ALTERNATIVE WORK ARRANGEMENT (AWA) AND ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE

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Abstract

The study explores the impact of Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) on organizational performance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, focusing on public school teachers' experiences in the Philippines. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) introduced AWA policies, such as work-from-home, skeleton workforce, and flexible working hours, to ensure the continuity of public services while prioritizing the safety and health of employees. This qualitative research utilized an interpretive approach, gathering data through Google Forms interviews with eight participants who had experienced AWAs. Four major themes emerged from the data: work-life balance, the suitability and challenges of AWAs, adaptation and adjustment to the new working conditions, and a focus on results. Participants reported that AWAs allowed for a better work-life balance and personal safety, though they faced challenges such as technological limitations and time management issues. The study found that teachers and their superiors were generally supportive of the AWAs, with a focus on output rather than physical presence. These findings underscore the potential of AWAs to enhance organizational performance by increasing employee satisfaction and productivity, despite the challenges of transitioning away from traditional work setups. The research suggests further examination of AWA policies to enhance their implementation and address gaps, such as providing more robust technological support and family-friendly work environments.

Keywords: *alternative work arrangement, organizational performance*

Introduction

The pandemic of the Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) has had a significant impact on everyone's lives, notably in the workplace. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) has the responsibility of establishing policies, standards, and guidelines for the Civil Service, as well as implementing strategies and programs to ensure that government personnel administration is cost-effective, efficient, and effective. The CSC has changed the government's guidelines on Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) to align them with the standards put forth by the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATMD) (IATF). According to CSC Resolution No. 2000912, which was issued on October 14, 2020, and circulated via CSC Memorandum Circular No. 18, the following rules apply: Until a different operational capacity is provided in agencies providing essential or critical services, agencies located in areas under Enhanced Community Quarantine (ECQ) and Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) shall adopt work-from-home arrangements, while skeleton workforce may be allowed (Civil Service Commission, 2020).

DepEd has also issued rules to guarantee that increased safeguards be taken in DepEd offices and schools, as well as the delay of different national and regional activities, as well as the temporary suspension of school-related activities. As a result, the DepEd work environment places a strong emphasis on the safety of all DepEd employees (Department of Education, 2020).

Many countries implemented mitigation measures to stop COVID-19 from spreading. Many workers are forced to work from home due to measures such as lockdowns and stay-at-home orders (Malkov, 2020). According to the Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS98) of 1998, working from home is more likely in the public sector, large organizations, and workplaces where employees are held accountable for the quality of their work (Felstead et al., 2006).

According to the CSC guidelines on Alternative Work Arrangements, the study's framework considers whether the policy objectives outlined in terms of adoption, implementation, and monitoring are satisfied. The AWA as defined in the CSC policy which government offices may adopt singly or in combination are the following: 1) Work-from-Home – refers to an output-oriented work arrangement that authorizes the worker to produce outputs/results and accomplishments outside of the office; 2) Skeleton (Skeletal) Workforce – refers to a work arrangement where a minimum number of employees is required to staff the office to render service when full staffing is not possible; 3) Four-day (Compressed Workweek – refers to a work arrangement whereby the employees' workweek is compressed to four (4) days each week. 4) Work Shifting/Flexible (Staggered) Working Hours – refers to a work arrangement applicable to offices/agencies that observe work shifting or flexible working time; and 5) Other Alternative Work Arrangements – refer to work arrangements consisting of a combination of the above enumerated work arrangements or other work arrangements subject to the prevailing community quarantine in the area where the agency is located and appropriate/ applicable to the agency mandate/functions. As a result, the relevance and importance of alternative work arrangements has become an important problem worth examining and resolving in many national and worldwide companies.

Research Questions

Based on this need, the following questions are investigated:

1. How do you describe your Alternative Work Arrangement (AWA)?
2. How do you find your AWA to be suitable/challenging for you?
3. How do you see your colleagues addressing the requirement of their AWA?
4. How do you see your superiors addressing the requirement of your/their AWA?

Methodology

This study is based on a qualitative method of the discovery that situates the effort within an interpretive philosophical viewpoint that focuses primarily on a teacher's experiences and challenges in implementing their AWA. Qualitative research, according to Creswell (1998), is "a process of understanding based on diverse methodological traditions of inquiry that investigates a social or human problem." The researcher constructs a sophisticated, holistic picture, analyzes language, presents extensive informant perspectives, and conducts the research in a natural context" (p. 99).

This study included interviews using Google Forms with 8 participants. The participants were notified through their Facebook messenger and all agreed to be part of the study. The participants were having their AWA since time of pandemic. The interview questions encoded in the google form were sent to their messenger chat and given ample time to type their responses. Transcripts were manually coded, grouped, and analyzed.

Results and Discussion

This study inquired on the potential benefits and challenges on alternative work arrangement and organizational performance. From the analysis of the interviews conducted on the eight participants, there emerged four major themes: (1) work-life balance; (2) suitable and challenging; (3) adaption and adjustment; and (4) results-focus.

Work-life balance

Findings from this study revealed that the participants believed that work-life balance is and can be achieved because schools adhere to the alternative work arrangement (AWA) scheme, in accordance with the guidelines set by CSC, DepEd, DOH, and other allied government agencies. The participants think that AWA is safe, practical, and responsive to the needs of the time, as the participants have shared:

It aims to promote safety and security of teachers during pandemic. This alternative working arrangement which was adapted by the school constitutes a subtle but reassuring working environment that satisfies the IATF protocol. (1)

I don't have to go to the site to report for duty. I am more efficient when I do my tasks at my own pace. (4)

…allows me to work and perform better (5)

It helps me respond to the current situation amidst pandemic taking into consideration my personal safety while in the performance of my responsibilities thereby making me more responsive and productive. (6)

This confirmed from the study of Tausig and Fenwick in 2001, which stated that the possibility that alternate work schedules affect perceived work-life imbalance—the "time bind." The results showed that alternate schedules per se do not "unbind" time. However, perceived control of work schedules increases work-life balance net of family and work characteristics. Further, in support to this study, Hayman (2009) found direct linkages between perceived usability of flexible work schedules and the three dimensions of work/life balance (work interference with personal life, personal life interference with work, and work/personal life enhancement). In addition, employees operating under flexitime work schedules displayed significantly higher levels of work/life balance than their counterparts utilizing traditional fixed-hour schedules. However, non-significant differences in the levels of work/life balance were found between two other flexible work schedules (flexiplace and job share) and fixed-hour work schedules.

Suitable and challenging

The COVID-19 pandemic has halted the day-to-day operations of schools and restricted the movement of both teachers and students. It was observed that one of the common issues among participants is finding AWA suitable in terms of efficiency and beneficiality on one hand and challenging on the other hand, as pointed out by most of the participants. It is very apparent that participants have both enjoyed and struggled in embracing the idea of AWA, as a stark contrast to the traditional 5-day reporting at workstation each week. Magnifying the suitability of AWA, the participants have shared:

Being an employee, it benefits me and increase my happiness having more time to do my work and finish my tasks. (Participant 3)

…suitable for me as it offers me the chance to make my own schedule of activities whether at home or in school, which in turn make me available for other tasks that need to be accomplished while extending guidance and helped to my kids who are also students of distance learning and other family matters. (Participant 6)

… suitable for me because I can save money for the transportation and save time as well. (Participant 8)

On the other side of the coin, the participants have also shared that there are challenges they have encountered in adapting to the AWA scheme implemented by their schools. There appear to be two apparent issues: first, access to technology; and second, time constraints.

Access to technology

…challenging, however, when there are problems in internet connection. (Participant 4)

Challenging because of the technical requirements. (Participant 5)

During the 4 days working at home, most are allotted in answering queries of students [in social media platform like Facebook]. (Participant 7)

Time constraints

I need to prepare for that day of my reporting to the school and I need to make sure that I already finish all the tasks assigned to me. (Participant 8)

…it offers temptations to abuse it. Abuse of the flexible time arrangement is possible if employees are not into minding work priorities and deadlines. This posted a challenge for me to keep on track. (Participant 6)

…a bit challenging on my part specially when it comes to addressing my tasks in school in such a short time. Tasks such as the distribution and reproduction of learning modules, preparation of other learning materials, classroom preparation and structuring, sorting and checking and recording of learner's achievement… (Participant 1)

Flexible work arrangements pose a problem for managers in terms of how to manage employees who use them. Groen, et. al (2018) investigated the relationship between the use of a specific implementation of flexible work (teleworking) and control system design, specifically the emphasis on output controls. As a result, the researchers found that among teleworking employees, the share of teleworking hours is positively related to the emphasis on output controls. However, employees who are allowed to telework report less emphasis on output controls by their manager relative to those not allowed to telework.

Adaption and adjustment

COVID-19, as a health crisis, which impacted the education landscape, have also augmented the appreciation on and utilization of many technology-driven solutions and innovations, paving the way for "borderless" classrooms. One the success stories in learning beyond the classrooms is integrating technology in the classrooms, giving birth to blended learning approach, and popularizing terms such as synchronous and asynchronous learning. Teachers, as the main persons behind the wheel, can accelerate and/or decelerates these processes.

The participants think that their colleagues had confusions, struggles, complaints, and disagreements as they adapt to new scenario. Adjustments, otherwise, creates positive perspective towards accomplishing AWA activities and managing time properly. Also, appreciating the personal benefits of AWA and make sense of balance in providing instructional assistance. The participants have pointed out:

They also find and manage their time properly to perform and finish their tasks whether in school or at home. (Participant 1)

…colleagues seemed to abide and fulfill the requirements rendered in our AWA. They were able to extend their instructional assistance with the students through accomplishing AWA activities. (Participant 2)

my colleagues have more control over how and when they do their work. (Participant 3)

my colleagues now have appreciated the efficiency of working at home (Participant 5)

They have this sense of balance in terms of flexibility and operational demand. (Participant 6)

Meanwhile, it is also important to emphasize that participants' colleagues must make some adjustments as they try to veer away from the norm. Three of the participants mentioned that challenges were met at the onset of the AWA implementation on their schools.

There are those who still try to adjust and embrace the change, most especially, they need to be online in almost 24 hours. (Participant 4)

At the onset of the pandemic, some of my colleagues find it difficult to adjust. (Participant 5)

…some are having hard times. I sometimes hear complaints and disagreement on the schedules assigned. (Participant 7)

Several studies were conducted to elicit information about several key employment variables on flexible work arrangement: job-related stressors (e.g., role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload), burnout tendencies (e.g., emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment, and depersonalization) and behavioral job outcomes (e.g., job satisfaction and turnover intentions). Results show that CPAs on flexible work arrangements report higher job satisfaction and lower turnover intentions than those on a standard work arrangement. CPAs on flexible work arrangements generally have lower levels of burnout and stressors, though the reduced personal

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accomplishment burnout dimension may be conditioned upon whether the CPA has a mentor. Finally, for professionals switching to a flexible work arrangement, respondents indicated a significant improvement in job satisfaction and turnover intentions as well as some decline in burnout and stressors (Almer and Kaplan, 2002).

Conclusion

The participants maintained that AWA implementation on their schools is to ensure teacher's health and safety, but not at the expense of doing their assigned jobs and mandates. Though not physically reporting at school, and may not be present online for straight hours, the participants' superiors upheld that AWA is a mechanism in the new normal, as teachers need to stay true to their calling and vocation in producing outputs or results which lead to the superior's (or of school's) desired outcomes. The participants have shared:

They guide and update us on the mandates and requirements in accordance with the alternative working arrangement. (Participant 1)

They choose to focus on results while they offer increased work flexibility by allowing us to work remotely. They find ways on how to successfully balance accountability and freedom. (Participant 6)

Regular online communication is set to ensure that everyone is hitting the expected outcome while enjoying each own pace of working. (Participant 7)

The superiors are sometimes giving lots of requirements, but they are also understanding in giving considerations. They're also doing their tasks and other responsibilities because they're always in the school. (Participant 8)

In the study conducted by Bhalla (2016), the researcher attempted to access the impact of flexible working arrangements on employees' productivity and performance. It is argued that the flexible working arrangements can affect the either directly or indirectly to the improvement of the individual as well as organization and society well-being.

This further supported by the study conducted by Allen et al. (2021), which aimed to examine whether FWAs were effective in alleviating key challenges to work among older workers by assessing the impact of FWAs on the associations of physical health, mental health, and negative age-related stereotypes about older workers, with work engagement. The data were obtained from 1,834 workers aged 55–82 (age M = 63.3, 54% female) from a general random sample of older adults. As a result, greater mental health and lower negative stereotypes predicted higher work engagement. Moreover, greater physical and mental health conveyed an indirect impact on engagement via lower perception of negative stereotypes.

The researcher urges that more studies be conducted to further examine and study the policy's provisions on alternative work arrangement in order to improve its characteristics and include other areas that the policy may not have addressed to date in order to improve health security for government employees. The researcher suggests that family-supportive work settings programs be given more attention in order to reduce friction between work and family obligations, particularly for working mothers with young children.

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