

Factors Influencing Work-Life Balance of PEA Head Office Workers during Hybrid Working under COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

Since the spread of COVID-19 pandemic, everyone has been forced to change their normal life including office workers of Provincial Electricity Authority (PEA)'s head office. They had to work onsite to tackle this crisis, and the ability of them for balancing their lives might be changed because of work from home (WFH). They had to manage their time between job responsibilities and personal activities. This study focused on their opinions towards factors influencing work-life balance during hybrid working. The data was collected through online questionnaire. A multiple regression was used for finding the statistical significance among factors. The research results revealed that most of them perceived that work environment, job engagement, social/family support and emotional intelligence could affect their work-life balance. However, only two factors were found statistical significance influencing their work-life balance: emotional intelligence and social/family support. PEA management should keep providing a measurement to support their work-life balance.

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Hybrid Working, Work Environment, Job Engagement, Social/Family Support, Emotional Intelligenc

INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, working from home has become the new normal work-life of office workers since the pandemic COVID-19 had begun since 2019. It can be said that COVID-19 was the hardest obstacle for people. Many people who were infected with the virus would experience mild to moderate respiratory illness. The World Health Organization (WHO) pointed out that the way to recover that illness was to cure it without requiring special treatment, and the virus could spread from an infected person's mouth or nose in small liquid particles when they coughed, sneezed, spoke, sang or breathed. Because of its rapid spread and danger, most organizations adjusted their work systems, management and employees to tackle this crisis. Alike, many companies, schools and other industries in Bangkok laid down some measures to prevent this problem.

The provincial Electricity Authority (PEA), a government enterprise under the Ministry of Interior, Thailand, has to comply with the government measurement related to the prevention of COVID-19 spread in the workplace. There were several of COVID-cases within PEA so the organization laid down the defensive measures in order to decrease the risk of the epidemic by avoiding gathering in the same area and doing work from home (remote working). PEA specified the regulation that its office workers must work at their home more than fifty percent in a week; however, the adjustment of the PEA's regulation depends on the severity of COVID-19 pandemic in society. During hybrid working, most PEA head office-workers spent their life in the office and home. They needed to manage their time to keep balancing between office's tasks that they were assigned and personal routines or activities that they had to handle. If they were assigned too many tasks or working too much, it would cause danger to their health such as having daytime fatigue and feeling blue (Bellefonds, 2017). Flexible work arrangement including flexible time and place as well as family responsibilities influenced work-life balance (Odeloye et al., 2020). The factors that could influence work-life balance included organizational factor, individual factor and societal factor (Omar, 2020). Thus, flexible working hours or flexible work plans could decrease the distress to them. Besides, their work-life balance could be affected by work environment, job engagement, social/family support and emotional intelligence. Otherwise, if they spent too much time doing their personal routines, they could not get a productive outcome for PEA.

The balance between work life and personal life was necessary for both the PEA organization and its office workers. Thus, this research studied whether or not the factors which are work environment, job engagement, social/family support and emotional intelligence influenced work-life balance of PEA head office workers during hybrid working.

Literature Review

There were many studies and theories related to work-life balance. Boundary and Border, Compensation, Segmentation and Instrumental theories mentioned about relationship between work life, family life and personal life. Boundary and Border theory pointed out that people could manage and negotiate their work and non-working domains because work and non-working were separate domains. Otherwise, the two domains affected each other (Khateeb, 2021). Compensation and segmentation theories said that work and family domains were independent. The segmentation theory mentioned that the characteristics of the work environment were defined as role conflict, role ambiguity and role overload which were related to job satisfaction. Besides, family conflict and parenthood were found to be related to family satisfaction. Yet, compensation theory pointed out that work and family domains could support each other to fulfill the satisfaction (AlHazemi and Ali, 2016). These theories pointed out that people could manage their work and non-working domains because work and personal life were in

separate domains. Instrumental theory also mentioned that people behaved in a field, and it could impact to the other field. For this research, these theories as mentioned were used to find out factors that affect work life or family life could affect work-life balance or not.

Work from home (WFH) during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Employees could be gotten positive and negative impacts during working from home (Aczel, et.al.2021). As positive impacts, it helped they increased their autonomy with less interruptions, personal comfort and working flexibility. The International Labor Organization (2020) stated that remote working during the COVID-19 pandemic was more complicated than working under normal circumstances. Working remotely from home contained positive experiences and facilitating work-life balance of people. Organizations could organize and evaluate their employees' performance based on work results rather than working hours or specific work schedules. They were better prepared to manage their time and tasks, so effectively balancing work responsibilities with personal life, including family responsibilities. In contrast, the negative impacts were also found, disconnection from co-workers and experience of isolation.

Work-life balance during the COVID-19 pandemic

Adamoniene (2021) proved that during the COVID-19 emergency situation, many people in the world were forced to work from home. Initially, there were certain expectations about the possibility of working from home as a positive factor that would support work–life balance. However, negative impacts also emerged. For example, employees received some calls or messages from the employer outside working hours, it meant that some employers expected that their staff would also be available all day long. Uncertainty and spending time with family often caused more stress because many organizations and individuals were not ready for this sudden change. Besides, many mistakes could be made if the organizations and their workers were not ready for the new style of working. They would be struggle to handle their lives. This could further raise the issue of work–life balance. According to Ramakrishnan (2020), valuable lessons had been provided because of the emergency situation of COVID-19. The cooperation within the organizations was more focused during work from home. People had to consider how to improve collaboration between companies and employees. Both employees and employers faced new challenges. It was essential to ensure the financial growth of companies in the future. Besides, praxis supporting work-life balance needs to be set for all of them. Work-life balance especially for the immeasurable time such as COVID-19 pandemic was crucial for employee growth, personal happiness and company retention. In fact, when companies gave workers support to find a positive work-life balance, they normally felt motivated to do their job effectively.

In summary, many people around the world were forced to work from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. There were arguments that work from home may affect work-life balance of office workers.

Accordingly, to investigate relationships of factors that could influence work-life balance, the conceptual framework was proposed as shown in the figure 1.

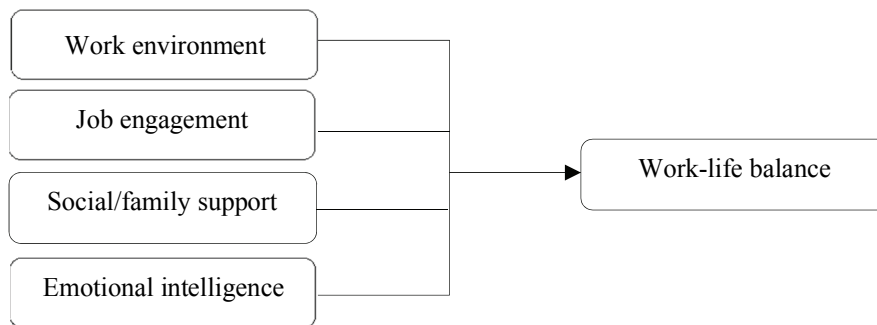


Figure1 Conceptual framework

Based on figure 1, there were four independent variables. They were work environment, job engagement, social/family support and emotional intelligence. The dependent variable was work-life balance. All conditions existing around the workplace could influence office workers either directly or indirectly. When organizations provided care and opportunities for their employees, the employees would express certain attitudes and behaviors. A perfect balance of life for office workers needed a prudent synchronization and juggling of wealth, career, family, social obligation, spirituality, health etc. It was proved that individual, organizational and environmental factors affected work-life balance (Kumarasamy et al., 2015).

Research Methods

This research focused on factors influencing work-life balance during hybrid working under the COVID-19 pandemic of PEA head office workers. The target population were 3,666 of PEA employees who have worked at PEA head office. Whereas the calculated sample size was 348 at the minimum, the data was obtained from 356 participants. The online questionnaire used for this research was developed based on relevant researches. The questionnaire focused on opinions of PEA head office workers towards their work-life balance and factors influencing their work-life and personal life.

Statistical analysis was applied for analysing the data. Respondents' opinions about work environment, job engagement, social/family support, emotional intelligence and work-life balance during hybrid working under the COVID-19 pandemic were analysed by mean and standard deviation. Stepwise method of multiple regression was applied to find out the statistical significance among factors. Work-life balance was set to be the dependent variable while work environment, job engagement, social/family support and emotional intelligence were set as independent variables. Statistical significance was measured by the level of significance which was set at 0.05.

Research Results

Opinions of PEA head office workers towards work-life balance

As shown in Table 1, it was found that their opinions towards their overall work-life balance during hybrid working under the COVID-19 pandemic was at 3.63. The average score was at high level meaning that work-life balance of PEA head office workers was good. The results showed that they were satisfied with work hour and family time during hybrid working. They believed that they could

maintain their work-life balance well during hybrid working; however, it was found that they focused on their work life before their personal and family life.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviation towards work-life balance

Work-life balance	Mean	S.D.
Being satisfied with the time spent with family during hybrid working	4.08	0.815
Prioritizing job over personal and family life during hybrid working	3.76	0.976
Being satisfied with work hour during hybrid working	3.90	0.880
Prioritizing personal and family life over job during hybrid working	2.43	1.058
Being able to balance your work life and personal life well during hybrid working	3.99	0.859
Overall	3.63	0.917

Opinions of PEA head office workers towards factors influencing work-life balance

As shown in Table 2, PEA head office workers believed that work environment, job engagement, social/family support and emotional intelligence could affect their work-life balance. Their opinions towards these factors were at high level. However, when considering each factor, it was found that social/family support was the highest while job engagement was the least.

Table 2: Mean and standard deviation towards factors affecting work-life balance

Factors	Mean	S.D.
Work environment	3.91	0.958
Job engagement	3.81	0.931
Social/family support	3.94	0.898
Emotional intelligence	3.93	0.864

Analysis of factors influencing work-life balance

Based on multiple regression analysis as shown in Table 3, it was found that there were two factors influencing work-life balance during hybrid working. Work-life balance during hybrid working could be explained by two factors 34.9 percent and their relationships could be written in form of equation. Emotional intelligence (X_1) and social/family support (X_2) were the factors that their significant level of p-value was lower than 0.05. It meant work-life balance of PEA head office workers was statistically affected by two factors which are emotional intelligence and social/family support. The relationships among them could be written in an equation to forecast. The linear regression equation formula can be used to forecast as follows:

$$\hat{Y} = 1.801 + 0.343X_1 + 0.122X_2$$

Table 3: Result of using multiple regression--stepwise method

Independent Variables	b	β_1	SS_b	t-value	p-value
Constant	1.801	.139		12.987	.000
X₁	.343	.049	.461	6.950	.000
X₂	.122	.051	.158	2.382	.018
R = 0.591	R ² = 0.349	F = 94.739			p-value < 0.00

Discussion

PEA head office workers could balance their work life and personal life well, and they were satisfied with the time spent with their family during hybrid working (average score = 4.08). During work from home, people would have work-life flexibility and it could improve physical and mental health as it provided them more time to personal activities (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2021). Based on the respondents, social/family support and emotional intelligence got high average score, so these factors played the important role during hybrid working. It meant that these two factors influenced work-life balance of PEA head office workers when they worked from home. Based on the regression, it was found that emotional intelligence and social/family support were the factors that statistically positively influenced work-life balance of PEA head office workers. The finding was aligned with the work of Vyas and Shrivastava (2017) and Mani et al. (2020) that individual factors such as emotional intelligence and organizational factors could affect work-life balance and job satisfaction. Apart from those two factors, PEA head office workers also believed that work environment and job engagement could affect their work-life balance. Nevertheless, no statistical significance was found in the regression for the work environment and job engagement. Not all variables were found statistical significance may be because of the impact from the variance of an uncontrolled variable and small sample size relative to the variability (Natoli, 2017).

Based on the research results, it was found that work environment at PEA was friendly. Colleagues, subordinates and supervisors supported each other. Supervisors always gave feedback to subordinates. Besides, there were a lot of team work projects which could improve the relationships among them. In addition, working policy during work from home also cared for health and mental health of the workers. Thus, these could be reasons that emotional intelligence and social/family support were found statistical significance. Otherwise, PEA should create more strategies that connect its workers with the organization in order to increase the workers' motivation and enthusiasm because job satisfaction and job engagement linked to each other.

Conclusion and managerial implications

There were two factors statistically influenced work-life balance of PEA head office workers during hybrid working under COVID-19 pandemic which are emotional intelligence and social/family support. Since the emotional intelligence was one of the factors that played the significant role influencing work-life balance, PEA management should continue caring about the emotional intelligence by maintaining the ability to understand, manage, and handle emotions. It will increase the capacity to adjust themselves under circumstances. Creating friendly environment can improve the positive emotion when working. The other managerial implication is to understand the characters and attitudes of colleagues, subordinates and supervisors. If there are some people who cannot accept feedback or do not work well in a team, they seem to have low emotional intelligence. Providing routine and fact-based feedback, giving PEA head office workers a voice and encouraging them to share their opinions can help to increase emotional intelligence in the workplace. Social/family support was the other factor that played the significant role influencing work-life balance, PEA management should create good relationships among colleagues, subordinates and supervisors in order to keep them engaged with the community. To make them feel supported by the organization, facilitation is required when they face with difficulties in their job. Providing a measurement to support mental health of the workers is needed. Besides, giving support to them can give an impact on their job satisfaction as well. Their quality of life could be enhanced because there is the positive linkage between social support from colleagues,

subordinates and supervisors and job satisfaction. However, due to the time limitation, the data was collected online quite a while after the happening of COVID-19 pandemic. The employees may have been already used to the “work from home”. Their opinions might be different if being asked right away at the first start of work from home.

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