reviewing, defining and naming themes, and reporting. Thematic analysis is a process of identifying patterns or themes in the data collected by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Holloway & Todres (2003) consider this method as fundamental to many qualitative research approaches. Additionally, thematic analysis offers flexibility in terms of research questions, data types, data volume, theoretical choices, and the ability to analyze data (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The beginning process of understanding data at this stage by ensuring that the transcript includes all the conversations that were made during the interview. Conversation transcripts were obtained from the audio recordings of each interview. The next step is identifying the initial code (coding) which means simplifying and focusing on data based on a particular characteristic (Nowell et al., 2017). After that, the code results made by observations start to give patterns of meaning in it. The researcher continues by grouping

codes that have similarities to be grouped into a theme (context). The themes in this study are formed through a process of analysis, unifying, comparing, and describing the relationships between themes as well as the relationships between themes and sub-themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020)

Table 1
Sample of Analysis of Interview Transcripts

Subject	Quotes	Keywords	Contexts	Work Transitions Meaning
CS/ P6	"As civil servants, we don't have a choice . We have to follow the regulations set by the government. So, we have to go back to working in the office again, following the government's instructions."	No options	There's no questioning over a direction	Lack of Alternative Spaces
CS/ P17	"In my organization, there is no tolerance because the culture is top-down and militaristic. They see that when people work remotely, they are not working, so now everyone is required to come to the office again."	Oversight	One-way communication	
(P4)/ PM	"For me, work from home was more structured . I could manage my work and rest time well and maintain a balance."	Manage	On comparing the working process	Loss of Job Autonomy
(P8)/ Support	"We have been at home for a long time, so I find it more flexible at home. Going to the office now seems complicated. If we can work from home, why go to the office? "	Questioning	When embracing normal work again	
P9 /Support	At the office, I see that productivity has decreased , in my opinion, expenses have increased	Downgrade	Working in the Office Does Not Mean Increased Productivity	No Improvement in Productivity

P15/ Knowledge	When I'm at home, compared to when I'm in the office , I actually have less time."	Comparing	Time Spent Unproductively	
P11/ Analyst	" I feel lazy when I'm in the office because there are always distractions and I can't have flexible working and still complete all our tasks.	Unwillingness	Unpreparedness for Adjustment	Loss of Work Motivation
P5/ Researcher	"In my opinion, having WFO every day is no longer relevant , considering that we can have flexible working and still complete all our tasks	Irrelevant	Non-Adaptive Organization	

The government's work process change policy, namely the return to working from the office (WFO) as a response to the declining cases of the COVID-19 pandemic, has generated various responses among employees, as it requires them to readjust. Findings from interviews indicate that there is a notable level of resistance towards the implementation of returning to normal working conditions. However, this study focuses on capturing the perspectives, transition experiences, and the impact of employees' adaptation to normal working conditions after a period of flexible working, through alternative narratives provided by employees who have experienced the policy implementation. The research findings are presented through four major thematic areas, formed based on the participants' perspectives, namely: (1) Lack of Alternative Spaces; (2) Loss of Job Autonomy; (3) No Improvement in Productivity; and (4) Loss of Work Motivation. These four themes are discussed in an informative and comprehensive manner, as depicted in Figure (1).

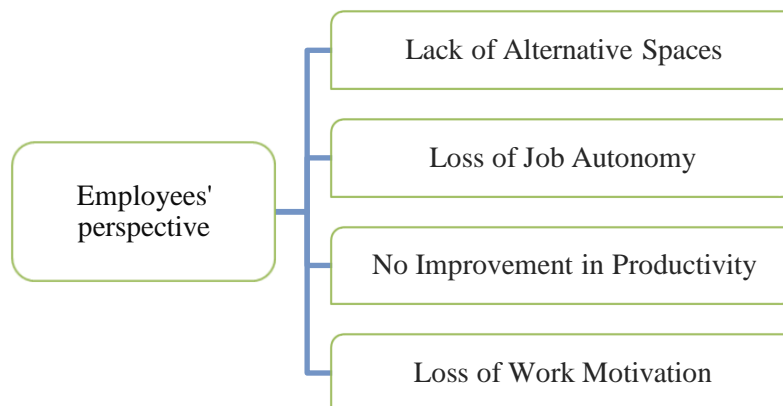


Figure 1
Research Theme Map

Lack of Alternative Spaces

Mandatory Compliance

The keyword "must" in the context of the implemented directive signifies the dominant perspective among civil servants in describing their response to the government's full-time office work decision. It highlights the importance of complying with the given directive or command. In the context mentioned, it suggests that there is a strong emphasis on the obligation to adhere to the prescribed rules and regulations, and there may be little room for deviation or personal choice. This sheds light on the behavior as exemplified in the following quotation from Participant 3:

"As civil servants, we don't have a choice. We have to follow the regulations set by the government. So, we have to go back to working in the office again, following the government's instructions." (P6)

Participant 17 expresses their response indicating the impossibility of keeping the flexible working conditions. They faced challenges due to the hierarchical structure within the institution, where the top leadership's decision is binding and units have no say or room for discussion.

"We can't do it anymore because the difficult part is that the ministry's top leadership said everyone has to come back to the office, and the units can't say anything or go against it. We have to obey." (P17)

Participants further elaborate on the behavior of superiors, emphasizing that their directives should be followed by subordinates.

"Like our secretary general said, all civil servants have to come back to the office, so there's no excuse for not coming in." (P3)

"If we're required to work full-time, we follow the government's regulations. So, we continue to work." (P10)

"I have to follow, because it's already regulated. It's mandatory." (P9)

Based on the participants' narratives, it can be concluded that if employees were given a choice, they would prefer to work from home (WFH). However, since the WFO work system is reinstated by the government and implemented in organizations, employees have no choice but to follow the orders. Based on the above description, also it can be understood that the interpretations are influenced by the professional identity and the location of the participants' respective institutions.

No Room for Flexibility

Another perspective indicates that there is no opportunity for flexible work due to the return-to-work policy imposed by the government. The changes in the implementation of work transition, show that there is no opportunity for them to explain that flexible work can still be carried out after the end of the pandemic. The difficulty in communicating within the civil service profession to express opinions on what participants believe should be implemented. This is expressed by Participant 6 in the interpretation of the implementation of work transition as follows:

"Yeah, from our side, it's like it's already certain because there's unnegotiable so be it." (P6)

Participant 3 on the lack of room for expressing opinions is particularly relevant to the point where the work location is determined by the participant's attachment to their institution.

"We are used to receiving orders from above, so whether we have our own opinions or not, we have no choice but to follow what they say, that's it. So, we have no other choice." (P3)

Another narrative expressed by Participant 17 shows how the attitudes of senior officials in institutions reflect a negative interpretation of remote work, considering it as not working, leading to the resumption of on-site work when the pandemic situation starts to improve.

"In my organization, there is no tolerance because the culture is top-down and militaristic. They see that when people work remotely, they are not working, so now everyone is required to come to the office again." (P17)

Other narratives from participants indicate that the work process requires 100% attendance, even though the role of superiors is crucial for employees who still need flexibility.

"We have to be present all the time. WFH is allowed, but with specific reasons and it also requires approval from superiors." (P14)

"Yes, we have to be present, and I prefer it when the person is present, so it's more difficult if we have flexible working arrangements." (P15)

The narratives from the participants conclude that working full-time in the office is seen as an obligation based on their understanding of their working experience, which revolves around following the working patterns of their superiors. Additionally, employees have no room whatsoever to communicate their opinions regarding the return to normal work systems. This is due to the top-down communication culture within the organization, making it difficult to express their opinions.

Failure to Learn from the Past

The transition process towards returning to normal work or 100% on-site work, which eventually needs to be implemented in the post-pandemic period, shows a lack of adjustment or adaptation to past changes that yielded many positive results but were unfortunately abolished. This viewpoint reflects an inflexible organizational culture that does not see the need to be constantly adaptive, especially in responding to changes in work methods.

"They feel comfortable and don't want to learn new things, even though many are willing to learn, but everything remains stagnant." (P17)

Another understanding expressed by Participant 3 is the lack of adjustment to the institutional support for external environmental changes that impact the significant congestion that occurs after the implementation of the RTW policy. This is perceived to significantly affect the transportation activities of civil servants and the time spent on the road.

"But if it can't be implemented for all 2,000 employees in the office, those whose homes are outside DKI Jakarta, they only arrive at the office by 8:30. The accumulation of delays and reprimands can lead to a deduction in allowances." (P3)

Participant 6 mentioned that the current working institution is perceived to lack a vision for implementing flexible working methods. This is because the institution believes that the best working process should be conducted face-to-face.

"So, in the end, if it's from the organization's side, they still choose the traditional, more manual approach, like before." (P6)

Participants also express their views on the organization's lack of understanding regarding the positive impact on employees when allowing flexible working. Participants demonstrate how organizations should recognize the importance of work-life balance in the current era.

"In the past, we were forced to work early in the morning and report back late at night, like robots. But if there is a policy that provides freedom while still applying regulations." (P8)

Another perspective comes from employees who feel that returning to work in the office is a wrong decision because they have adapted to and become accustomed to remote work, considering working in the office as an outdated and ineffective concept. Participant 15 describes their experience with RTW in their work environment.

"I'm already tired when I arrive at the office because the journey itself is exhausting. So, there is no enthusiasm for work. They might be tired and want a new environment." (P15)

Participant 5, who works in the research field, believes that organizations should reconsider work flexibility. This is because the positive impacts are not only beneficial for employees but also for the company and the environment.

"For sectors that can be done from home, it's better to strive for remote work to reduce congestion, save costs for the office, and provide benefits for employees to make them happier. What matters is achieving the target. This way, time management can be honed, and we can also manage our work rhythm." (P5)

The narratives from the participants above conclude that organizations have not fully recognized the positive impact of flexible working during the pandemic. The organizations have not viewed WFH as a system that brings benefits to employees, indicating that the return to the old way of working has not significantly influenced the work approach. It can be understood that the organizations and management as part of it show a lack of wisdom getting of the organization regarding the success of flexible working in the past. The rigid

institutional characteristics and the belief that ideal work should involve all activities being carried out.

Loss of Job Autonomy

Work Loss Flexibility

View of disappointment expressed regarding the 100% implementation of RTW suggests a lack of consideration for the success achieved in the past when flexible work arrangements were in place. Even though remote or WFH work can yield good results, some participants expressed their disappointment with the RTW implementation. Participant 17 shared their experience with RTW related to their work: In fact, my work doesn't have to be done in the office.

There are often distractions when working in the office. (P17)

Participant 6 expressed their personal view that flexible work during the pandemic provided an opportunity for participants to determine the best work process for themselves:

It's just that it's still better if we have flexibility in working hours, so we can manage it ourselves. (P6)

"For me, Work from Home was more structured. I could manage my work and rest time well and maintain a balance." (P4)

Participant 3 suggested that organizations should consider flexibility rules to address the traffic issue:

Going to the office every day is tiring now because it's better to work 3 days, come in today, and don't come in tomorrow (hybrid). (P3)

"Yeah, once you're in, the superiors prefer it when people are present, so it's harder for us to have flexible working." (P14)

Another narrative from Participant 10 highlights the challenges faced by employees working in a company with affiliations to the government, making it difficult to reintroduce flexible working:

"It's because we can't be as flexible since we have to follow government regulations." (P10)

Based on the statements provided by the participants, it can be concluded that employees feel a loss of flexibility when returning to office work. The rules make it difficult for them to manage their work and rest time in a balanced manner, resulting in a loss of work-life balance that was previously achieved during the pandemic. Participants also suggest that

the government did not consider the benefits of remote work, which had previously yielded good results and provided employees with the freedom to manage their work processes.

Reluctance to Embrace Changes

The recommendation to return to full-time office work after a period of flexible work arrangements shows the reluctance of participants to return to normal working conditions. The habits that provided convenience, especially those that significantly influenced work-life balance and yielded satisfactory results through flexible work arrangements, were questioned by some participants. Participants 6 and 8 questioned the implementation of RTW, suggesting that the previous work process before the pandemic should be adapted to and adjusted to external changes.

Even though we felt comfortable with the previous WFH-WFO (hybrid) arrangement, why can't we just continue with WFH-WFO? (P6)

"We have been at home for a long time, so I find it more flexible at home. Going to the office now seems complicated. If we can work from home, why go to the office?" (P8)

Participant 17 expressed their response to the return to normal work conditions, which resulted in indifference as a form of disappointment with the implemented RTW rules:

But now I don't want to work after 4 PM unless it's really urgent and requires overtime. (P17)

"For example, if we have to be in the office all the time and follow strict rules, it can be demotivating. Maybe it would be better to consider other options that still offer flexibility in working hours." (P15)

Participant 16 shares a narrative indicating that employees in an organization may not immediately adjust to the normal work routine but require time for the process:

"At first, we were still halfway there, and then eventually everyone returned to the office." (P16)

Employees' perspectives highlight the difficulties employees face during the RTW transition, with their reluctance to change resulting in half-hearted adjustments. This is because employees were satisfied with remote work during the pandemic. The narratives above indicate that the consequences of RTW implementation made employees reluctant to comply because flexible work also provided a sense of freedom and yielded satisfactory results. Another impact was that it made employees indifferent and apathetic towards their work.

No Improvement in Productivity

Working in the Office Does Not Mean Increased Productivity

One of the narratives circulating is about the process of working in an organization or institution that expects employees to return to the office to increase work productivity. However, in the implementation carried out by civil servants, the return to full-time office work is perceived to have no significant difference compared to the results achieved when working remotely. Participant 6, 15, and 9 explain their experience of returning to normal office work, which shows no connection to increased productivity:

"If we work from home, it can also be done, and it won't be a problem if there are visits required." (P6)

"At the office, I see that productivity has decreased, in my opinion, expenses have increased." (Participant 15)

"At the office, you might not be able to work fully, sometimes you have to work overtime, and so on." (Participant 9)

Other narratives expressed by participants 3 and 17 indicate that working full-time with many employees returning to the office is not beneficial because the RTW process is implemented simultaneously not only in government but also in various sectors, resulting in long commuting times and physical fatigue.

"To avoid getting tired of commuting five days a week, morning and evening, it's not healthy for the employees." (P3)

"Not to mention floods, traffic jams, and I work in the morning, so it's very exhausting to go through all that." (P17)

Furthermore, participant 11 and Participant 1 shared their experiences after implementing RTW, showing that the return to office work did not result in significant performance improvements compared to working from home.

"It's more or less the same result between working from home and working from the office." (Participant 11)

"There's no intention to change; we're still working from anywhere until now because it doesn't change the quality." (Participant 1)

The narratives of the participants lead to the conclusion that returning to normal work does not lead to increased productivity. The results are either lower or similar to those achieved during remote work. It is understood because working productively is perceived to have no connection to the office-based working system. The immediate impact of the RTW implementation is that employees spend a long-time commuting, which hinders their ability

to work productively. Both physical and mental health factors are considerations mentioned by the participants. Some views indicate a decline in productivity when returning to office work. This is reflected in the statements of Participant 15 and Participant 9, who explain that the post-pandemic changes have affected various aspects.

Time Spent Unproductively

The implementation of RTW shows an influence on declining work productivity. The post-pandemic commute for employees requires more time, making it less efficient compared to the ease of flexible work processes. This is evidently expressed by fellow participants in interpreting the process of returning to full-time work, comparing it to the flexible work approach, as stated in the following quote:

"Actually, we could allocate our energy to more substantive matters. So, I agree that we should have flexible working, wherever and whenever, as long as it is productive." (P6)

"When I'm at home, compared to when I'm in the office, I actually have less time." (Participant 15)

"But if I have to go to the office, I waste time on the road." (Participant 9)

"Getting ready, dressing up, and so on, it takes time. But at home, I don't care much, I don't feel like preparing for the office." (Participant 5)

Another narrative is shared by Participant 3 regarding their experience during the RTW process in a government institution, which highlights the excessive engagement in ceremonial activities that are considered to be distracting from work:

"Working full-time in the office is not effective either. Being in an environment where it seems like work is happening in the office, but actually, there are various ceremonial events that can be more effective when working from home." (P3)

Participant 17 also mentions in their narrative the experience of returning to work at the office, where there are many unrelated events:

"For example, being involved in many events, which is very disturbing." (P17)

Another perspective is shared by Participant 1, stating that location is no longer relevant to job performance, as the participant can manage their work remotely.

"For me, it's relevant whether I can work independently remotely, where we can maximize work at home." (Participant 1)

The understanding of the participants indicates that the return to office unfortunately happens to be more non-substantive activities that disrupt the main job desks of participants. The views collectively indicate that returning to normal work wastes time on commuting

which narrows down employees' productivity. On the other hand, remote work allows them to maximize their work within the designated working hours without considering the preparation and travel time from home to the office.

Loss of Work Motivation

Unpreparedness for Adjustment

Participants manage and maintain their motivation towards the change from a comfortable and enjoyable work-from-home situation to the requirement of returning to the office. The adaptation required to work together with all employees in the same location has shown discomfort due to repeated adaptation processes and added pressure. This is reflected in the following statement:

"But because for two years we were used to WFH-WFO (Hybrid), going back feels different, like the motivation is lacking." (P6)

"After the pandemic, we have to adapt again to meeting more people, whereas before we were comfortable, it was quieter and more relaxed."(P16)

Another narrative expressed by Participant 3 based on the experience of RTW indicates the need for flexibility in normal work processes, by providing an opportunity to continue having the option to work remotely full-time (five working days):

"Yeah, there's one day where you rest at home while working, you know. I mean, after returning to normal, it would be better to have a rule for one WFH day... Yeah, WFH for just one day." (P3)

Another perspective from Participant 17 suggests a lack of motivation to return to normal work due to repetitive adjustments that do not yield significant results: "And now we have to adjust to a full-time work schedule.

"But working full-time at the office is not effective either." (P17)

"I can't focus. I meet people here and there, and while I'm working, I get interrupted, so I can't finish my tasks."(P11)

Participant 9 indicates a form of resistance observed among employees in their office behavior. This is demonstrated by an employee who believes that work can be done remotely, even during RTW, and feels confident enough to not follow the RTW policy in place.

"I heard stories from HRD colleagues about cases where there are still people who carry the WFH mindset, so when there's something, they say, 'If I work from home, it's not a problem.'" (Participant 9)

The accounts from the participants illustrate resistance to the change in the normal work system or Return to Work (RTW), as they continue to implement WFH even though the organization or company has advocated for WFO. Additionally, working in the office brings pressures and challenges in adaptation due to the monotonous office environment that does not align with the comfort of the employees. The monotonous and uncomfortable office environment can affect the mental well-being of employees. It can be concluded that participants have lost the enthusiasm to adapt to returning to normal work or WFO. This is because reverting to the old ways does not result in effectiveness.

Non-Adaptive Organization

The highly structured and rigid work processes in government agencies indicate a view of a lack of adaptability in response to changing circumstances. Returning to normal work demonstrates a lack of openness to embrace new and beneficial changes in the present and future. This is reflected in the following statement by participant 17:

"The budget has already been allocated for various things, so it limits our ability to be adaptive." (P17)

Another narrative expressed by Participant 6 is that the habit of following orders from superiors becomes one of the barriers to expecting work flexibility:

"We are accustomed to receiving orders from above, from the top, and it goes straight down." (P6)

Participant 5, demonstrates resilience in adjusting their behavior to comply with the new policy in their work system, which involves returning to WFO. They make adjustments by managing their time allocation for tasks. Although they feel tired of the change in the system, they will seek other options to regain flexibility in their way of working.

"In my opinion, having WFO every day is no longer relevant, considering that we can have flexible working and still complete all our tasks."

For employees, this can lead to the development of diseases such as stroke or blood clots, which ultimately cause significant negative consequences for the workers' families and the company due to the ineffectiveness of the old concept of working.

"But now it seems like no one cares anymore; no one asks why we work at cafes. No one asks anymore."(P8)

These narratives suggest that the organizational structure and lack of adaptability hinder the participants' motivation to return to work. The top-down approach and budget constraints restrict their ability to adapt to new work methods. participants' perspectives also indicate that the company's decision to return to the old way of working without considering the positive impact on employees is not showing consideration. The old way of working should be considered irrelevant, considering the benefits of flexible working methods.

Working Only as Necessary

The change in attitude from civil servants who feel that returning to work at the office is a wrong decision stems from their adaptation and familiarity with remote work, making working at the office no longer effective. This is demonstrated by participant 17, indicating a shift in their perspective towards the implementation of RTW:

"Now I want to work with work-life balance and don't want to put in more effort than that because I feel like we didn't learn anything from the pandemic." (P17)

Furthermore, the narrative from Participant 6 mentions their experience of returning to full-time work, which is still being done remotely. It shows that the influence of the old ways has not been eliminated. The attitudes of civil servants and the institution itself still justify this process:

"It's already full, like that. If someone can work remotely, then we do it remotely." (P6)

Based on the participants' understanding, it indicates that the transition to WFO is considered less effective, stemming from the perceived benefits of WFH implementation. The spirit of adapting to normal work is demonstrated by civil servants who only work as usual without requiring maximum effort.

Considering a Career Change

Experiencing a shift in the way work is done, which can be carried out flexibly, has an impact on workers, especially civil servants who are starting to consider career options that offer such opportunities. This is because flexible work is seen as something that can be done in the era of technological advancements and has personal implications for achieving a balance in personal life. This is expressed by participant 17 as follows:

"But I don't know, one day when I'm already married and have children, moving to a new place will definitely burden me a lot. So, if there is a more flexible place, I will move there." (P17)

Realizing the changes in perspective regarding the new work situation leads participants to prefer companies that can provide a flexible work system. This was also expressed by participants 4, 5, and 14 as follows:

"If I want to switch to a job outside of education, my thinking might be different." (P4)
"Yeah, if it reaches the point of being full-time WFO and feeling exhausted, I think I'll look for other options that can offer flexibility again." (P5)
"Yes, as long as the work is beneficial and more flexible, I would definitely give it a try." (P14)

The location of work is no longer the determining factor for an employee's success, indicating a preference for potential career changes, as expressed by Participant 9.

"Basically, the type of work we do doesn't require being onsite. So, if there's a company that offers more flexibility, it would definitely be more appealing." (P9)

In conclusion, the return to the WFO work system makes employees reconsider their careers. Participants believe that if a company offers a flexible work system, it becomes an attractive option, considering the presence of technology that can facilitate work completion in their lives.

Discussion

In this subsection, the author will discuss the findings and present a descriptive narrative about employees' perspectives on readjusting to normal working methods after a period of flexible working. The findings reveal that employees have varying perspectives on returning to normal working methods after a period of flexible working.

The finding regarding the perspective theme "Lack of Alternative Space" is also consistent with the research conducted by Diah (2015), which states that individual tendencies play a major role in employees' resistance to the change in the system. However, employee resistance is not always immediate. Consistent with the study by Anggardini & Affandi (2017), the position, both in terms of level and position, influences the extent of the resistance shown. Ultimately, employees will comply with the rules and orders issued by the organization, such as implementing 100% WFO or returning to the normal way of working.

Nevertheless, the unwillingness, indifference, and passive behavior displayed by employees in the implementation of RTW are forms of passive resistance resulting from their refusal.

The perspectives found in this study are in line with Lewin's theory (1951), which suggests that employees' resistance or reluctance to change occurs because they do not want the change to be realized due to fear of organizational setbacks or the loss of comfort they had before the change. It is also mentioned in Balogun (2008) that the failure rate of organizational change processes reaches 70%. This indicates that success depends on how employees respond to the change, as each employee has a different perspective on dealing with change (Lines, 2004). Not all employees react positively; some may have negative reactions, which are known as resistance to change (Piderit, 2000).

Some employees express discomfort with the company's decision to implement a Return to Work (RTW) policy and resume full-time office work. They prefer to maintain a flexible working style, such as working from home (WFH), even when the office has returned to normal. Several reasons are mentioned to support this preference. Employees find comfort in working from home, avoiding distractions in the office, and feeling more relaxed while carrying out their tasks. They also express dissatisfaction with the monotonous and uncomfortable office environment, which negatively affects their mental well-being. Some employees perceive the return to normal working as a regression. Furthermore, there is a sentiment that the RTW decision is imposed unilaterally by management, resulting in a lack of motivation among employees. They feel that the decision does not consider their needs and preferences, disregarding the benefits derived from work flexibility.

The findings also indicate a change in employees' perspectives regarding work methods, influencing their preferences when choosing another career or company. They tend to seek organizations that offer flexible work arrangements, allowing them to maintain a balance between work and personal life. In conclusion, the study highlights employees' perspectives on readjusting to normal working methods after a period of flexible working. These perspectives encompass the preference for flexible work arrangements, dissatisfaction with the office environment, and the perception of the RTW decision as one-sided. The findings also suggest that employees consider work flexibility as a significant factor when evaluating job opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study show an exploration of employee perspectives leads to the meaning of resistance to changes in the normal way of working. This form of rejection in the minds of employees who make these changes shows their incompetence based on their position and level given by the organization. So it is not possible to get a flexible alternative. Employees' resistance to change is negatively affected by this loss of work freedom. Employees find it challenging making it a lengthy procedure that is not immediate to adjust.

Employees also show indifferent behavior as a form of disappointment with half-hearted work and show their willingness to try another career that brings flexibility. The implementation of a return to normal work results in decreased productivity, as the simultaneous adoption of this process by all organizations leads to challenges in commuting time, preparation, and physical well-being. The transition back to normal work does not have a direct correlation with work productivity. Instead, the work environment itself plays a significant role in determining productivity.

This research has three main objectives: (1) To explore employees' perspectives on the transition from a flexible working period to the normal work mode, (2) To identify the forms or strategies of employees' self-adjustment during the transition, and (3) To identify the impact of employees' self-adjustment on the transition. Through the conducted study, four major themes were identified, reflecting the participants' narratives: "Lack of Alternative Space," "Loss of Job Autonomy," "No Improvement in Productivity," and "Loss of Work Motivation." Therefore, in this chapter, the researcher will present the research conclusions based on the findings and analysis.

The study aimed to gain insights into employees' experiences during the transition from a flexible working period to a regular work mode. The first theme, "Lack of Alternative Space," illustrates that employees expressed a sense of constraint and dissatisfaction due to the absence of alternative work arrangements. They felt confined to traditional work settings and believed that their work-life balance was compromised. The second theme, "Loss of Job Autonomy," highlights the participants' perception of reduced autonomy in decision-making and task execution. They described feeling micromanaged and restricted, which negatively impacted their job satisfaction and sense of empowerment.

The third theme, "No Improvement in Productivity," suggests that the transition did not result in increased productivity as anticipated. Employees shared their frustrations about inefficiencies and challenges they faced during the adaptation period, indicating that the new work mode did not yield the desired outcomes. Lastly, the theme "Loss of Work Motivation" reveals a decline in employees' motivation during the transition. Participants reported decreased enthusiasm and engagement, attributing it to factors such as reduced social interactions, diminished team spirit, and a sense of disconnection from the organization.

Despite the insightful conclusions drawn from this study, it is critical to recognize its limitations, which present opportunities for additional research and future studies. This study's focus on the change from flexible work schedules to normal work modes without exploring the unique effects of other professions or organizational cultures is one of its limitations. The findings may not be generalizable to certain sectors or work settings because they do not take into account the specifics brought by different professions or the impact of organizational culture. Therefore, future studies should concentrate on investigating how various professions or organizational cultures affect employees' perspectives and experiences during changes in work mode.

Furthermore, this study focused solely on the employees' side of the transition process and did not explore the perspectives of managers or organizational leaders. Examining the viewpoints of these stakeholders could offer valuable insights into the challenges they face in managing and facilitating the transition, as well as their strategies for supporting employees during the process. Future research could adopt a multi-dimensional approach that includes perspectives from employees, managers, and organizational leaders to provide a more holistic understanding of work mode transitions.

In conclusion, while this research has shed light on the experiences and challenges faced by employees during the transition from flexible working periods to normal work modes, some limitations provide opportunities for further investigation. Exploring the influence of specific professions, and organizational cultures, and incorporating quantitative measures would enhance the applicability and depth of knowledge in this area. Additionally, expanding the scope to include perspectives from managers and organizational leaders would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the transition process. Addressing these

limitations through future research will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of work mode transitions and facilitate the development of effective strategies for managing and supporting employees in various professional contexts.

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