
The Demands of Roles, Challenges, and Actions to Face the New Normal Era

Tuntutan Peran, Tantangan, dan Tindakan Menghadapi Era Normal Baru

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ABSTRACT

Employees, in all countries, are bearing a heavier burden in the COVID-19 pandemic situation. At least, there are three important issues that make the burden on employees, during the COVID-19 pandemic, heavier. First, is the conflict between the demands of work and family. Second, feelings of insecurity at work (job security). Third, related to the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. On the other hand, these employees are also faced with the challenges of new normal, so appropriate actions are needed when these employees return to work in the office.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Role Demands during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Role demands during the COVID-19 pandemic employees in all countries bear a heavier burden in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. There are at least three important issues that make employee burdens heavier. The first is the conflict between work demands and family demands, especially for employees who have children who are still of school age. In pandemic situations like today, the role of work and non-employment become more interconnected than normal situations (Sinclair et al., 2020). When schools, offices, and various workplaces must close, most employees have to work from home. Work from home makes many people vulnerable to family-work conflicts. Family-work conflicts occur when pressures of work demand and family demands do not suit each other play role, performing job role (Weer &Greenhaus, 2014). In the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, when employees must work from home, the opposite happens, namely, to play job role becomes more difficult to do when it comes to also being involved in family role.

Greater role demands, both from work roles and from family roles family-work conflicts. Allen et al. (2019) stated that role demands are a strong predictor of family-work conflicts. Another problem that makes employees experience family-work conflicts is difficulty of managing boundary between workspace and family space. Many employees must work from the kitchen, living room, bedroom and so on which under normal circumstances is a family room. The house has become an office and a school space for children. The space between working and doing family chores is blurred. The blurring of the work and family space can psychologically be a problem, because according to Ashforth, Kreiner, &Fugate (2000). Individuals distinguish physical space and time as a means of distinguishing different roles. We create, maintain, and change boundaries of physical space and time to manage the world around it, so that we can play an appropriate role. There are two types of people associated with managing these boundaries, namely segmentor and integrators. Segmentor types are people who strictly separate the

boundaries of space, such as separating a workspace from a living room, time to work with time for the family. This person type will perform work roles in separate places, namely the office and home. When in the office, they try not to carry out the role of family, otherwise when at home, they do not want to be bothered their job. Therefore, people of this type will experience greater family-work conflicts when it comes to working from home. Meanwhile, the integrator type is more receptive, because he is used to not too separating the living room from work room, the working time with family time.

Work-family conflicts have an impact on declining employee productivity, performance, and job satisfaction (Johnson et al., 2005), and life satisfaction (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). Individuals with high levels of work-family conflict reported more depressive symptoms, more marital problems, poorer health status, and reduced life satisfaction, well-being, and family quality of life. Therefore, higher family-work conflicts have been linked to variety of physical and psychological health problems (Zhou et al., 2018). The explanations provided are related to the influence of work-family conflicts, one of which uses the Conservation of Resource (COR) model. COR model states that individuals strive to acquire and maintain resources (Hobfoll, 1989). If resources are lost or threatened, individuals experience distress and decreased psychological well-being. When individuals lose their identity in the process of managing their work and family roles, their resources (e.g., time, energy) gradually decrease, causing fatigue, restlessness, and even depression. As a result, individuals could experience less psychological well-being and mental health disorders.

Second problem that makes the burden heavier is job insecurity feeling. Based on data presented by the Director of Industry, Tourism and Creative Economy of the Ministry of VAT / Bappenas, total reduction of labor that occurred in the economic sector during the pandemic reached 1,715,066 people or 8.93% of the total before the pandemic (Novika, 2021). Workforce reduction occurs in almost all countries with COVID-19 pandemic. In the UK, it is estimated that more than eight million employees laid off (Bell, Gardiner, & Tomlinson, 2020). Many companies have business and financial problems, so they must close business or reduce their employees. It certainly makes employees who are still working experience a feeling of worry about continuation of their job. Being forced to lose a job and being unemployed has been shown to have a significant impact on mental health (Gallo et al., 2000), even if still working but feeling worried that losing a job will affect employees' mental health (Llosa et al., 2018).

The problem is of course directly related to the transmission of the COVID-19 virus. Employees, who work office or work from home, feeling fear virus infected. Unresolved and in long time worries will be able to increase stress, which will have a huge impact on his psychological health and cannot infrequently cause mental disorders. Psychological First Aid is needed worrying and stress can be managed properly, so as not to lead to poor performance and mental health. Himpunan Psikologi Indonesia (HIMPSI) collaboration with government, represented by Kantor Staf Presiden (KSP), Ministry of Health, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, Ministry of Communication and Informatics, and PT. Telkom and PT. Infomedia Nusantara as a subsidiary of Telkom has launched a public service with access to call center 119 ext. 8 namely as Layana Sejiwa. Layanan Sejiwa can be obtained by all Indonesians for free. In addition, the companies have increasingly raised awareness of the importance of mental health issues, so many of them opened the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP).

Challenges of New Habits Adaptations

Indonesia's Government has taken initiative to ask the public to make behavioral adjustments in the face of pandemics, by proposing adaptation of new behavior in new normal. This initiative is intended to prevent economic problems from worsening due to regional restriction policies, lockdowns, regional quarantines, and other policies that serve to prevent the transmission of viruses. Health issues due to the COVID-19 virus and economic issues, as a result, become a dilemma in policy making. Both must be considered equally or sometimes unequally, so often must pull out to win one at a certain moment and move to the other at another time.

Adherence to health protocols is one of the keys, in addition to vaccination, which is currently used by the government to be able to win both, prevent transmission making economy of the community still working. During eid al-Fitr, for example, government prohibits homecoming to prevent the spread of virus. This policy is a form of health winning rather than economics. On the other hand, the government continues to encourage opening of various business ventures, such as the opening of shopping centers, cinemas, tourist attractions, football matches, and soon the opening of schools and others. This policy is a form of economic winning. At the same time, the government continues to implement health protocols such as 3M (Keeping distance, wearing masks, and Washing hands). It all leads to the hope that people are healthy, the economy rises.

Nowadays, many companies and government agencies ask their employees go back work, from office. The school has also started to reopen so students can study offline at school. Economy wheels have begun to spin again. The government even set a high growth target this year, which is up to 7%. That growth level will be difficult to achieve if, the government must suppress mobility of community through regional restriction policies and so on. Microscale restrictions were chosen to keep the economy running, particularly in areas where the spread of the COVID-19 virus is low, while areas where the spread of the virus can be suppressed with micro-scale restrictions. Some universities have also begun surveying lecturers and students to choose online, offline, or hybrid learning, which means they have started preparing for students to return to study on campus. Most employees have had to back to work from office, and others must start preparing to return to work from office too.

Actions When Returning to Work from the Office

When rate of virus spread is at a relatively sloping over time, although there are still certain regions that at certain times experience a case spike, and with aim of order for economic growth to occur, the easing of regional restrictions with various implications, such as restrictions on the number of employees in the office, begins to be implemented. The community is expected to be able to work immediately in new normal conditions and start working back from the office. After employees work from home with all the problems faced as previously stated, are employees ready and able to focus on work (while the COVID-19 pandemic is not over), have a high motivation to return to work from the office? What can employees and leaders do to get employees back to work from office by displaying effective work behavior?

Yuan, Ye, and Zhong (2020) stated that there are two challenges that must be faced in order for employees go back work from office effectively, namely (1) the difficulty of employees to focus and engage closely in work caused by stressful situations experienced while working from home;(2) the fear of contracting due to the COVID-19 pandemic that has not ended can make the spread of the virus in the workplace; (3) for employees who feel comfortable working from home and do not experience problems while working from home also have their own problems when having to return to work from the office, How to deal with those challenges?

The concept that can be used to show how much employees are closely involved with their work and based on various research related to well-being is job engagement. Employees who have high job engagement show us of physical, cognitive, and emotional energy carrying out their work (Kahn, 1990). Schaufeli & Bakker (2004) defines job engagement as a positive work-related state of mind characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption in one's work. Job engagement was originally constructed as a trait, but measurements at different times in the same person show varying levels of job engagement depending on how the employee responds to the situation and their personal experience at the time. Therefore, job engagement may vary from episode to episode within days, similarly to within-day fluctuations of job performance (Reis, et al., 2015). So, job engagement can be constructed as a state concept. Thus, an employee's job engagement can be different when he works from home with when he starts having to work from office depending on how the office condition and his experience working from office.

When employees experience a change in the work situation, from working from home back to work from office, they need to be able to reconnect mentally with their new situation. His proposed concept is job reattachment, in which employees seek to mobilize energy, focusing the jobs and resources they have (Sonnentag and Kühnel, 2016). Job reattachment process will help employees to increase psychological resources they have to carry out his work and be reattached to their work. Re-adjusting to different situations is sometimes difficult, mentally connecting with work becomes an important factor that can help. Job reattachment has been shown to influence job engagement in Yuan, Ye, Zhong (2020). Conducted study on employees returning to work after the COVID-19 pandemic at pandemic center, Wuhan city. Job reattachment is proven to be associated with a greater level of job engagement, with lower levels of work withdrawal (behaving badly when not supervised by superiors) as well as higher levels of safety-compliance behavior and performance.

Yuan, Ye, and Zhong research also found that relationship between job reattachment and job engagement is stronger when leaders display behaviors that make employees feel psychologically safe. Leader safety commitment to safety can help reduce workplace health and safety threats. When employees feel that their leaders have a strong commitment to keeping their workers safe, employees will be better prepared mentally to work and can use their energy into their jobs more when they must back to work from office. However, when employees judge that their leaders are not committed to promoting safety, they will not feel safe to use the psychological resources into their work, so their cognitive readiness to reconnect with the work will be difficult to do. That is, when an employee feels psychologically threatened, then the resources in him will also be very limited to be used in increasing his work involvement. So, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to ensure employees have a psychologically safe feeling when they must return to work from work.

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