The Work from Home Revolution: WFH Starter Kit

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Abstract: The implications of the COVID-19 pandemic have greatly changed the norm in the employment system. Workers in both the public and private sectors are now adapted to the term "Work from Home" (WFH). Also, despite the little information on reliable practices for working from home, employees are nevertheless expected to perform at their highest level in accordance with the organizational goals. Therefore, this study is aimed to evaluate the need of establishing a guideline for WFH. A total of 178 employees from both private and government sectors were recruited in this survey. Findings showed that 69.1% of staff agreed their organization should provide them with proper guidelines in the implementation of WFH. It means that when they have specific guidelines it enables them to work more independently which also exhibits flexibility and creativity. As a conclusion, the developed and validated WFH manual handbook is able to become the main reference for employees for them to prepare physically and mentally while working efficiently from home.

Keywords: *Work from Home, Guidelines, Government, Private.*

1. Introduction and Background

Working remotely is a term used to define work from home (WFH), which implies that employees should be doing it from a distant location, typically their house. WFH has been labeled as the "new normal" when COVID-19 spreads further. Starting from March 11, 2020, when the World Health Organization announced that COVID-19 is a pandemic, the majority of the employees have been required to Work from Home. Before this, it was necessary to shift from the actual office to a home office for working purposes (Yang, Kim, & Hong, 2021). WFH is becoming more well-liked in developed countries (Morikawa, 2022). According to Rauh, Adams-Prassl, Boneva, & Golin, (2020), the proportion of employees who often WFH was typically 10% or less during those normal times, but starting in March 2020, there has been a considerable increase from the previous number. Bick, Blandin, & Mertens, (2020) reported the proportion of American employees who exclusively work from home increased from 8.2% in February 2020 to 35.2% in May 2020. To stop the spreading of COVID-19 and to reduce expenses, it was also reported that 20% of Thai firms have made the shift into work from home policies (Kate, 2020) during the pandemic. At the same time, The Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training (JILPT) stated as of December 2020, 30% of employees in the employment sector reported of involving in work from home practice.

The quantity of individuals who work from home has unquestionably greatly expanded since the initial wave of the pandemic, which took place between March 2020 and May 2020 (JILPT, 2020). The government's announcement of the deployment of a Movement Control Order (MCO) to stop the virus' transmission by closing all public and private businesses had an impact on how WFH was implemented for the entire population of Malaysia. Nonetheless, the majority of Malaysian businesses and organizations used a hybrid approach, with some employees working from an office and others from home, because various professions and job kinds required varying work implementation. In a statement, the chief secretary, Tan Sri Mohd Zuki Ali, announced that, except for the health workers or other front liners (Nor Azizah, 2021), only 20% of government staff will report to work and the remaining 80% would be on WFH with rotation. Although implementing the practice of working from home practice was important in that situation, most of the employees were not given any guidance in the form of policies, or a manual of procedures. This makes it challenging for them to assure that they can complete the tasks effectively and efficiently. Furthermore, reports showed number of workers facing stress when they were unable to manage their time properly between handling family and completing their tasks. Xiao, Becerik-Gerber, Lucas, & Roll, (2021) claimed that

the required stay at home practice during the pandemic has interrupted the employees' routines.

Which in turn contributed to their emotions of despair and worry, which in turn will affect their physical and, mental health. At the same time, Hayes, Priestley, Moore, & Ray (2021) illustrated the number of teachers who were forced to change the old teaching and learning approach to online methods when school sessions continue in most countries during the pandemic. They encounter challenges such as being cut off from coworkers and experiencing social distance from their colleagues (Aczel, Konvacs, Van Der Lippe, Szaszi, 2021), which causes them to lose direction and guidance while doing their job at home. Thus, it is significant for them to have a reference while implementing the new norms. Basically, the guidelines or references become vital for employees because they will help them manage broad implementation on how to complete work and usually offer a helpful overview of what to do in circumstances.

At the same time, employees also should be given a checklist regarding the necessities needed during the WFH period. Having good tools and systematic preparation will give them valuable experience working at home, the same as working at their office. When the company's objectives and purposes are completely accomplished, both the company and the personnel will benefit. The Malaysian government has released a JPA circular on the policy of working from home (Jabatan Perkhidmatan Awam, 2020), which however those policies does not provide recommendations for managing other matters such as on the aspect managing their time, emotional, and physical management aspects. It is very essential to ensure that employees have proper direction in establishing the work-life balance while working at home. Thus, this study will be focusing on developing the WFH Starter Kit as a guideline for employees to work systematically and efficiently from home.

2. Literature Review

Work from Home: Since the spreading of the Coronavirus worldwide, World Health Organization (WHO) has classified the virus as a pandemic. It was first identified in Wuhan, China, in November 2019. Following that, governments around the world have accustomed the public to the order of the Movement Control Order (MCO), to halt the spreading of the virus. Therefore, this forces organizations including private sectors and industries to adopt the Work from Home (WFH) practice to ensure business sustainability (Patanjali, & Bhatta, 2022). Work from home (WFH) is now becoming the new norm being practiced by most organizations. Many businesses were ordered to switch from conventional operating procedures to practice full or partial WFH. Some people have found the adjustment to be easier than others, particularly if the staff members are accustomed to work remotely and the necessary technology was made available even before the MCO (New Straits Times, 2020). The majority of the leading companies have stated that over 70% of their employees will have to work from home in the near future, demonstrating that the WFH culture will persist even after lockdowns particularly among jobs that relied on information technology (Oettinger, 2011).

It was also discovered that the decline in the cost of working from home was a major factor in this increase. Peter Drucker, a management expert, claimed in a 1989 Wall Street Journal editorial that the entire infrastructure was already in place for knowledge work to move from offices to people's homes (Waters-Lynch, 2020). According to a UK survey of IT and non-IT workers, working from home helps employees become more independent and motivated (Bailyn, 1988). They discovered that when workers started working from home, the call center's productivity increased by 9% and staff turnover decreased by 50%. However, they are also concerned that if management is unaware of the contribution made, it would negatively impact their promotion. According to a case study conducted in Germany (Kira & Beckmann, 2016), staffs who work from home exert greater effort, particularly when they have additional responsibilities at home that must be completed in addition to their work. On the other hand, OWL Labs (2017) made the case that workers choose WFH to fulfill their responsibilities to their families, avoid frequent travel, and minimize office disturbances.

However, Schawbel (2018) demonstrated that a global study cited in the Harvard Business Review showed that WFH also caused people to feel disengaged from their work and struggle to focus to finish their tasks. The factors most significantly associated with productivity during this period were hence consistent communication and significant cooperation (Haridas, Rahul, & Subha, 2021). According to other different

studies carried out during COVID-19, employee performance and autonomy were favorably correlated. However, a poor work-life balance and related stress may have a negative effect on the employees' production. Women employees may be getting undesirable experiences by not only working from home but also, being obliged to the household chores and managing family, contrary to men who could work longer uninterrupted (Farooq & Sultana, 2021). On the surface, letting your employees work from home can seem to provide all the advantages and conveniences they require for success and productivity. But just as every place of employment has its challenges, so does the home. In light of this, manual/guidelines on a few areas should be enlightened to improve performance and help employees to stay focused during WFH.

Manual/Guidelines: The COVID-19 pandemic is a rapidly changing situation. The expanding number of research papers that have been published and present scientific evidence for preventing COVID-19 have made it possible to formulate several guidelines. Businesses should consider the suggestions made by the World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labor Organization (ILO) about how to protect their employees against COVID-19 at work (WHO, 2021). There are quite a number of additional suggestions were also made, including those for COVID-19 workplace preparation (WHO, 2020a), risky direct communication when there are community involvement (WHO, 2020b) and mental health issues to support mental and psychological well-being throughout the pandemic phase (WHO, 2020c). In response to the COVID-19 outbreak, the International Labor Organization has also developed an employer's guide on WFH (ILO, 2020a). The guideline has been designed to help employers adapt to a new normal. However, up to date, there are very few other scientific research and guidelines on WFH. Many companies are new to WFH arrangements and still struggling to adapt. While conducting WFH, work-life balance should be considered by every company to support the physical health, mental health, and sustain the productivity of WFH workers (Como, Hambley, & Domene, 2021).

The present literature does not suffice to rectify the important points pertaining to the unexpected behaviors and circumstances of being WFH towards the overall well-being of WFH workers (Rudrum, Rondinelli, Carlson, Frank, Brickner, & Casey, 2022). Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai, and Bendz (2020) have reported some undesirable experiences among WFH workers on WFH including being highly difficult, fraught with interruptions and having a damaging impact on their productivity and well-being. The majority of the respondents claimed that distractions from the home environment, family members, and a lack of material and technological support prevented them from concentrating on their professional assignments (Raju and Kumar, 2020; Waizenegger, McKenna, Cai, & Bendz, 2020). Meanwhile, another study reported having posttraumatic stress disorder (37%), anxiety attacks (20.8%), symptoms of despair (17.3%) and sleep problems (7.3%) (Rossi et al., 2020). On the other hand, 21.8% had high levels of perceived stress and 22.9% had adjustment disorder. In response, the International Labor Organization issued further recommendations on how to manage occupational psychosocial threats during the COVID-19 pandemic to address the consequence of mental health (ILO, 2020b). Stress associated with COVID-19 and a lack of organizational assistance during the transition to WFH may impact the work-life well-being of WFH employees (Como, Hambley, & Domene, 2021). The lack of suitable WFH standards from the employers changed how the employees were disciplined in their regular job activities.

Adults who had COVID-19 had postural discomfort and a reduction in quality of life due to a decline in physical activity, a rise in screen usage, and extended work hours (Sharma, & Vaish, 2020). Apart from that, WFH workers also experienced physical dysfunction that affects their musculoskeletal (Gupta, Jadhav, Nataraj, & Maiya, 2022 and Condrowati, Bachtiar, Maharani, & Utari, 2020)). These four highest body regions are the neck, shoulder, lower back, and upper back. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2020) has adopted a number of guidelines and techniques to control musculoskeletal ailments, including modifications to work practices during WFH and the use of ergonomics equipment. The COVID-19 pandemic, which is expected to start spreading over the world in March 2020, has prompted the Malaysian authority to develop legislation and standard operating procedures to limit the disease in Malaysia. The steady increase in COVID-19 active cases in Malaysia from 14 March 2020 until 25 March 2021 has resulted in the Malaysia Public Service's Circular 5/2020 allowing civil servants to work from home (Tambou, Rahim, & Sabar, 2021). To have a positive impact on the level of productivity at work, both employers and employees should have clear norms and guidelines (Nordin, Baidzowi, & Razak, 2016). Numerous initiatives should be taken to maintain ongoing communication between employers, employees, coworkers, and the organization (ILO,

2020c). To deal with the new nature of the work environment, it would be necessary to research a variety of WFH-related topics, including developing guidelines for Malaysian workers.

3. Methodology

This study primarily employs primary data collected through the online survey method. The researcher first identified and defined the issues that employees faced when working from home. To confirm that this problem is actually present, researchers have surveyed to get a true picture of the difficulties faced by remote workers. The sample includes employees from both the public and private sectors. To ensure that the data's accuracy and consistency met the objectives of the study, the primary data was collected through the use of a closed-ended online survey. The assessment measure was a five-point Likert scale, with the points ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). This study used convenience sampling, a non-probability sample technique because it is quick, easy, and reasonably priced. The data were quantitatively examined using the SPSS application and it was conducted from Mei February 2021 until May 2021. Data were analyzed after the respondents provided their responses, and this analysis helped to produce the manual. To gauge the handbook's effectiveness, researchers distributed it to employees in the public and private sectors via online platforms to get their feedback on the relevance and effectiveness of the manual. Basically, there are a total of five processes involved in producing the WFH Starter Kit. Figure 4 depicts the study's methodology in steps.

Figure 1: Process to Develop the WFH Starter Kit
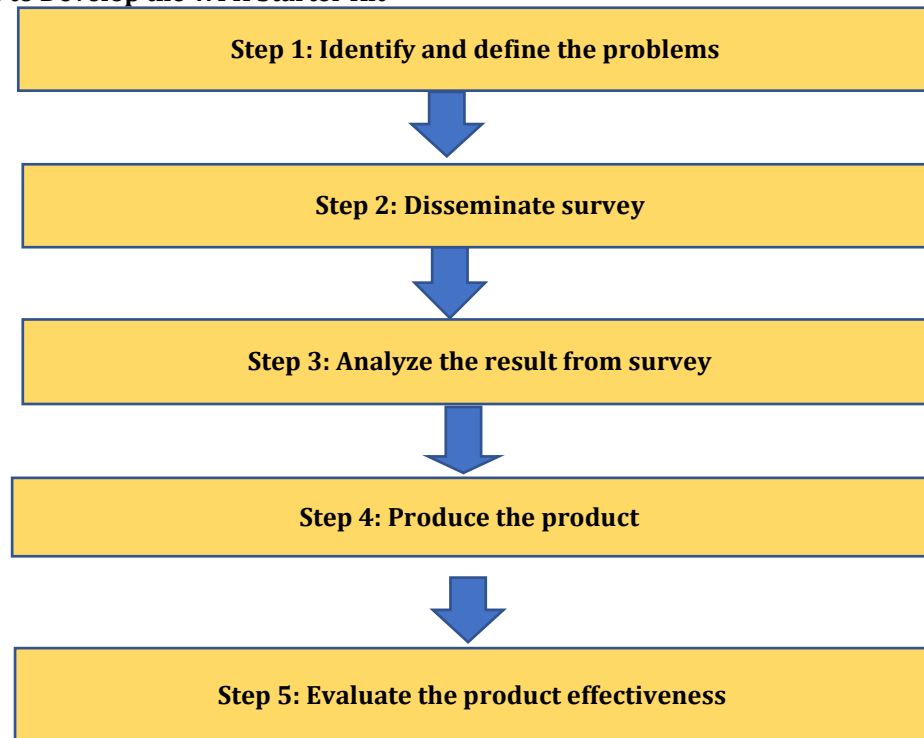
The detail about each step is also explained below:

STEP 1: Identify and Define the Problems: Both public and private sectors have started to implement work from home (WFH) practices in the situation of a pandemic outbreak in the country. There is no proper guideline for staff and leaders in enforcing the practice of WFH. The guideline must provide basic protocols to assist staff and managers in fulfilling their working responsibilities.

STEP 2: Disseminate Survey: The study was conducted through an online survey and involved 178 private and government employees who were practicing working from home. The survey also investigated the need of developing specific guidance in performing work from home among the respondents.

STEP 3: Analyze the Result from Survey: The descriptive statistical analysis is used in looking at the frequency i.e., the distribution of the tendency of employees to realize the need for the existence of a policy in working from home is created. Based on that, 69.5% of respondents agreed that their organization should provide a manual or guidelines on WFH for both employers and employees. At the same time, almost 50.9 % of the respondents agreed that, to date, their company did not provide them with any manual or guideline on WFH policy.

STEP 4: Produce the Product: Produce the WFH guidelines with the name of the WFH Starter Kit to be referred to by staff and leaders which is suitable for both private and government sectors.

STEP 5: Evaluate the Product Validity: The validity of the product will be evaluated through two processes which are the face and content validity. Face validity is obtained from the end user of both government and private sector while the content validity was done by the appointed representative of Jabatan Tenaga Kerja Negeri Sembilan using a self-administered questionnaire. All respondents were satisfied with the manual provided and also suggested improvements in several aspects.

4. Results and Discussion

In the preliminary study, an online survey was conducted among 178 government and private workers in Malaysia to collect demographic data and to get their responses on the standard guidelines for WFH. The sociodemographic characteristics of the respondents were presented in Table 1. About 53.4 % of the respondents were aged between 36 to 45 years old, followed by 31.6 % aged between 26 to 35 years old and 14.9 % aged more than 46 years old. The majority of the respondents were male (75.3%), married (78.7%) and worked as government servants (64.4 %).

Profile of Respondents: Table 1 displays a summary of the sociodemographic characteristics of the Malaysian worker who participated in the study.

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents (N=178)

VARIABLE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
AGE		
26-35 years old	56	31.6%
36-45 years old	95	53.4%
>45 years old	27	14.9%
AGE		
Male	134	75.3%
Female	44	24.7%
MARITAL STATUS		
Single	34	19.0%
Married	140	78.7%
Divorce	4	2.3%
WORKING SECTOR		
Self-employed	3	1.7%
Government	115	64.4%
Private	60	33.9%

Furthermore, it was found that 66.9% of the respondents have no experience working from home before the pandemic COVID-19 (Figure 2) and agreed that there are no specific tools that can serve as a guideline and reference in implementing WFH practice. The policy on WFH was created by the government on December 21, 2020, however, its implementation of it was still unclear. About 69.1% of the respondents have agreed that their organization should provide a manual or guidelines on WFH for both employers and employees as shown in Figure 3. At the same time, Figure 4 showed 60.7% of the respondents agreed that the Ministry of Human Resources also should provide a manual or guidelines on WFH for both employers and employees. This has shown that the development of a manual or guidelines is highly crucial to help both employers and employees to have a healthy work and life balance when working at home.

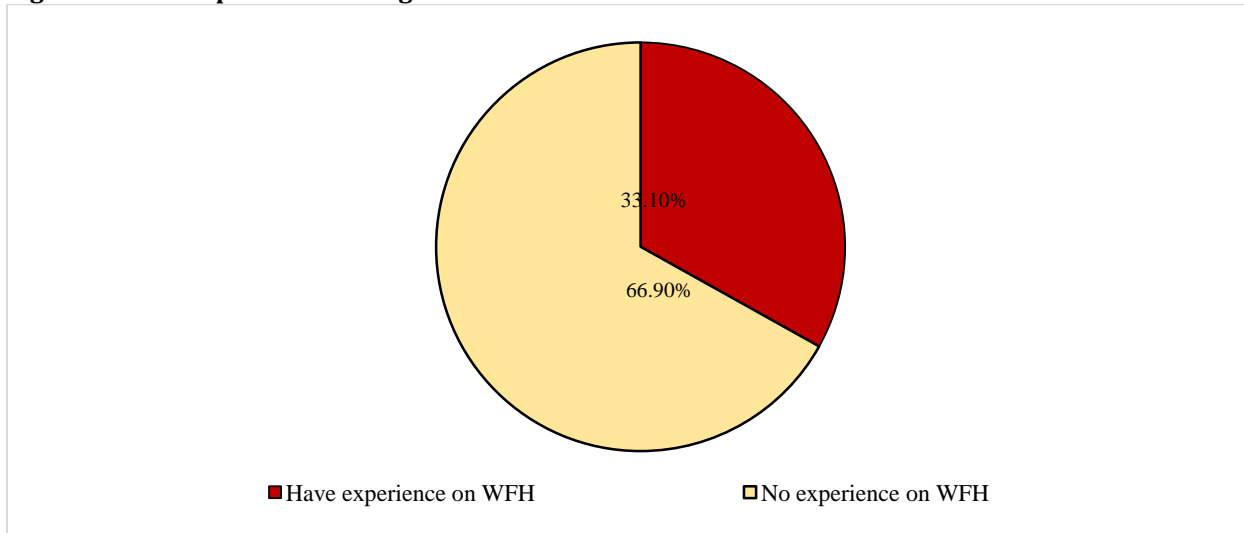**Figure 2: WFH Experience among 178 Government and Private Workers**

Have experience on WFH: 33.10%
No experience on WFH: 66.90%

Figure 3: Responses for the Organization to Provide a Manual or Guidelines on WFH for Employers and Employees
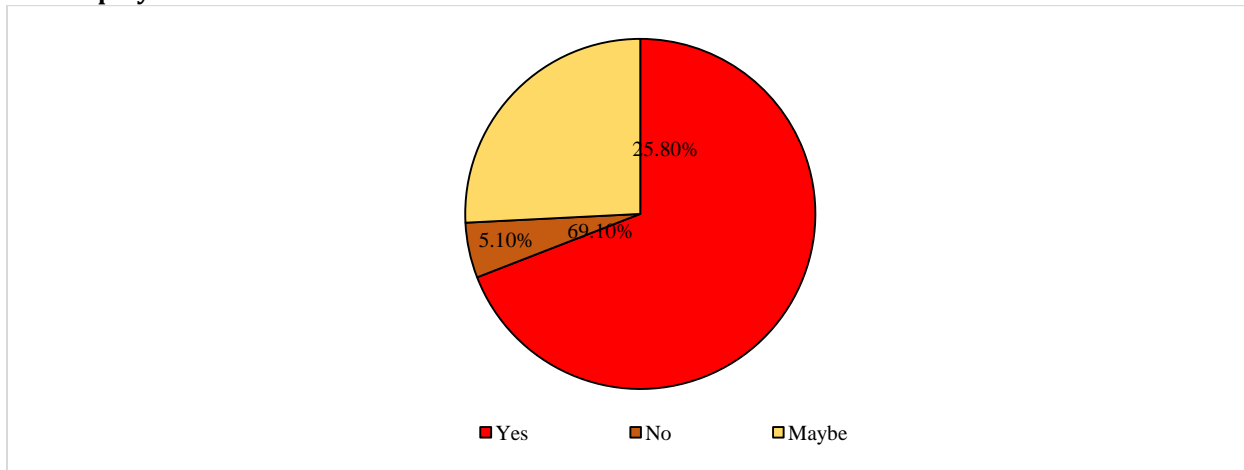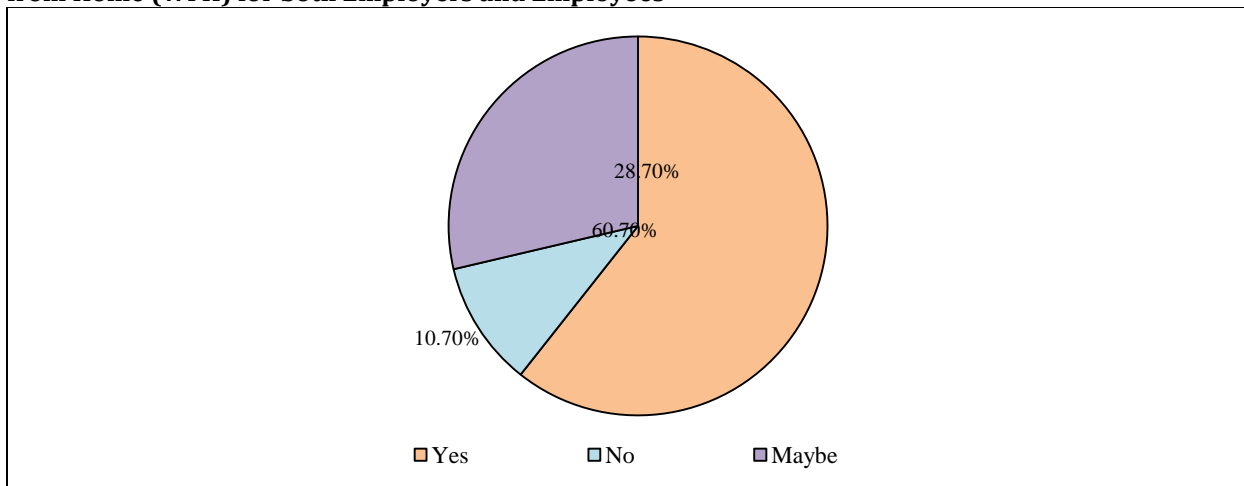

Yes: 69.10%
No: 5.10%
Maybe: 25.80%

Figure 4: Responses for the Ministry of Human Resources to Provide a Manual or Guidelines on Work from Home (WFH) for both Employers and Employees


Yes: 60.70%
No: 10.70%
Maybe: 28.70%

Mean Comparison: Table 2 shows the distribution of the WFH satisfaction level for both males and females are not normally distributed with SW=0.923 and SW=0.970 respectively with p-value=0.005.

Table 2: The WFH Satisfaction Level for both Female and Male

Tests of Normality

	Sex	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	DF	Sig.	Statistic	DF	Sig.
The level of Satisfaction WFH	Male	.159	46	.005	.923	46	.005
	Female	.078	132	.049	.970	132	.005

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Figure 5: Box Plot Satisfaction Level WFH

Case Summaries
Mean

Sex	Satisfaction Level WFH
Male	3.5435
Female	3.4981
Total	3.5100
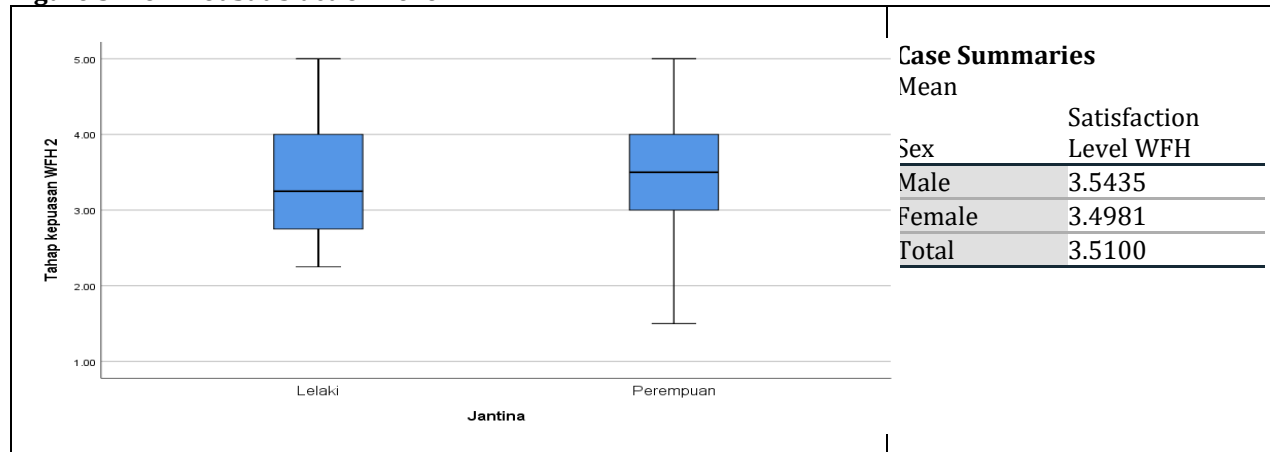
Based on the Box plot as shown in Figure 5, the median line lies far from the center of the box plot. This indicates the distribution of the WFH satisfaction level for both male and female skewed and not normally distributed. On average, WFH satisfaction level score among males was 3.54 slightly higher than females' score of 3.50.

Table 3: Mann-Whitney Test for WFH Satisfaction Level among Gender

Ranks

	Sex	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Satisfaction Level WFH	Male	46	89.97	4138.50
	Female	132	89.34	11792.50
	Total	178		
Mann-Whitney U	3014.500			
Wilcoxon W	11792.500			
Z	-.072			
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.943			

Table 3 above demonstrates the Mann-Whitney Test results, and it illustrates that not much difference in mean rank for both males and females. Nevertheless, the mean rank of the male is slightly higher than the female. The results also showed there is no significant difference in the mean WFH satisfaction level between gender (U=3014.5, p-value = 0.943 > 0.05). This outcome was consistent with what has been established by Brancaccio et al. (2021), who likewise discovered that there was no gender-based substantial variance in the working activity during the lockdown. Job satisfaction may rise as WFHs had considered employees' freedom and they gain their own control over work-related tasks, pace and location (Deole, Deter, & Huang, 2023). WFH was no longer an option but a necessity during the COVID-19 epidemic, and women valued it more than men, especially those with young children (Mas & Palais, 2017). The fact that working mothers still provide the majority of the childcare explains why their WFH satisfaction level is marginally lower than that of men,

which is most noticeable among respondents with children (Gallen, 2018). It was discovered, however, that men thought it was possible to work from home (Adams-Prassi et al., 2022). Despite the fact that women spend more time caring for children, there was no statistically substantial difference in the mean WFH satisfaction level between the sexes in this study, suggesting that both sexes share equally in homework and childcare during WFH. In the meantime, the distribution of the WFH satisfaction level for both government and private sectors are significantly not normally distributed with SW=0.977 and SW=0.919 with p <0.05 respectively as demonstrated in Table 4.

Table 4: The Distribution of the WFH Satisfaction Level for both Government and Private Sector
Tests of Normality

	Sector	Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	DF	Sig.	Statistic	DF	Sig.
Satisfaction level WFH	Government	.081	117	.058	.977	117	.046
	Private	.129	58	.017	.919	58	.001

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Figure 6: Box Plot Distribution of the WFH Satisfaction Level for both Government and Private Sector

Case Summaries	
Mean	
Sector	Satisfaction Level WFH
Government	3.4509
Private	3.6293
Total	3.5100
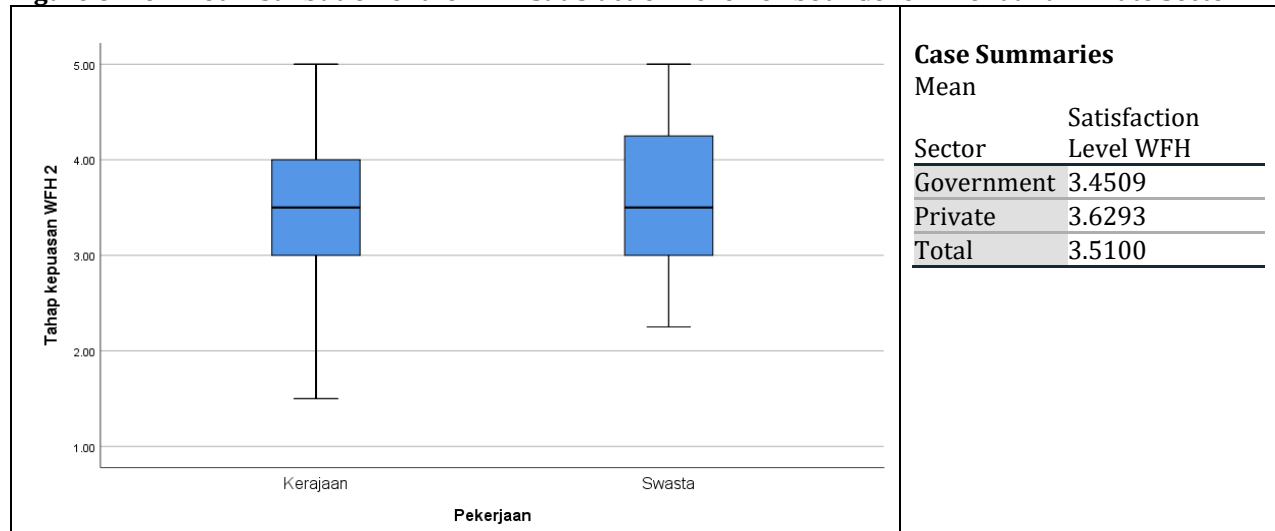
Based on Figure 6 above, the median line lies far from the center of the box plot. This indicates the distribution of the WFH satisfaction level for both government and private sectors skewed and not normally distributed. On average, the WFH satisfaction level for the private sector showed a score of about 3.63 slightly higher than the government sector score of 3.45.

Table 5: Mann-Whitney Test for WFH Satisfaction Level for both Government and Private Sector (N=175)

Ranks

	Sector	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Satisfaction Level WFH	Government	117	85.13	9960.00
	Private	58	93.79	5440.00
	Total	175		
Mann-Whitney U	3057.000			
Wilcoxon W	9960.000			
Z	-1.070			
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.285			

Table 5 above displays the Mann-Whitney Test results of slightly different mean ranks for the government and private sectors. However, the mean rank of the private sector is slightly higher than the government

sector. The results also showed there is no significant difference in mean WFH satisfaction level among the working sector (U=3057, p-value = 0.285 > 0.05). The percentage of government employees who were able to work totally from home during the coronavirus epidemic is higher than the average for all private employees. This is because it adheres to the guidelines provided in a circular issued by JPA about Government Office Operations. The WFH strategy and working with flexible hours are encouraged and used as support for ongoing efforts to prevent the spread of the virus during the Conditional Movement Control Order (MCO) period beginning on May 2, 2020. In an ongoing attempt to enhance the way public services are delivered and to balance the demands of officers' obligations and their well-being, the government has committed to develop a WFH policy as a substitute for a new method of working in the public sector.

5. Recommendations and Conclusion

Overall, it can be suggested that this developed and validated WFH Starter Kit will serve as a guideline for employees to work efficiently by outlining the strategies in preparation for the daily tasks needed. It also helps employers in making decisions, disseminate tasks and instructions to their workers systemically. This tool is also applicable to assist employees in having a balance between workloads that must be carried out at home while maintaining their health quality. The WFH Starter Kit provides the most up-to-date electronic in any platform and quick reference for employees and employers whenever the government needs to change or revise its policies due to current situations. Any arrangements made in the future are subject to modification in response to revised instructions and the organization's changing needs. It is also advised that employers think about altering or creating corporate policies or guidelines to give specific instructions on how to adopt WFH in their business. All employees should be properly educated about this policy and notified about any changes that may be made. The efficiency of the company's policies and rules should be frequently evaluated by the employer. During WFH implementation, personnel should be given the precise tools, equipment, materials, and technology they need to complete the necessary duties. Also, it is critical that personnel receive the necessary training, supervision, guidance, and information, including strategies for handling emergencies during pandemics. Any arrangements pertaining to the tasks and key performance indicators (KPI) given should also consider the employees' physical and mental well-being.

On the other hand, monitoring and evaluation of employees' work performance should also be carefully developed and considered certain degrees of flexibility while conforming to the expected standard. A new type of management will need to be used much more widely in WFH practice in the new post-COVID-19 era. With the relaxation of lockdowns, agile businesses are very likely to embrace this method of working. Improved digital infrastructure will make it easier for employees to work from home effectively. This is due to the likelihood that more workers will look for employment that enables WFH to meet their family and personal demands. So, in the long run, employers would be seeking better regulations and rules from the government regarding the operation of WFH. Hence, WFH is a constant element of employment in Malaysia that may alter the country's customary contract of employment as the labor market adapts to the advancements of the Industrial Revolution. Many believed that as the world slowly recovers from the pandemic, some changes in working arrangements, such as WFH and increased use of technology, will continue. In this regard, the article's findings cast a favorable light on WFH's alternative working structure. During WFH, productivity levels for both employees and employers may even hold steady or even rise. The WFH Starter Kit can be a contingency guideline and reference to ensure job preservation and productivity. Finally, it is concluded that the findings of this study can help the university or company's top management in short- and long-term planning to improve the performance of its departments. Therefore, this kit will be used to create applications or mobile apps for HR managers to use in their HRMIS scheme which will be beneficial to many government institutions or the private sector.

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