

Updating Potential Soft Skills For Telecommuters In A Home-Work Double Situations In The Covid 19 Pandemic

Dewi Khrisna Sawitri¹, Hesty Prima Rini²

¹²Department of Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, UPN "Veteran" East Java

Correspondent: hestyprimarini.mnj@upnjatim.ac.id

Submitted : March 27, 2021 Revised : April 6, 2021 Published : April 30, 2021

ABSTRACT

Telecommuting is used to work far from the central office to achieve performance but now the term is shifting. Work from home is now hard to do since workers also have to take care of their families. Job routines are still demanding and at the same time, taking care of family and handling domestic affairs tasks cannot be neglected since safety comes first to protect the family from the virus. Job demands shift in this COVID 19 pandemic as many domestic and office problems occur while people work from home. This review paper elaborates the important soft skills for telecommuting who work from home in this pandemic. The review was conducted from 1986 until the latest one in 2020. This review results in some soft skills that have evidenced their presence for telecommuters. The existence of soft skills are demanding and undoubtedly plays important role in helping telecommuters complete their job.

Keywords: Telecommuting, Work From Home, Soft Skill

INTRODUCTION

Corona Virus 19 Disease (COVID-19) has spread globally and this has made a new habit for all mankind on this earth. Since the virus spread easily, one of the health protocols is keeping a safe distance from other people. This has made people keep their distance in interacting with one another. (Allen, Golden & Shockley, 2015) explained that telecommuting is an organizational practice in which workers allocate a portion of their period of working to work online and interact with others to accomplish their work assignment generally from home. Since the pandemic emerges, employees work from home and children study from home. The situation of this pandemic has transformed a living room into instant meeting rooms, a bedroom into an instant office, a dining room into a workshop, etc. Surprisingly, this kind of job help workers to be able to perform their job. The International Labor Organization (ILO) mentioned that the COVID-19 has reduced working hours by about 6,7 in percentage for 195 million full-time workers worldwide in the 8th month of 2020 (ILO, 2020). Even though in the beginning the COVID-19 pandemic has turned working into a shocking moment since all work is conducted online at home. While dealing with all the traffic at home, workers are still occupied with how to perform their job and somehow are also interrupted with how they can conduct their job remotely from home.

Telecommuting work brings other problems such as having trouble communicating with colleagues, decreasing job motivation, feeling bored and stressed because of the new job routines, having trouble dealing with computer/ IT, and many others. Many limitations exist during this teleworking. It is undeniable that telecommuting job is a two-sided coin condition

for workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. On one side this job helps workers to get the job done but on the other side, this job has risen other problems. Telecommuting has existed before this health problem expands all around the world. The term telecommuting is proposed to refer to the activity of working outside the office which is made possible by the support of technology facilities (Nilles, 1973). So, these days, working is no longer dealing with going to the office every day but workers can work virtually from home. Even though working from home has been a solution but it also has become a challenge for telecommuters. Many problems occur and have put them to the test.

Ambiguity is what the worker deals with in their day-to-day lives as much defiance at work (Chang, 2020). Uncertainty is what they feel when the jobs are sought to be demanding while a home is not qualified being transformed into an office. Teleworkers are dealing with fewer technology advances, minimal peer support, decreasing work concentration, etc. When people cannot perform their skills, they will feel disoriented, bad-tempered, and stress when they are incapable of fulfilling their needs and qualifications (Cable, 1996). Individual's perception of stress during the COVID-19 pandemic may affect the strength of the relationship between proactive coping and perceived work productivity.

Chater mentioned that the COVID-19 pandemic threatens not only physical health but also psychological. People throughout the world seek positive feedback in an attempt to decrease the potential hazard (Benjamin & Samson, 2011). That is why job demands must be fulfilled with a skillful, knowledge-based person (Morikawa, 2020). So what is needed at present is workers who can cope with these job demands and are qualified with characteristics of telecommuting during this pandemic. some problems of telecommuting work are adapting work pattern, having less available to meet other people for completing jobs, having less time to complete job task, So soft skills are important factors that must be applied while conducting working from home. Soft skill is no technical skill that can help workers in performing their job.

METHODS

This is qualitative research by reviewing scientific literature since there have been many studies discussing telecommuting and working from home during this COVID-19 pandemic. The process of gathering the literature mainly focuses on telecommuting during this pandemic. The search of the literature to identify the research topics. was conducted using the keywords: telecommuting, working from home, soft skill, and the COVID-19, The search was not only in the form of journals but also textbooks, workshop/congress material, news, and other printed materials related to the discussion of this paper. To get a comprehensive review, researches were given to all job fields related to the research keywords. Most journals reviewed for this research are from the year 2020.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Barriers For Telecommuters While Working From Home

It is true to mention that in this pandemic telework relates to minimum workers' self-reported performance (Salomon, 1986). People do their best to keep themselves employed and for that, they have to struggle to perform their work while working from home. The working hours seem to extend since telecommuters keep having distractions when they try to complete

their work. There are some barriers captured while telecommuters perform their work remotely from home.

First, barriers come up when telecommuters are difficult to coordinate team assignments and to deal with their work colleague directly face-to-face. However, Coordination is important since many jobs are conducted in a team force. (Salomon, 1986) and (Hall, 1989) mentioned that obstacle that comes up for telecommuting workers is having less social relations with others. But, it was informed that during a pandemic human contact is a cautious activity that endangers human health (Thomas, 2020). So, to complete coordination, people at work must be supported with many work facilities to keep the focus on working in a team. In coordinating others, people interact and perform virtually using software such as Zoom, Google meeting, Microsoft teams, etc. These technologies are considered Artificial intelligence which is very useful to help people do their day-to-day activities. (Coombs, 2020) mentioned that in this pandemic, people interpret technology as helping to protect their health and improve their wellbeing. But at home, workers have other problems. They work with adequate work facilities such as having minimum data package to keep them interacting with other work colleagues, having PCs/ Laptops which are not supported with the appropriate software for working, showing less motivation since some works need to be elaborated in a work team, and many other things. In this pandemic, teleworkers realize that there are many obstacles while working from home. The hardest obstacles in telecommuting far from the office are mentioned for being unable to stay tune after a while, trouble interacting with other workers, and less passion to work (Routley, 2020). Discussing motivation, (Salomon, 1986) and (Hall, 1989) also mention that telecommuters need to be seen to advance their jobs. Coordinating virtually may rise other obstacles. This situation is far beyond what has happened before the pandemic. (Gajendran, 2007) stated that formerly, telecommuting is considered to be a simple condition in which the job assignments can contribute to giving good performance result even conducted at home.

Second, problems occur when workers do their job assignments but domestic affairs suddenly come up at the same time. Another problem for telecommuters is an inability to separate home from work (Salomon, 1986) and (Hall, 1989). Conducting work from home has so many challenges especially for workers who already got married and have to take care of the family members while performing their daily job routines. While working, workers are still dealing with children who are seeking attention, helping their children studying online, taking care of households' needs, protecting themselves from the spreading virus, and many other things. This reflects in how domestic affairs at home can dominate teleworkers' concentration. Workers who work from home cannot separate domestic assignments and job ones since these sometimes happen at the same time and place. Workers try their best to keep work productivity in a non-supported working area with children's appearance since they are family workers and have children (Gorlick, 2020). (Toniolo-Barrios & Pitt, 2020) explained that teleworkers from home are having trouble dividing job tasks from family life.

Third, telecommuting also results in psychological and health problems for having stacked job assignments. Even though it has been a solution to maintain a job, but working from home also raises serious problems. Telecommuting shows entirely new barriers: virtual, emotional, and body exhausts caused by conducting video meetings (Fosslien, 2020). The company keeps stating its target instead of minimizing it. People deal with limited work facilities but must be able to accomplish job performance. Of course, technology helps them since it connects lots of

people on a screen. But in a long term, applying this virtual meeting is considered to be isolating employees from having social interactions with others. Human needs physical interaction between others and this telecommuting for a long time has prohibited employees from doing it. Not to mention when trouble happens in joining virtual meetings because of bad network/connection. (Toniolo-Barrios, 2020) explained that though there are benefits for corporations and their workers in implementing telecommuting, they still deal with persistent problems like alienation and scene exhaustion. An employee will face burnout in an extensive moment at risk of substantial criticalness as this ongoing global pandemic (Giurge, 2020). Inevitably, double situations in which workers are involved have set physical and psychological exhausts. Employees are automatically trapped in this situation and incapable to refuse those conditions.

Understanding the existing barriers, it is important to know that telecommuting has shifted. The shift has changed the way employees behave, feel and even think. Corporations cannot deny that sometimes family matters, work facilities, limited coordination have impacted employees' performance. However, telecommuters have to deal with that kind of situation without any further reasoning. This pandemic still lasts without knowing its point when to stop endangering human life. For that reason, telecommuting is still best implemented in some corporations.

The Emergence of Soft Skill for Telecommuting Workers in a Home-Work Double Situations

Skill is what the worker needs to perform the jobs and to use knowledge effectively (Klaus, 2010). Hard skill is defined as technical procedures or practical assignments which are usually convenient to monitor and evaluate meanwhile the soft skill is generally characterized as 'people skills' (Shakir, 2009). Soft skill is mentioned as people skill since it is urgent to help workers interact with others. People usually work in a team instead of an individual one. This condition has lead to the importance of soft skills in completing their day-to-day tasks. Individuals have to deal with other and they have to apply the appropriate soft skill. (Robles,2012) elaborates that soft skills include personality, manner, and behavior rather than technical or knowledge skills. Furthermore, soft skills are described as intangible, non-technical, and certain personalities that help to ensure a person's strength in leadership, facilitating, mediating, and negotiating (Parsons, 2008). The soft skills of telecommuters in this COVID-19 pandemic are elaborated below.

Social Contact

(Parsons, 2008) mentioned that soft skills are natural traits that advance human interactions. Conventionally, people are used to doing job travel from other cities/nation to another one. But during this pandemic, travel warning is implemented and workers telecommute and interact virtually with others. The role of social contact in telecommuting has also been explored (Wilton, 2011). Working virtually with others cannot be ignored and this skill must be updated since workers need to contact others. People work in partners, a team in a cope of a local, national and even international. Contacting others is a must to carry on the job to a teammate.

Social influence

(Wilton, 2011) also mentions the social influence on telecommuting. Job assignments vary and they are a lot in number. A virtual meeting is conducted to distribute assignments. Distributing assignments can be given to the right person to get the job done as expected. Not just being able to complete the job but the quality of the completed job is reached. Skill in

influencing others is important to make people do something as we wish. Some tasks need to be completed by other work colleagues in which they often refuse in doing it.

Collaboration

Social distancing has positioned teleworkers to enter virtual technological means like the collaboration stage (Davidson, 2020). According to the lack of organic-person involvement, teleworkers could separate from on-site colleagues and joining divisions in a strongly related department (Davidson, 2020). This virtual activity enables an organization to make any human resource movement. Cross department members are possible to create since the platform to collaborate is available. Since the activity is conducted online, every connection is possible to do as long as the technology can support this platform.

Professionalism

During a pandemic, telecommuting about using online meeting room tools performing 100 % remotely in a different way (Davidson, 2020). Anybody knows that now everyone is forced to be professional in performing their job. New strategies are socialized by the corporate and human resource must conduct as it is asked to do. New standards are established as (Feldman & Mazmanian, 2020) mentioned that during this digitalized telecommuting period, workers show that they are involved, ready for everything, easy to contact and to give a response, fast in responding to electronic mails and somehow their working hours extend (Feldman, 2020).

Communication

To support telecommuting, people need communication methods (Kawashima et al, 2020). Online meeting is made but people still need to express what they want to avoid misunderstanding. Pharmacists create appropriate communication rules not just for the inside-place team but also outside-place ones (Martin, 2020). The process of communication is about sharing messages and ideas so that the sender and receiver get the same point. Communication is meaningless if there is no message accepted by both sides. The weakness of virtual meetings is some so many participants often mute themselves during the meeting. People do not share ideas in which will lead to misunderstanding.

Adaptation and Self-Exploration

Employees who are working online from home can explore and experiment with many tools which are noticed in an exposed manner (Richter, 2020). Since the company establishes a new policy to conduct telecommuting, employees adapt in quick response. They learn how to interface online, to use any software, etc. adaptation to a new phase is somewhat what the employees do in maintaining their job at the company. If not, they can easily be replaced by others. Working virtual gives the advantages of having no boundaries in trying and experimenting with anything. Everything can be learned online since the virtual world has prepared everything that people wish to learn. It has no boundaries. Working virtually also gives more space and enables many people to explore many things.

CONCLUSION

Telecommuting has been a solution for many workers. Many giant corporations declared that lots of their workers will telecommute from home for the next year of 2020 (McLean, 2020). This is interesting since the companies have suited well with the platform of telecommuting work. The reason why they keep going on with this type of work point to other

reasoning which mentions that obstacles do exist but managed to handle. Implementing telecommuting was not only for the importance of worker's health but also for the great result of performance and decreased costs (McLean, 2020). Telecommuters who deal a lot with technologies and work from home must be able to adapt quickly transforming themselves into the new style of telecommuting. Many soft skills can be implemented and these keep updating since telecommuting does not end yet.

REFERENCES

- Allen, T., Golden, T., & Shockley, K. (2015). How effective is telecommuting? Assessing the status of our scientific findings. *Psychol Sci Public Interest*, 16((2)).
- Chater, N. (2020). *Facing up to the uncertainties of COVID-19*. Retrieved from Nature Human Behavior: <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-020-0865-2>
- Coombs, C. (2020). Will COVID-19 be the tipping point for the Intelligent Automation of work? A review of the debate and implications for research. *International Journal of Information Management* 55.
- D.M Cable, and T.A. Judge. (1996). "Person-organization fit, job choice decisions, and organizational entry". *Organizational Behaviour and Human Decision Processes*, 294–311.
- Davidson, R. (2020). The transformative potential of disruptions: A viewpoint. *International Journal of Information Management*.
- Feldman, E., & Mazmanian, M (2020). *Why time signals still matter when working remotely*. MIT Sloan Management Review. Retrieved from <https://sloanreview.mit.edu:https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/whytetime-signals-still-matter-when-working-remotely/>.
- Fosslien, L., & West Duffy, M (2020). *How to combat zoom fatigue*. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org:https://hbr.org/2020/04/how-to-combat-zoom-fatigue>.
- Gajendran, R., and Harrison, D.A. (2007). The Good, the Bad, and the Unknown About Telecommuting: Meta-Analysis of Psychological Mediators and Individual Consequences. *Journal of Applied Psychology*.
- Giurge, L. M., & Bohns, V. K. (2020). *3 tips to avoid WFH burnout*. Harvard Business Review. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org:https://hbr.org/2020/04/3-tips-to-avoid-wfh-burnout>
- Gorlick, A. (2020). *The productivity pitfalls of working from home in the age of COVID-19*. Retrieved from <https://news.stanford.edu:https://news.stanford.edu/2020/03/30/productivitypitfalls-working-home-age-covid-19/>
- Hall, D.T. (1989). *Telecommuting and the management of work-home boundaries*. In: *Paper Prepared for the Annual Review of Communications and Society*. Boston: Aspen Institute and the Institute for Information Studies.
- ILO. (2020). *COVID-19 causes devastating losses in working hours and employment*. Retrieved from [www.ilo.org: http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_740893/lang-en/index.htm](http://www.ilo.org:http://www.ilo.org/global/about-the-ilo/newsroom/news/WCMS_740893/lang-en/index.htm).
- Kawashima T, Nomura S, Tanoue Y, Yoneoka D, Eguchi A, Shi S, Miyata H. (2020). The relationship between fever rate and telework implementation as a social distancing measure against the COVID-19 pandemic in Japan. *Public Health*.
- Klaus, P. (2010). Communication breakdown. *California Job Journal*, 1-9.

- McLean, R. (2020). *These companies plan to make working from home the new normal. As in forever.* CNN Business. Retrieved from <https://www.cnn.com/2020/05/22/tech/work-from-home-companies/index.html>
- Morikawa, M. (2020). *COVID-19, teleworking, and productivity.* Retrieved from VoxEU.org: <https://voxeu.org/article/covid-19-teleworking-and-productivity>
- Nilles, J.M. (1973). *Telecommunications-Transportation Tradeoff: Options for Tomorrow.* New York, United States: John Wiley & Sons.
- O. A. Benjamin, and B. S. Samson (2011). "Effect of perceived inequality and perceived job insecurity on fraudulent intent of bank employees in Nigeria". *Europe's Journal of Psychology*, 7(1), 99-111.
- Parsons, T. L. (2008). *Definition: Soft skills.* Retrieved from [http://searchcio.techtarget.com/http://searchcio.techtarget.com/](http://searchcio.techtarget.com/http://searchcio.techtarget.com/http://searchcio.techtarget.com/)
- Martin. R.D. (2020). Leveraging telecommuting pharmacists in the postCOVID-19 world. *Journal of the American Pharmacists Association.*
- Richter, A. (2020). Locked-down digital work. *International Journal of Information Management.*
- Robles, M. (2012). "Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace". *Business and Professional Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453-465.
- Routley, N. (2020). *6 charts that show what employers and employees really think about remote working.* World Economic Forum. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/06/coronavirus-covid19-remote-working-office-employees-employers>
- Salomon, I. (1986). *Telecommunications and travel relationships: a review.* Boston: Transp. Res.
- Shakir, R. (2009). "Soft skills at the Malaysian institutes of higher learning". *Asia Pacific Educ. Rev*, 309–315.
- Thomas, Z. (2020). *Coronavirus: Will Covid-19 speed up the use of robots to replace human workers?* Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/technology-52340651>
- Toniolo-Barrios, M., Pitt. L. (2020). *Business Horizon. Mindfulness and the challenges of working from home in times of crisis.* Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2020.09.004>
- Wilton, R.D., Paez, A., Scott, D.M (2011). *Why do you care what other people think? A qualitative investigation of social influence and telecommuting.* Transp. Res.
- Y. Chang, C.-R. Chien and L.-F. Shen. (2020). *Telecommuting during the coronavirus pandemic: Future time orientation as a mediator between proactive coping and perceived work productivity in two cultural samples, Personality, and Individual Differences.* Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2020.110508>