CHALLENGES OF WORKING DURING THE PANDEMIC

Movement Control Order (MCO) was implemented since 18th March 2020 to control the spread of COVID-19 in Malaysia. The government imposed 6 restrictions during this period which also include the closing of government and private premises except for essential services (water, electricity, energy, telecommunications, postal, transportation, irrigation, oil, gas, fuel, lubricants, broadcasting, finance, banking, health, pharmacy, fire, prison, port, airport, safety, defense, cleaning, retail and food supply).

Working from home is vaunted as the "new normal" as Covid-19 continues to spread. Consequently, many workers are encouraged to work from home. Although the MCO was subsequently replaced by a recovery phase in which workers could return to work, working from home might persist for some workers as vaccines are still being distributed and Malaysia still recorded higher number of cases by day. Working from home is the best way to keep employees who have the capability to do so safe. But it doesn't come without its challenges.

Remote Work / Working from Home Challenges

Working from home challenges reflect workers' immediate psychological experiences in accomplishing tasks, interpersonal collaborations, and social interactions with family and friends. There are four challenges detected in the remote work context during the pandemic which are:

1) Lacking a routine and work-life balance
2) Ineffective communication
3) Work-home interference/ Distractions
4) Loneliness

Generally, those four challenges bring impacts on individuals' work effectiveness and well-being. Feelings of isolation may arise for employees due to their lack of interaction with others. An employee may begin to feel lonely and socially isolated due to absence of face-to-face interactions. Collaborating and communicating with others was also the most encountered challenge when working remotely. Establishing a healthy routine and setting strong boundaries between work life and home life is critical to successfully

working from home. It's important for employees to have a set schedule when working from home but it's also complicated because one of the major perks of remote work is having some flexibility over how and when they get their work done. Employees should aim to work on the same days for the same amount of time each week but remain flexible and communicate with employers if that schedule needs to be adjusted slightly for things like childcare, medical appointments or other responsibilities.

Essential workers face the following risks

Besides, amidst the economic disruption being faced due to the COVID-19 outbreak, organisations or businesses that can still operate are being challenged with how best to ensure their continuity. In the case of these, not everyone can work remotely from home, and for some sectors employees still need to go to work.

Companies operating during the pandemic are faced with challenges and expectations. Organisations providing essential goods and services are legally allowed to operate and may feel pressure to operate at peak production capacity. However, they are also under increased scrutiny by consumers and the media to protect their workers from the virus and also protect consumers and community members who interact with these workers. While protecting workers may result in decreases in production, companies must prioritise the safety and wellbeing of their workers and consumers if they are to be sustainable.

During this challenging time, the safety of employees is the most important. Organisations face challenges in supporting different populations of workers and ensuring fairness across the whole workforce. For those who still need to physically report to work, organisations are encouraged to monitor their employees' health. An example of this could be to test employees for symptoms, such as fever, prior to employees reporting to work. Other measures to be taken can include ensuring distancing, increased hygiene and providing protective clothing. Moreover, during this time it is also important that all crucial contact information, including emergency contact information of all employees is updated. To ensure organisation continuity, it is essential for an organisation to act as fast as possible to lessen any negative impact while preparing the organisation for future developments that may arise due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

Conclusion

The COVID-19 pandemic has a strong impact on the work of all of employers and employees, as working from home or other places virtually for a longer period is a new experience for all of us. To overcome all the challenges of working during the pandemic, it requires finding out together how to best organise teamwork and how to communicate with each other effectively. In addition to this basic infrastructure, organisations will need to provide access to the right collaboration and communication tools to work together. It's impossible to predict the long-term implications of this outbreak, massive shift to remote work, but a few outcomes are possible. Workplace strategists will have an important role to play in shaping the future of places and spaces where we can come together to connect, work productively and be inspired.

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