

Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance among Human Resource Personnel in Malaysian Health Departments during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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ABSTRACT

Work-life balance means keeping work and non-work related matters in equilibrium. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, work-life balance has been a challenge to the employees and employers particularly those working under the health departments in Putrajaya, Malaysia. Therefore, the purpose of the study is to determine the influence of working environment, job demands, and employee stress towards work-life balance among Human Resource personnel. 103 responses to survey questionnaires were collected through convenience sampling technique and the data were analysed using hierarchical multiple regression. The results indicate that job demands and employee stress influence work-life balance. While working environment does not have any relationship with work-life balance. It is recommended that an improved level of stress would enhance the work-life balance of HR personnel by having a policy on work-life balance. In addition, some time off could be given to the personnel to do the non-work related matters.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Working Environment, Job Demands, Employee Stress

1. INTRODUCTION

In this day and age, work-life balance changes over time based on the situation people are living in, be it personal or career (Swarnalatha, 2017). Changes in the labour market's demographic mix, as well as the volume and pace of work, have all been identified as causes that have prompted the interest (Helmle et al., 2014). As noted by Bataineh (2019), one can live a happy, healthy and successful life provided work-life balance exists. Hart (2020) mentioned that the term work-life balance refers to the individual's ability to control over their life while working productively and maintaining a good personal life with enough leisure time. It is essentially what fulfilment means to an individual in one's daily life, and it provides a sense of success by ensuring that one's life is not consumed by work and that one's personal life is relevant without sacrificing job goals.

Human Resource plays an important role in managing human capital where it is a component of the organization's success (Muqedi, 2018). Many organizations have adopted the work-life balance in providing a family-friendly workplace for their personnel (Alexander-Wright, 2020). Thus, implies the importance of HR personnel in an organization. To convince the management or leaders of the organization of the importance of work-life balance, the personnel have to start within themselves moving towards having a work-life balance especially in the current

situation of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) that has plagued the world. Human capital management is particularly important during this pandemic. Hossin et al. (2020) claims that the impact of COVID-19 on the HR operations in Malaysia exists.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Due to the pandemic, the amount of work has just increased with the pandemic that affects Malaysian health departments' personnel greatly (Cullen et al., 2020). Affected personnel is not limited to the healthcare workers, even HR personnel are affected. During this pandemic, HR practices were also impacted including recruitment and selection, remote working, motivating employees, re-skilling and communicating (Przytuła et al., 2020). Based on few brief interviews that were done between the researcher and Malaysian health department's HR personnel, it is mentioned that many challenges arose during this pandemic specifically the work environment, job demands and employee stress (Ajat, personal communication, June 1, 2021). It was described that job demands for HR personnel which involve physical documents can only be acquired at the office (Lattfi, personal communication, June 1, 2021). This also shows that the job depends highly on the physical documents including service book and file for each personnel.

These challenges are perceived as factors that lead to the disturbance in work-life balance of the HR personnel. In which also brings to the personnel issues of struggling to manage a work-life balance while maintaining their professional life (Hart, 2020). During the pandemic, healthcare workers are very important to cater to the health issues, while the support system is essential to cater to the need for healthcare workers (Malaysia, 2020a). It is vice versa when the healthcare workers battle against the pandemic, the support services, in this case, HR personnel engage to keep the number of healthcare workers in line with the cases and services to the healthcare workers are maintained at par (MOH, June 2020). Furthermore, there has been Proclamation of Emergency 2021 which adds up to the HR current work (AGC, 2021). Based on that, other human capital from the various ministries have been placed to the health departments in order to manage the situation (KPPA, 2021). In which adds to the burden of HR personnel of health departments. Therefore, based from the aforementioned arguments, the purpose of the study is to determine the influence of working environment, job demands, and employee stress towards work-life balance among Human Resource personnel.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

3.1 Work-Life Balance

Work-life balance is the balance between an individual's work and personal life (Thompson, 2020). It is when an individual can attain control of their life with abundant free time for that individual, work-life balance is achieved (Pineault, 2019). The accomplishment of fairness between work and life every day came without subjugating personal needs (Schwartz et al., 2019). As Tapp (2018) has mentioned, work-life has been deliberately used in the study though work-family has been used in many other studies. Family is a component of balance to many people, though it is not the only non-work factor for an individual's time (Tapp, 2018). Studies (Davidson, 2017; Swarnalatha, 2017; Tapp, 2018) have shown that work-life balance has many factors and impacts such as the demography (e.g. gender, age, experience, spouse), organizational identity (which includes policies, programmes, organizational culture and support) and pliancy (coping strategies, locus of control, leisure activities and the desire for work-life balance).

3.2 Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance

Working Environment. Working environment is defined as work and context. Work includes all the characteristics of the job being carried out and completed and also involves the task activities, control of one's own job related activities and the intrinsic values of the task (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). Agbozo (2017) has laid out three types of working environment namely physical working environment, psychological working environment and social working environment. The type that relates to this study is physical working environment. Physical working

environment refers to where the work is being performed and work setting such as machinery, office layout, temperature, ventilation, lighting, noise level and space.

Job-Demands. Job demands are defined as aspects of the job that includes social, physical, psychological, or organizational need to sustain the skills be it to gain or reduce (Roethler, 2021). These demands have physiological and psychological costs for individuals in which studies were done on nurses, teachers and based on gender (Chen et al., 2020; Kuranga, 2021; Roethler, 2021). Job demands include matters such as time and work pressure, responsibility, role conflict, and computer problems, which were initially defined as those components of the job that need persistent effort and are related to cognitive and emotional implications (Savage, 2019).

Employee Stress. Employee stress is defined as how an employee or personnel reacts to difficult work related pressure. Factors that contributed to employee stress may vary from organization to another or even within the organization were mentioned by Ganster et al. (2013) as cited by Nabors (2019). The importance of employee stress is pertinent to the productivity of the organization.

3.3 The Relationship between Working Environment and Work-Life Balance

Raziq and Maulabakhsh (2015) have demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between the working environment and satisfaction of personnel from the educational institute, banking sector and telecommunication. In which is an emotion that contributes to the work-life balance. The relationship between social working environment and work-life balance also exists when there is an organizational commitment to personnel (Thompson, 2020). By exhibiting such commitment, the impact on the working environment has some satisfactory level to the personnel can be seen (Hawes, 2020). Thus, expressing the relation of the working environment and work-life balance. The physical environment also contributes to the relationship between working environment and work-life balance. This was supported by Forrest (2017) when leaders in the fast food industry are using strategies of the enticing working environment to level up their personnel confidence in the organization. Hence, the first hypothesis is:

H¹: There is a relationship between working environment and work-life balance among HR personnel in Malaysian health departments.

3.4 The Relationship between Job Demands and Work-Life Balance

Yamaner (2019) has noted that role conflict (job demands) has a positive relationship with emotional exhaustion where it might affect to the desire of work-life balance (Davidson, 2017; Swarnalatha, 2017; Tapp, 2018). If personnel have more control of their job demands, personal resources (motivation) would also increase (Yamaner, 2019) which could contribute to coping strategies and would have a relationship with work-life balance (Tapp, 2018). The need for high-performance work is connected to the psychological demand where an individual is expected to have a certain level of output (Zahoor et al., 2021). This indicates the existence of the relationship between psychological demands to the coping strategies of an individual. Nowadays, business encompasses constant change and uncertainties where it relentlessly needs time for work to enhance the effort and productivity that tips off the balance of an individual (Kuranga, 2021). Therefore, it is hypothesise that:

H²: There is a relationship between job demands and work-life balance among HR personnel in Malaysian health departments.

3.5 The Relationship between Employee Stress and Work-Life Balance

The study done by Nabors (2019) indicates that the relationship existed between trust and stress also between transparency and stress. In which correlates with organizational identity and pliancy under work-life balance (Davidson, 2017; Swarnalatha, 2017; Tapp, 2018). Work practices in banks in Malaysia also have some effect on the employee stress where it is practically creating

stress to the personnel causing an imbalance situation between work and life (Zahoor et al., 2021). Wong et al. (2021) stated that pleasure on the job and organizational dedication have a significant impact on well-being and prosocial behaviour. Relation between employee stress and fulfilment at work does exist (Han et al., 2020). Another study by Yang et al. (2021) also supports the relationship between stress, satisfaction and performance. Relation on employee welfare and organizational output (Bhende et al., 2020) also demonstrate the existence of a relationship for employee stress and work-life balance.

H³: There is a relationship between employee stress and work-life balance among HR personnel in Malaysian health departments.

3.6 Conceptual Framework

From the ground, it is understood that working environment, job demands and employee stress are perceived to be the main contributors to work-life balance of an HR personnel (Ajat, 2021, June 1; Donley, 2019; Nabors, 2019; Roethler, 2021; Tapp, 2018). It is yet to be proven that the independent variables namely working environment, job demands and employee stress have relationships with the dependent variable that is work life balance. Thus, the conceptual framework is as shown in Figure 1 is developed.

The contribution of the framework to the current state of work-life balance is anticipated to be a piece of evidence for initiating a work life balance initiative.

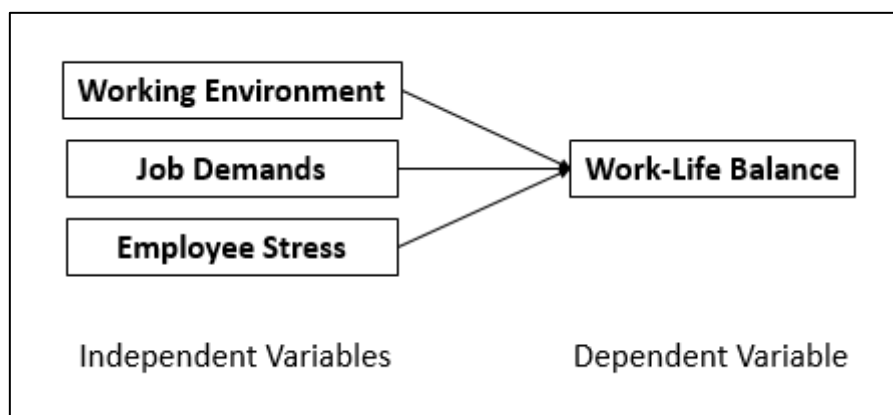


Figure 1: Conceptual framework for factors that lead to Work Life Balance

4. METHODOLOGY

This study is a correlational study as it is to determine the relationship between each independent variable which are working environment, job demands and employee stress and work-life balance as the dependent variables. The study was conducted in a natural environment with the normal flow of order or also known as non-contrived settings (Sekaran & Bougie, 2020). It was carried out over a few months during the normal routine or procedure where everything is done with minimal interference from the researcher. It is a one-time study thus also termed as a cross-sectional study. In this study, data collection is through questionnaires. The questionnaire is with the purpose to collect data pertinent to the research questions. The sampling frame is the current list of personnel in Malaysian health department in Putrajaya, Malaysia.

The population in this study is the set of people who works as Human Resource (HR) personnel of health departments in Putrajaya, Malaysia. It comprises of 374 people who work as HR personnel regardless of grade and position. Taking into consideration of the current situation of the pandemic in Malaysia where offices are operating at less than 60%, the researcher sought the best way which is to carry out a convenience sampling technique. The sample size is 103 HR personnel. The unit of analysis in this study refers to individual HR personnel at health departments located at Putrajaya, Malaysia. The questionnaire was generated in Google Forms with Google Sheet as the database. The items for the working environment were adapted from Donley (2019).

While items for job demands was adapted from Roethler (2021). Items for employee stress is adapted from Nabors (2019). The dependent variable which is work-life balance. Items for this section were adapted from Tapp (2018). The instrument used for this study has been applied face validity and content validity. Data were analysed by using SPSS version 26.

5. FINDINGS

Saldivar (2012) has mentioned that the response rate calculated by taking the number of returned surveys divided by the number of the distributed questionnaire via online response rate is 30% on average. The return rate for this study was 44.15% (N = 103). Hence, the return rate for this study is acceptable. Regarding the demographics of the respondents, the majority of the respondents is female with 73 (70.9%) respondents. More than half of the respondents is in the 30-39 year-old (53.4%). Majority of respondents is Malay (93.2%). The marital status demonstrates that 70.9% of the respondents are married. 78.6% of the respondents are with at least one (1) dependent. Majority is a degree holder which contributes 35.9%. 35.9% of respondents experienced 11-15 years of employment. This is followed by 23 (22.3%) respondents that have 5-10 years of employment. The highest number of respondents is of Grade 41-44 with 33.0%.

This study used multiple hierarchical regression to assess the relationship between working environment, job demands, employee stress, and work-life balance. Hierarchical regression lets the assessment of the variables at its point of entry (Ho, 2006). Before multiple regression analysis, normality, linearity, multicollinearity, and homoscedasticity test were conducted to ensure that no assumptions for multiple regression have been violated. Based on Table 1, Durbin Watson value is 1.901 which falls into the range of 1.5 - 2.5. This ensures that there is no problem of dependency (Ramayah, 2014). The correlation coefficient (R=.799) is showing a positive linkage between the variables. While the coefficient determinant was $R^2=.639$ implies that 63.9% of the variation in work-life balance is explained by job demands and employee stress.

Table 1: Results of the Multiple Hierarchical Analysis

Relationship	Std. Beta	Sig. Value
Working environment and work-life balance	-.013	.842
Job demands and work-life balance	.338	.000
Employee stress and work-life balance	.560	.000
R	.799	
R ²	.639	
Durbin-Watson	1.901	

The relationship between working environment and work-life balance depicts the beta value as $\beta=-.013$, $p=.842$, where p is more than .05, making it insignificant. Thus, there is no relationship between the variables. Therefore, H^1 is not accepted. As for the relationship between job demands and work-life balance, it shows the beta value of .338, $p=.000$. There is a significant relationship between the variables. Hence, H^2 is accepted. Lastly, the relationship between employee stress and work-life balance ($\beta=.560$, $p=.000$) demonstrates a significant relationship between both variables. Hence, H^3 is accepted.

6. DISCUSSION

Employees seemed to be constantly busy while at work and yet have the possibility of not finishing all their work related tasks. This leads to many other counterproductive work behaviours (Morse, 2019). The current study shows that there is no significant relationship between working environment and work-life balance among HR personnel in Malaysian health departments in Putrajaya. This coincides with Linnhoff and Smith's (2014) study. However, it is possible that the insignificant relationship was as such because the small number of samples was unable to show the relationship, in which if the number were to increase, there might be a chance to have a better analysis (Matsunaga, 2010).

Job demands among the majority of HR personnel give a big impact to their work-life balance (Yamaner, 2019). Based on the findings, the majority of HR personnel agreed that their job is psychologically demanding. In which the job demands them to finish their job outside working hours or office. This is also claimed by the HR personnel that it is unlikely their job could be completed in a typical 8-hour workday. All of these demands make it difficult for HR personnel to strike a balance between work and personal life. By saying so, their work may be facing backlogs (Jamal et al., 2021). In which as the job demands increase, the work-life balance decreases (Haar et al., 2019).

The study found that employee stress has a significant relationship with work-life balance. The HR personnel felt that they never had a day off. This can be deduced from the situation of the pandemic all over the news when those who are working under the ministry are required to work (Malaysia, 2020a). To the extent when they are at home, they sometimes dreaded the telephone ringing (Pineault, 2019). This is because the call might be job-related. They frequently get the feeling that they spend too much time at the department rather than at home.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

Job demands have been impacting work-life balance of HR personnel. It is recommended that the employer/management to look into the allocation of supportive resources to help with the work-life balance of the personnel. This may include the distribution of workload or even additional personnel. Through the distribution of workload, it can also minimize the demand on each personnel. Supportive resources can also mean additional personnel. Adding personnel can also mean an addition of time to complete the task. As the task could be divided to two people. By adding personnel, the job demands can be lessened. As for the demands for the job completion, it can be catered through classification of work.

Through this study, it is found that personnel are stressed due to supporting the healthcare workers and having to maintain a high pace throughout the day. It would be beneficial if some guidelines or improvement activities were initiated as that would make the best possible choices for the Human Resource personnel to improve on their work-life balance. Some policies for the personnel to be allowed to have paid time off might elevate the overwhelmed feeling of being married to the ministry. This would also increase the time they could use for personal activities. Which in the long run would reduce the burnout among personnel.

This study was carried out with a few independent variables and without any moderating or mediating variables which might have effects on work-life balance. Research has yet to be done in order to assess the relationship of work-life balance and motivation of the employee in the public sector. It would be great to have more research on HR personnel perhaps another ministry during the pandemic. This study could then be compared to the future study.

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