

# **CONSOLIDATING WORK FROM HOME AS THE NEW NORMS: INTERNAL VS EXTERNAL FACTORS AMONG UiTM STAFF**

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## **ABSTRACT**

In recent years, the focus on the challenges regarding work from home (WFH) has been escalating throughout the globe. In the context of Malaysia, seeing that this is an emergent issue, there are still limited studies conducted on the framework or model that promote the effectiveness of WFH. However, there are fundamental issues that need to be addressed, namely; (i) the accessibility and coverage; (ii) the acceptance level among the staff and (iii) the quality of productivity. This study outlines two main objectives, which are (i) to examine the internal factors; and (ii) the external factors that influence the staff while WFH during MCO. Thus, there is an increasing need to recognise the benefits and potential challenges towards assisting the human resource practitioners to be more effective in implementing the WFH (Nordin et al., 2016). This study was conducted among the staff of Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) during the Movement Control Order (MCO) from 18 March till 9 June 2020. Based on the survey conducted among 17,541 staff (as per 31 Mac 2020), 1,320 staff volunteered to be involved in this survey. The data was analysed using the SPSS v26. In part, the analysis was carried out to ascertain the main challenges comprising of internal and external factors. From the internal factor, the findings showed that flexible working hour was found as the main factor; mean value of 4.10. Furthermore, for the external factor, the factor on the distraction due to other commitments such as parent/child caretaker and house chores was found as the main factor; mean value of 3.82. The findings of this study significantly contribute towards understanding the internal and external factors of WFH, and serve to measure the productiveness and the effectiveness of WFH from the viewpoint of higher learning institutions.

**Keywords:** work from home, staff experience, internal factor, external factor, movement control order

## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

The world is now witnessing a sudden change in the way of living of humanities. It all began when the World Health Organisation (WHO) publicised the first outbreak of Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) as it was reported in Wuhan, China on 31 December 2019. Since then, the COVID-19 has become a major threat for human life around the world. It spreads rapidly and has stunned health practitioners worldwide as it infected thousands of people during the first week of its discovery alone. On 30 January 2020, the WHO declared that the coronavirus outbreak was a global health emergency. To make matters worse, WHO on 11 March 2020 had declared COVID-19 as a global pandemic. The whole world is affected by the pandemic considering its devastating impact towards economic, social and most importantly has transformed the customary lifestyles into the new norms almost instantaneously.

In the face of COVID-19 pandemic, many countries have taken immediate precautionary measures by implementing work from home concepts within their organization. The same scenario also took place in Malaysia after the Prime Minister's duly announcement to commence the Movement Control Order (MCO) effective nationwide. The 2020 MCO or PKP (*Perintah Kawalan Pengerakan*) has started since 18 March 2020 until now and it is put into effect based on different phases. As mentioned, MCO in Malaysia is implemented according to different phases, namely; MCO, CMCO (known as Conditional Movement Control Order) and RMCO (known as Recovery Movement Control Order). On 16 March 2020, the Prime Minister, Muhyiddin Yassin had made an official speech thus lawfully promulgated the movement control order under the Prevention and Control of Infectious Diseases Act 1988 and the Police Act 1967 to take effect.

The implementation of MCO had witnessed a lot of companies and organizations alike in various sectors facing difficulties particularly when their operations were forced to stop which left a great deal of workers jobless. The education sector is also affected as the staff and students couldn't attend to school, college and university. In the case of public university, the policy regarding work from home is currently imposed based on the instruction from Ministry of Higher Education of Malaysia and UiTM through *Pekeliling Naib Canselor UiTM bil 4&5, 2020* and *Pekeliling Naib Canselor Bil 4/2020: Arahan Pelaksanaan Sesi Penyampaian Dan Pembelajaran Secara Dalam Talian di Universiti Teknologi MARA sepanjang penularan Wabak COVID-19 bertarikh 16 Mac 2022* dan *Pekeliling Naib Canselor Bil 5/2020: Arahan Penangguhan seluruh operasi perkhidmatan UiTM sepanjang Pelaksanaan Perintah Kawalan Pengerakan dan mengenai penyampaian dan pembelajaran pelajar bertarikh 17 Mac 2020* (Universiti Teknologi MARA, 2020b, 2020c) as they describe the nature of operation of academic and non-academic activities during MCO.

This paper has been organized as follows: first, the paper will explain the overview of WFH in Malaysia and higher education of Malaysia, objective of the study and the related past researches. Second, the paper will explain the problem background of the study. Third, the paper will explain the methodology of the study. After that, the researchers will discuss the initial findings based on the literature review that had been conducted earlier. At the end of the paper, the researchers will discuss the expected outcome and the recommendation of the research study followed by the conclusion.

## **2.0 WORK FROM HOME: THE NEW NORM**

On March 11, 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) had declared COVID-19 as a pandemic, pointing to the over 118,000 cases of the coronavirus infections worldwide. This has contributed to a major shift in how things are done as the whole world is affected. Thus, Work From Home (WFH) has now become a new norm. Everyone never expected to experience work from home concept or arrangement before the COVID-19 pandemic happened around the world.

According to Lambert 2004 in (Ones *et al.*, 2020) some arrangements, such as flexible scheduling, telework, and part-time schedules, are often described as ways to improve work-life balance, and perhaps to reduce gender disparities in terms of wages and labour force participation. However, irregular scheduling, whereby workers do not control their schedules, or jobs with long hours may have the opposite effect in addition to negative health consequences. Other definitions or descriptions regarding WFH concepts or arrangement will be further discussed in literature review.

Furthermore, the ability to work from home (WFH) has been measured for the United States by Dingel and Neiman, 2020 in (Charles Wyplosz, 2020) who found that around 40% of jobs could potentially be carried out at home.

How do WFH concepts or arrangements being implemented in Malaysia context, especially in higher education? The 'working at home' concept is not a recent trend in Malaysia. The idea has been developed at an earlier time as working at home is seen as a new element in the human resource strategy. Flexible employment can be implemented in Malaysia by considering the utilisation of technology involved, rules set up by employers and employees' preference (Suparmaniam, 2016). Furthermore, since Malaysia is a developing country, WFH approach is still not being implemented widely but only limited to certain groups after having an unofficial agreement from their organization (Nordin *et al.*, 2016). Besides that, previous research also states that there is an increasing need to understand the benefits and potential challenges towards assisting human resource practitioners to be more effective in carrying out their work from home (Nordin *et al.*, 2016).

Based on a survey conducted by Lembaga Penduduk dan Pembangunan Keluarga Negara (LPPKN), there are 63% respondents who chose to work at the office or their current workplace (Muhammad Yusri Muzamir, 2020a). The survey found that:

- 52% stated the staff are facing disturbance at home as the main challenges for them;
- 35% facing motivational issue;
- 33% no specific workspace;
- 32% cut off salary;
- 31% managing office workload; and
- 30% afraid of losing their job (30%)

In the context of Universiti Teknologi MARA, the work from home (WFH) concept has been practiced nationwide effectively since 18 March 2020 when the first MCO was announced by the Prime Minister of Malaysia. The unprecedented situation due to the COVID-19 outbreak necessitated the workforce to WFH during the lockdown periods. The top management of organizations is obligated to duly construct immediate alignment and remedial strategies to ensure continuous productivity in regard to WFH. The university staff need to deliver the task given during MCO by utilizing all available medium of communication via social media or online platforms such as WhatsApp, Skype, google classroom, Microsoft Team, Google Meet, Cisco Webex or Zoom. Work from home used to be a privilege offered by several companies in the country but since the MCO is in place, it has become a norm for everyone. Thus, in order to ensure productivity level remains and continue to develop, all staff are required to work from home with the exception given to the 10% essential services staff.

The common daily activities during MCO by staff when they are working at home are online meeting, conducting the open distance learning (ODL) to the students, e-commerce, e-library and online courses and training or webinar. This new experience serves each and every one of us a simple depiction to conduct effective work from home best practice among the universities in Malaysia. Every staff is supported by the guidelines issued by the university which outline the concept of work from home as the main framework of reference (Universiti Teknologi MARA, 2020a). Another study (Gy R. Hashim *et al.*, 2020) among Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Cawangan Selangor (UCS) staff found that 17.7% of the administrative staff did not meet their daily logbooks. Similarly, the study by

Mohd Rahim *et al.*, (2018) found that there are knowledge gaps that determined the level of understanding in the process to adopt WFH within the organization. This study concerns the implementation of WFH due to the lack of policy and guidelines for the employees to mirror the office work setting at home. This scenario creates new challenges for the employers to access and measure the outcome from every staff involved with WFH. In public universities like UiTM, the new norm of WFH needs to be introduced to the entire staff even though they only have minimal experience from both the management and employees alike. Hence, there are important questions that need to be addressed, which or whether the output really reflects the work quality that are expected from them?

### **3.0 CONCEPTUAL MODEL WORK FROM HOME**

Social distancing and stay-at-home policies do play a critical role in breaking the chain of COVID-19 infection. In this context, the negative employment impacts arising from the virus could possibly mute the workers should they are unable to perform their jobs at the office. Furthermore, the work from home approach will become one of the important approaches in the area of human resource management in the future. From this study, the researcher tries to examine the experience among UiTM staff on (i) internal factors and (ii) external factors toward WFH.

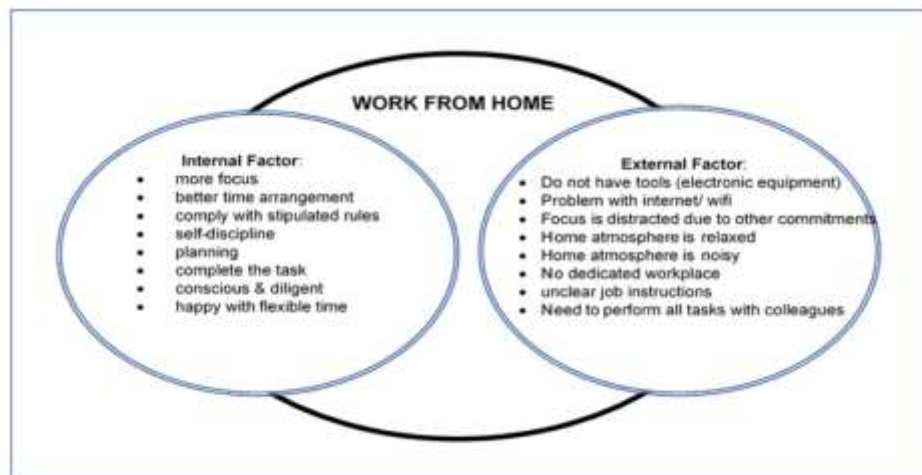
Another objective of this research is to examine the self-reflection among the staff involved with WFH as it is their first time experiencing it throughout the implementation of MCO. In relation to this study, the current survey data by *Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas* (2020) revealed that 35.2% (Bick *et al.*, 2020) of the US workforce had worked entirely from home in May 2020, which was 8.2% higher than it was in February. Highly educated, high-income and white-collar workers were more likely to shift to working from home to maintain their employment following the pandemic. Individuals working from home on a daily basis even before the pandemic had lost their jobs at a similar rate as the daily commuters. This suggests that, apart from the potential for home-based work, demand conditions also mattered for job losses, 71.7% of workers that could work from home effectively did so in May (Bick *et al.*, 2020).

It seems to us, WFH concepts or arrangement are really important to every organization including the universities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study by Hall and Richter (2011) suggested that organizations that operates on flexible time should be aware that it means employees may be out of sync with respect to where they are in their daily transitions. The researcher suggested that the scheduling of formal work takes into account a boundary zone that allows time for people to adjust to being able to work. Specifically, this means that meetings should not be scheduled too close to the beginning or the end of the day. Hence, this reflects the purpose of this study which is to examine whether the staff are really comfortable or not while working at home because this is everyone's first experience in doing so. It signifies that self-reflection on the basis of theory of mind toward WFH concepts is really important for this study and needs to be substantiated more in other future researches.

According to Astington and Hughes (2013), social cognition undergoes dramatic developmental changes and this is especially true for the so-called Theory of Mind, which is the ability to understand other people's mental states, like desires, motives, emotions, and thoughts, and to respond to them adequately. Besides that, theory of mind refers to everyday ability to attribute independent mental states of self and others in order to predict and explain behaviour by Premack and Woodruff 1978 in (Happe, 2003). This justifies the aptness of the study on the range of internal factors influenced by self-reflection because our mind will influence our ability and response towards the work and emotions while WFH.

The policy maker especially in the human resource department of public universities must be provided with the fundamental factor of challenges currently faced by the staff while WFH. This is

important for the universities so that the top management can look deeper into the issues related to the implementation of any kind of policies towards the staff productivity and measurement of the university key indicators for the year (KPI). The research by (Mohammadi & Karupiah, 2020) stated the overall findings of this study and suggested that managers of both public and private universities to pay more attention to the quality of work life dimensions that have significant relationships with their performance in order to improve the level of work of the academic staff. Furthermore, the results of internal and external factors based on the theory of locus of control in this research can be used as the basic guidelines for human resource managers in universities to be weighed as part of the measurement of the quality of work life in WFH.



**Figure 1: conceptual framework wfh: internal vs. External**

#### **4.0 RESEARCH PROBLEM AND QUESTION**

Though work from home makes the working life so simple and flexible, it actually is detrimental to staff's mental health. Working remotely also can create anxiety and depression. For female staff, they are facing more work as they take on more household chores and child-rearing duties than men. And women already face biasness in personnel decisions, especially in certain fields (Flaherty, 2020b). Besides that, children aren't the only challenge while working from home.

The coronavirus has shut down laboratories, archives, libraries and fieldwork, not to mention classroom instructions too. But there's a more personal piece to the puzzle. Support from colleagues is now harder to find, at least face-to-face. And anxieties about the public health crisis itself are high. Other review concentrates on studies of the impact of working from home from the employee's perspective, and reveals that there is no consensus on whether working from home is good or bad for employees. When the workplace is moved into the home environment, it is argued that there is a dual potential to exacerbate conflict, or to minimize it through increasing work schedule flexibility, resulting in a longer working hours, career stagnation, adverse effect on employees' performance and feelings of social isolation (Dockery & Sherry Bawa, 2014).

In published newspaper reports in Malaysia, there are several statements released regarding the work from home approach. On the same note, the survey by LPPKN had highlighted there are 63% responded chose to work in the office or workplace. Referring to the survey, majority respondents (52%) stated that they are constantly disturb at home as the main challenge for them, maintaining motivation (35%), no specific work space (33%), cut off salary (32%), managing office workload (31%) and afraid of losing the job (30%) (Muhammad Yusri Muzamir, 2020a).

Furthermore, there are also issues regarding the Employment Act 1955 as it contains no clause regarding the right of employee & employer regarding WFH method (Muhammad Yusri Muzamir, 2020b). Besides that, there are no specific concepts on WFH approach and the level of understanding and knowledge are still low among the staff (Rusli Ahmad, 2020). In regards to the problem statement, this research had been carried out to answer two main questions: Research Question 1: What are the main challenges comprising of internal and external factors when practising WFH among Universiti Teknologi MARA staff during the movement Control Order (MCO) between 18 March till 9 June 2020? Research Question 2: What is the range of the main internal and external factors among staff during their first experience of WFH?

## **5.0 COVID-19 AND NEW NORM**

The COVID-19 pandemic outbreak has given a remarkable impact to the globe. In April 2020, this outbreak had affected 213 countries (Shah, Ain Umaira Md, Syafiqah Nur Azrie Safri, Rathedevi Thevadas, Nor Kamariah Noordin, Azmawani Abd Rahman, Zamberi Sekawi, Aini Ideris, 2020) leading to disruptions in the economic, social and even political aspects of the country. Malaysia is no exception. The Malaysian government through the Ministry of Health (MOH) and Malaysian National Security Council (MKN) are the key players in dealing with the pandemic and have submitted several action plans in addressing the issue.

### **5.1 ADAPTING TO WORK FROM HOME SETTING**

The concept of WFH is not a new term in the field of labour market and human resources. It was first introduced by Jack Nilles in the 1970s during the OPEC oil crisis and rising fuel costs in the 1970s to look for ways work could be done without the need for so much commuting (Narayanan, Lakshmi, Shanker Menon, & Michel Plaisent, 2017). The effects of COVID-19 pandemic have brought an immediate change to the current work environment. Indirectly, WFH has gained popularity as an alternative to maintain the work output. It has become the best approach for many organizations when most countries declared the lockdown or movement control order to curb the spread of the virus. However, there are a lot of debates on the effectiveness of WFH when it is associated with productivity, work ethics and job satisfaction. Disputes raised in terms of internal issues with the employees to get used to the new norm, which is also another important aspect of WFH readiness, especially when the readiness for this approach is not an option.

In a different spectrum, evidences from the private sectors have proven that some organizations like Pitney Bowes, IBM, Ernst and Young have achieved successful records in financial and human resource goals and objectives as well as to accelerate social responsibility and good corporate citizenship (Narayanan, Lakshmi, Shanker Menon, & Michel Plaisent, 2017). On the other side, companies such as Hewlett Packard, Yahoo and Best Buy were among companies that reverted work from home due to unsatisfying results of the option (Narayanan, Lakshmi, Shanker Menon, & Michel Plaisent, 2017). Although there are positive and negative sides to adopting WFH from the experience of many private companies, the public organisation needs to adjust their resources to get used to the WFH work setting.

Due to the pandemic, public sectors through Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam (Public Services Department) has introduced the policy on physical distancing and WFH Policy whereby the organisations involved could apply flexibility such as reducing their working hours in the office, offered the same salary with the capacity of generating productivity, security of jobs and income guarantees (Cetrulo, Guarascio & Virgillito, 2020). Therefore, as the spread of the virus could not be prevented in a short period, many organisations have decided to implement work virtually from home in order to ensure that they are still connected with their clients and supervisors while maintaining their employees' health (Adenle, 2020). In the case of higher education in Malaysia, WFH has

somewhat limited in-depth studies on the context although it is common in developed countries due to the WFH benefits (Saludin *et al.*, 2013). Nonetheless, as a developing country, Malaysia is already acquainted with the concept of WFH even before the pandemic outbreak in terms of teaching and distance learning in universities and colleges as a mean of flexible method for lecturers and students alike (Mohd Rahim *et al.*, 2018).

As a prior prediction, WFH seems to be facing some hitches for many employees as they have to commit to household chores such as childcare as well as to ensure their productivity at their targeted level (Flaherty, 2020a). In the context of organization setting, the management should provide their employees with the necessary tools to equip them while WFH, instead of relying on employees' personal or household internet connection (Siti Aiysyah Tumin, 2020).

Therefore, a more systematic WFH can be implemented if both employees and employers are well aware of the benefits that they can obtain from it (Saludin *et al.*, 2013). According to Sualman (2020), employees can still be productive if they adhere to the procedures of WFH working setting, together with more flexible working hours as well as conducive work space environment. In addition, when WFH the employees are constantly facing the dilemma between work and family matters as their significant challenges. In fact, family and social obligations can easily blast over into working hours and it is ascertained in previous analysis that blurring of such boundaries between work and family could result in employees associating their homes with their work roles as it repeatedly intruded upon family time (Zara Abrams, 2019).

Based on the current situation where the newest technologies could be aligned with IR 4.0, WHF will give new perspectives and meaning of working platform for employees, yet it is an arguable statement to consider it is as troublesome (Nor Hidayati Mokhtar, 2020). As mentioned by Deloitte (2020), there are a lot obstacle when WFH was introduced. The most frequent challenges for WFH are technical issues such as trouble in using the technologies for virtual meetings, distractions including childcare issues, officemate communication and supervisors who fail to give full commitment in certain tasks given. He added more by saying that WFH always result in a fusion between work and private life, and some employees may even face difficulties to disengage at the end of the work day (Deloitte, 2020).

## **5.2 Locus of Control Theory**

WFH has already become a new norm especially among public organizations. What really matter is to actually understand how the internal elements of an individual in perceiving and valuing the new approaches to deliver routine work. According to Narayanan *et al.*, (2017) to understand the concept of WFH, it is also important to further investigate the aspects from the viewpoint of organizational behaviour and psychological theory to understand the personality and temperament of the employees. Study on the effectiveness of working from home can be associated with various variables such as internal and external factors. Both factors play an important role in influencing the experience and the extent to which the WFH can increase employees' productivity.

Thus, the theory of Locus of Control is appropriate in explaining the phenomenon which has been used to measure the attitudes to work in virtual teams (Lee-Kelley, 2006). Locus of Control Theory was introduced by Julian B. Rotter in 1954 which refers to the degree of which an individual feel whatever is happening to themselves is actually influenced by internal or external factors. The study by Judge and colleagues defined locus of control as a higher order construct called as the core-self-evaluation, which explains how individuals assess themselves and their self-worth (Thomas & Sorensen, 2006). The locus of control can be explained further from the perspective of internal and external factors.

**i) Internal factors**

Internal factors refer to an individual's belief in whatever the consequences, such as success, failure, productivity, satisfaction, decisions; are influenced by factors within themselves. These include self-control, personality, characteristic, spiritual, self-responsibility of the individual himself (Thomas & Sorensen, 2006). The study by Judge and Bono (2001) associated the locus of control as a higher order construct called as one-self-evaluation; which explains on how individuals assess themselves and their self-worth (Ng *et al.*, 2006). The meta-review analysis study on local control carried out by Judge and Bono (2001) are related to job satisfaction and job performance. The similar argument is also derived from Thomas and. Sorensen (2006) who associated the locus of control effect on the perceived role conflict and job satisfaction.

In the context of this study, the focus is established on how the employees of UiTM see themselves in performing and undergoing WFH throughout the MCO period, both internally and externally. The internal side mainly focuses on directing the incidents proactively with an optimistic, confident and responsible manner (Thomas &. Sorensen, 2006). In the case of UiTM however, the concern is on how the employees are able to put more focus on work, good time management in balancing work commitment and personal needs, level of discipline and self management ability and punctuality. It also involves the aspects to determine the extent to which they will be more alert and diligent in performing tasks from home. These criteria are consistent with the locus of control attributes as introduced by Werner *et al.*, in 1971 as cited by (Thomas & Sorensen, 2006) which are ability, effort, task difficulty and luck. Judge and Bono (2001) had emphasised locus of control as a higher order construct called as one-self-evaluation that are related to job satisfaction and job performance; which also explained on how individuals assess themselves and their self-worth (Thomas & Sorensen, 2006).

**ii) External Factors**

As for external factors, people with a high external locus of control believes that other powerful people such as their employers will determine their outcome related to their objectives (Berglund *et al.*, 2014). Thus, for this study, employees assume their outcomes are determined by external forces for themselves to complete their tasks (Lilly & Virick, 2006). Workers who classified themselves as having an external locus of control believe that success is obtained from other external environment opportunities and fate (Lee, 2013). The employees with ‘externals’ also believe that unpredictable complex forces outside of their own actions and results lead to the implications of events. Thus, workers perceive their actions will have quite different impacts on their lives as the internal and external factors are directing them so that they can encounter other identical situations (Reed *et al.*, 1994).

For this study, the external factors contributed to the challenges faced in WFH are the equipment or tools to cope up with requirements of WFH such as internets and Wi-Fi, household commitments, home environment, job instructions from managers and support from colleagues.

**Table 1: Locus of Control Applied in Challenges of WFH in UiTM’s study**

	Locus of Control	
	Internal	External
<b>Challenges of WFH</b>	Ability to concentrate on work with more focus	The equipment/tools for WFH
	Good time management	Household commitments
	Level of discipline	Home (workspace) environment
	Self-management ability and punctuality	Job Instructions from Managers
	Alert and diligent performing tasks from home.	Colleagues’ support

**5.0 METHODOLOGY**



This study applied descriptive analysis to describe the elements of the data collected. Descriptive statistics were used to present the quantitative descriptions by using frequency and mean values to measure the variability. The data collection used in the cross-sectional survey were the data collected at a given point in time across the sample population. The unit of analysis of this study was the individual referring to all academic and non-academic staff. The total population was 17,541 respondents and the sample size was 375 (Krejcie & Morgan, 1970). The survey was conducted through an online survey using stratified random sampling.

## 6.0 RESULTS

This section discusses the findings based on the profile of respondents, internal, external factors and cross-tabulation analysis comprised of gender, marital status, residential area and types of services.

### 1. Profile of respondents

**Table 2: Profile of respondents (n = 1320)**

Variable	Item	Frequency	Percent
Gender	Male	567	43.0
	Female	753	57.0
Age	< 25 years	22	1.7
	26 - 30 years	131	9.9
	31 - 35 years	290	22.0
	36 - 40 years	367	27.8
	41 - 45 years	231	17.5
	46 - 50 years	125	9.5
	51 - 55 years	96	7.3
	56 - 60 years	58	4.4
Marital Status	Single	216	16.4
	Married	1063	80.5
	Others	41	3.1
Types of Services	Academic	482	36.5
	Non-Academic	838	63.5
Race	Malay	1208	91.5
	Chinese	19	1.4
	Indian	3	.2
	Others	90	6.8
Branch Campuses	UiTM Shah Alam	274	20.8
	UiTM Kedah	5	.4
	UiTM Kelantan	87	6.6
	UiTM Melaka	20	1.5
	UiTM Negeri Sembilan	102	7.7
	UiTM Pahang	96	7.3
	UiTM Perak	20	1.5
	UiTM Perlis	11	.8
	UiTM Pulau Pinang	7	.5
	UiTM Sabah	11	.8
	UiTM Sarawak	261	19.8
	UiTM Selangor	314	23.8
	UiTM Terengganu	47	3.6
	UiTM Johor	65	4.9
Position Grade	VK 7 and above	6	.5
	54 - 53	29	2.2
	45 - 52	440	33.3
	41 - 44	166	12.6
	29 - 40	278	21.1
	28 and below	401	30.4
Level of Income	B40 (RM4360 and below)	464	35.2
	M40 (RM4360 - RM9619)	656	49.7
	T20 (RM9620 and more)	200	15.2
Residential location	Urban	907	68.7
	Rural	413	31.3

Table 2 shows that 567 (43%) are male and 753 (57%) are female respondents. For the age distribution of the respondents, the age group ranges between 36 – 40 years old represents the highest participation with 367 (27.8%) respondents and the least group of respondents are from the age below 25 years old with 22 (1.7%) respondents. In terms of marital status, 1063 (80.5%) married respondents had participated, and followed by single with 216 (16.4%) respondents. Nonacademic respondents show the highest participation with 838 (63.5%) respondents and the academic staff participated are 482 (36.5%).

Based on the category of races, a total of 1208 (91.5%) Malay respondents had participated, followed by subcategories of other races with 90 (6.8%) respondents, Chinese with 19 (1.4%) respondents and the least is Indian with 3 (0.2%) respondents. For branch campuses, UiTM Selangor has the higher participation with 314 (23.8%) respondents and the least participation is from UiTM Kedah with only 5 (0.4%) respondents. The question on position grades shows the grades range in between 45 – 52 have the highest participation with 440 (33.3%) respondents and the least is from the grade VK7 and above with 6 (0.5%) participation. Lastly, the residential location shows the majority of participants are from urban areas with 907 (68.7%) respondents whereas rural areas respondents with 413 (31.3%) respondents.

2. Internal Factors

**Table 3: Descriptive analysis of Internal Factors**

Item	Description	Number of Respondents / Percentages (%)					Mean	Interpretation
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree		
10.	I have more focus while working from home	75 (5.7%)	429 (32.5%)	284 (21.5%)	426 (32.3%)	106 (8%)	3.04	Moderate
11.	I make time arrangement better while working from home	37 (2.8%)	299 (22.7%)	250 (18.9%)	585 (44.3%)	149 (11.3%)	3.39	High
12.	I comply with the stipulated rules as working from office	26 (2%)	190 (14.4%)	242 (18.3)	666 (50.5%)	196 (14.8%)	3.62	High
13.	I have self-discipline while working from home	20 (1.5%)	161 (12.2%)	304 (23%)	664 (50.3%)	171 (13%)	3.61	High
14.	I make planning while working from home	16 (1.2%)	92 (7%)	197 (14.9%)	805 (61%)	210 (15.9%)	3.83	High
15.	I completed the task on time as instructed by the head of department	19 (1.4%)	94 (7.1%)	150 (11.4%)	802 (60.8%)	255 (19.3%)	3.89	High
16.	I am as conscious and diligent as working from the office	28 (2.1%)	139 (10.5%)	270 (20.5%)	678 (51.4%)	205 (15.5%)	3.68	High
17.	I am happy because I have flexible hours	24 (1.8%)	79 (6%)	167 (12.7%)	636 (48.2%)	414 (31.4%)	4.10	High

*Note: Mean and interpretation (Low = 1.00 – 1.66; Moderate = 1.67 – 3.33; High = 3.34 – 5.00)*

Table 3 explains the internal factors of WFH based on the score of mean values. There are eight items that represent the internal factors. Based on order from the highest (mean = 5.00) to the lowest (mean = 1.00) mean values, the result shows that the statement on “I am happy because I have flexible hours” scores the highest mean values with 4.10. The second highest score is the statement “I completed the task on time as instructed by the head of the department” with the mean values of 3.89.

The statement “I make planning while working from home” with the mean values of 3.83 is the third. The fourth statement “I am as conscious and diligent as working from the office” scores 3.68 mean values. The fifth statement “I comply with the stipulated rules as working from office” scores 3.62 mean values. The sixth statement is “I have self-discipline while working from home” with the mean values of 3.61. The seventh statement is “I make time arrangement better while working from home” with the score of 3.39 mean values. Last of all, the only statement scores a moderate level is “I have more focus while working from home” with 3.04 mean values.

3. External Factors

**Table 4: Descriptive analysis of External Factors**

Item	Description	Number of Respondent / Percentages (%)					Mean	Interpretation
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree		
18.	I do not have the tools such as electronic equipment that allows me to work from home	303 (23%)	510 (38.6)	60 (4.5%)	331 (25.1)	116 (8.8%)	2.58	Low
19.	I always have problem with internet/Wi-Fi/ data plan	218 (16.5%)	477 (36.1%)	85 (6.4%)	379 (28.7%)	161 (12.2%)	2.84	Moderate
20.	My focus is distracted due to other commitments (such as parents/taking care of the kids, house chores, etc)	131 (9.9%)	297 (22.5%)	177 (13.4%)	496 (37.6%)	219 (16.6%)	3.82	High
21.	My home atmosphere is more relaxed	46 (3.5%)	171 (13%)	239 (18.1%)	685 (51.9%)	179 (13.6%)	3.59	High
22.	My home atmosphere is noisy	312 (23.6%)	549 (41.6%)	214 (16.2%)	199 (15.1%)	46 (3.5%)	2.33	Low
23.	I do not have a dedicated workspace at home	233 (17.7%)	432 (32.7)	142 (10.8%)	385 (29.2%)	128 (9.7%)	2.81	Low
24.	I received unclear job instructions from my head of department	258 (19.5%)	572 (43.3%)	261 (19.8%)	184 (13.9%)	45 (3.4%)	2.38	Low
25.	I need to perform all tasks individually without the support from my colleagues	169 (12.8%)	468 (35.5%)	245 (18.6%)	359 (27.2%)	79 (6%)	2.78	Low

Note: Mean and interpretation (Low = 1.00 – 1.66; Moderate = 1.67 – 3.33; High = 3.34 – 5.00)

Table 4 shows the level of each item as the external factors of WFH. The results show that only two items are at the high level, which are the statement on “My focus is distracted due to other commitments” with the score of 3.82 mean values and “My home atmosphere is more relaxed” with 3.59 mean values. The only statement at the moderate level is “I always have a problem with internet/Wi-Fi/ data plan” with the score of 2.84 mean values. However, five statements are at the low level, namely; “My home atmosphere is noisy” (mean = 2.33), “I received unclear job instructions from my head of the department” (mean = 2.38), “I do not have the tools such as electronic equipment that allows me to work from home” (mean = 2.58), “I need to perform all tasks individually without the support from my colleagues” (mean = 2.78), and “I do not have a dedicated workspace at home” (mean = 2.81).

**Table 5: Cross Tabulation Demographic (Gender, Marital Status, Residential Area and Types of Services) with Internal – External Factors**

Demographic	Internal			External			Total
	Low	Moderate	High	Low	Moderate	High	
<b>Gender</b>							
Male	7 (0.5%)	181 (13.7%)	379 (28.7%)	29 (2.2%)	347 (26.3%)	191 (14.5%)	567 (43%)
Female	6 (0.5%)	215 (16.3%)	532 (40.3%)	49 (3.7%)	550 (41.7%)	154 (11.7%)	753 (57%)
<b>Total</b>	13 (1%)	396 (30%)	911 (69%)	78 (5.9%)	897 (68%)	345 (26.1%)	1320 (100%)
<b>Marital Status</b>							
Single	1 (0.1%)	53 (4%)	162 (12.3%)	14 (1.1%)	157 (11.9%)	45 (3.4%)	216 (16.4%)
Married	12 (0.9%)	328 (24.8%)	723 (54.8%)	61 (4.6%)	715 (54.2%)	287 (21.7%)	1063 (80.5%)
Others	0 (0%)	15 (1.1%)	26 (2%)	3 (0.2%)	25 (1.9%)	13 (1%)	41 (3.1%)
<b>Total</b>	13 (1%)	396 (30%)	911 (69%)	78 (5.9%)	897 (68.0%)	345 (26.1%)	1320 (100%)
<b>Residential Area</b>							
Urban	11 (0.8%)	264 (20%)	632 (47.9%)	57 (4.3%)	641 (48.6%)	209 (15.8%)	907 (68.7%)
Rural	2 (0.2%)	132 (10%)	279 (21.1%)	21 (1.6%)	256 (19.4%)	136 (10.3%)	413 (31.3%)
<b>Total</b>	13 (1%)	396 (30%)	911 (69%)	78 (5.9%)	897 (68%)	345 (26.1%)	1320 (100%)
<b>Types of Services</b>							
Academic	4 (0.3%)	131 (9.9%)	347 (26.3%)	37 (2.8%)	352 (26.7%)	93 (7%)	482 (36.5%)
Non-Academic	9 (0.7%)	265 (20.1%)	564 (42.7%)	41 (3.1%)	545 (41.3%)	252 (19.1%)	838 (63.5%)
<b>Total</b>	13 (1%)	396 (30%)	911 (69%)	78 (5.9%)	897 (68%)	345 (26.1%)	1320 (100%)

Table 5 shows the cross-tabulation for demographic elements based on gender, marital status, residential area and types of services from the two main factors, namely; internal and external factors. Based on gender preferences on internal and external factors, the result shows that none from both genders indicated strong preferences towards internal or external. Females however, show 40.3% high level internal factors whilst 41.7% are at the moderate level of external factors. The second element is marital status which shows “married” respondents with 54.8% for high level internal factors whilst 54.2% are at the moderate level for the external factors. Based on the residential area, although respondents did not demonstrate strong preferences, but the urban area has shown 47.9% indication of high level of internal factors, and 48.6% are at the moderate level of external factors. The last component is the types of services which show no apparent strong preferences. Nevertheless, the non-academic shows 42.7% indication of high level for internal factors whilst 41.3% are at a moderate level for the external factors.

## 6.0 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Working from home is likely a part of the ‘new normal’ as the global community continues to fight COVID-19 pandemic. Nonetheless, it is not a viable option for many employees in Malaysia. Some do not WFH due to the limitations on technology facilities such as no mobile computer, no specific workspace or internet access. Through the findings, the main internal factor of challenges identified among the university staff was Q17 “*I am happy because I have flexible hours*” with the mean value of 4.10. It showed that every staff felt so happy because they were given a flexible time when they performed work from home during MCO and CMCO. This study also showed that the staff did not

have any issues regarding flexible working arrangements in the future. The study by Brammer and Clark (2020) found that one of the most positive experiences of COVID-19 was the staffs' adaptability when they witness the scale, scope, speed, and quality of their colleagues' adaptation to new circumstances, and the receptivity within the communities to experiment with new ways of engaging with teaching and research. *Magne et al.*, (2020) also concluded that family to work enrichment is positively related to work effectiveness.

The range of internal factors are between mean 3.04 to 4.10 which is interpreted as moderate to high. The findings also showed that self-reflection among the staff towards WFH concepts is positive and they realized even if they need to work at home they can deliver and know what exactly needs to be done when the practices of WFH become reality. According to Timms & Brough (2020), modern workplaces are characterised by greater diversity in personnel and locale. Many organisations have adopted flexible work arrangements which assists employees to balance their competing responsibilities. Commitments to work can be constrained by other compelling commitments in people's lives, commonly including demands arising from family responsibilities.

Besides that, external factors stated that Q20 "*My focus is distracted due to other commitments (such as parents/taking care of the kids, house chores, etc)* with mean value of 3.82. Referring to the previous study by Bailyn and Harrington (2004), the results indicated that looking at work is important for work-family integration, but doing it is not that easy. Lately, there have been experimental efforts to redesign work in order to make it more effective and at the same time helping employees to integrate it better with their family lives. Previous studies are already having similar findings when it comes to commitment to work and family demands. When the workspace and home become one, it's really hard to differentiate the responsibility and the time it consumes. The study by Farrell (2017) stated that the disadvantages of working from home was (i) the difficulty in separating work from home (ii) the difficulty in separating home from work (iii) selfimposed pressure of working endlessly, and (iv) the feeling of being alienated from a company's major decisions and sometimes promotions.

As we move forward to an effective WFH approach in the future, the employers should be properly trained in managing WFH concepts effectively for their staff. Besides, it is the role of the human resource department to identify accommodating strategies to regulate the interaction between work and home. Apart from that, they must also have a greater control over their work schedules. For the university context on the other hand, a specific policy should be introduced on the implementation of WFH approach which acts as a guideline for the staff and it must be well communicated to all levels. Furthermore, it is evident that there is a need for substantial, in-depth empirical research in this particular area, to identify the key indicators and conditions that permit the practice to flourish or fail (Farrell, 2020).

Another suggestion is focusing on a comprehensive log system to record the KPI and tasks delivered by the university staff in the future. The management of the university needs to invest into software that can be used for monitoring the staff work during WFH. There are a lot of software in the market that can be used as a tool of monitoring. It may help the university to check the staffs' efficiency, attendance and productive time as well as to detect slackers and late-comers (Paterson, 2020). From this study viewpoint, WFH can be implemented if the Malaysian Higher Education Institution are aware of the benefits that they can obtain. The past literature review may serve as an insightful foundation for the future researchers to start afresh. Therefore, we hope that there is an opportunity to conduct deeper research using a mix-method approach to gain better understanding for scholars and community alike in higher education in Malaysia. Proper guidelines to universities regarding WFH concepts must be drafted based on Malaysia perspectives and take into account all the challenges and barriers currently faced by the staff inside the higher education institutions. We hope that in the future, WFH will become one of the best solutions for all the problems that are being faced by the



employees nowadays in order to achieve a better worklife balance especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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