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Working From Home Policy for Indonesia's State Civil Apparatus: General Propositions

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Abstract.
The COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the pace of change within the public sector. In Indonesia, one of the most conspicuous transformations can be seen in the introduction of working from home (WFH) practices among public sector employees who are part of the State Civil Apparatus. Before the pandemic, WFH had been proposed as an alternative style of work for the public sector with stipulated requirements as a cue to join the global trend of implementing WFH for employees in the public sector. However, it was only through the pandemic that the vast realization of WFH was done thanks to the health risk factor and the availability of technology. In the absence of comprehensive and official formal evaluation, this paper made use of the findings from previous studies as the basis of evaluating the WFH policy among the State Civil Apparatus. A literature review was conducted and some general propositions regarding WFH policies in the future were developed.

Keywords: working from home, State Civil Apparatus, COVID-19 pandemic, policy, evaluation

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1. Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has hit the whole world since last year. In Indonesia alone, as of the end of October 2021, the official record showed that COVID-19 infected more than 4.2 million people with more than 143,000 death casualties [1]. The effects of the pandemic have had consequences for the public sector, including the sudden implementation of Working from Home (WFH) for public sector employees, which is referred to in Indonesia as State Civil Apparatus. Responding to the threat of the virus, President Joko Widodo at a press conference at the Bogor Palace on March 15, 2020, urged the public to work, study, and observe religious practice from home. This appeal also applies to the State Civil Apparatus.

WFH is not something completely new for workers in Indonesia. This practice was implemented before the pandemic by several start-up companies and professions such as software programmers and graphic designers [2]. However, for State Civil Apparatus,

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WFH is something new. Before the pandemic, the usual practice was only to work outside the office, for example when on an official travel out of town or holding a meeting at a hotel. Several years ago, Suarlan [3] predicted that WFH or teleworking would not be carried out by State Civil Apparatus in the near future due to various reasons: the internet infrastructure that is not yet reliable and equitable, the low competency of State Civil Apparatus in using technology, and the perception that is still strongly attached in society that working must be done in the office.

In State Civil Apparatus case, the reason for doing WFH is different from the classic reasons usually given for this practice such as providing work flexibility or balancing work and life, but for employee safety, that is to avoid being contracted by the virus [2]. Since its implementation until now, there has never been a comprehensive evaluation of the implementation of WFH which takes into account all impacts beyond virus-related number. This paper provides an initial evaluation by making use of the findings from previous studies on WFH implementation among State Civil Apparatus. The evaluation is transmogrified in the form of propositions. This paper asks about the propositions that can be derived from the implementation of WFH among State Civil Apparatus as a guide for future arrangement of WFH after the pandemic. The writing is structured as follows. After presenting the introduction and method, the literature review on the implementation of WFH in the public sector globally is presented. The article continues with the findings of some studies on WFH among State Civil Apparatus in Indonesia. These findings are used as the basis for formulating propositions regarding future regulation of WFH. The paper is then closed with a brief conclusion.

2. Literature Review

2.1. WFH in Public Sector

Implementation of a flexible work schedule in which WFH is one of its manifestations has increasingly become a trend for employees in the public sector [4]. The US federal government started the WFH program in July 1990, starting with a pilot program involving 500 federal employees from 13 agencies, which was followed by various state and local governments. In his survey, Kemp [5] found that the reasons used behind the introduction of the WFH program were to increase productivity, reduce road traffic, save fuel, reduce air pollution, answer employee needs, reduce office space, and create collective bargaining agreement. In the survey, these reasons were mostly confirmed to have been achieved. The survey also found obstacles met in the WFH program such

as managers who did not dare to try it, resistance from some employees, difficulty in managing employees who worked remotely due to limited access, potential for abuse, limited technology, and budget constraints.

In a study that took data from 35 European countries, it was found that WFH did not hinder the delivery of public services. However, WFH disrupted the work-life balance of public sector employees. By WFH, there was an overlap between private life and work life. The boundary between the two seeped into each other. WFH also triggered greater work-related burnout, which in turn led to both physical and emotional exhaustion. All of these effects led to the perception that work-life balance, the usual idealized positive effect of WFH, did not occur. However, it was also found that work engagement was able to reduce the perception of this imbalance [6].

In a comparative study of the impact of telecommuting on private organizations and public organizations in the United States which were open to telecommuting practices, it was found that telecommuting was positively related to professional isolation, namely the fear that working outside the office will limit opportunities for promotion and getting rewards from the organization. This professional isolation was closely related to employee professional development activities such as interpersonal networking, informal learning, and mentoring. Interestingly, because these activities were less valued by public sector employees than private sector employees, telecommuting was less likely to hinder the professional development of public sector employees than private sector employees [7].

The relationship between teleworking and the professional isolation of public sector employees was also explored by de Vries, Tummers, & Bekkers [8]. Teleworking actually had a negative effect in the form of increasing professional isolation. In addition, working from home also reduced organizational commitment and had no effect on work engagement. However, these negative effects can be reduced if there is a high quality of superior-subordinate relationship based on social exchange, which is termed as leader-member exchange.

In a study of civil servants conducting WFH in Ibadan, Nigeria, it was found that boredom proneness (unpleasant affective state where individual feels a significant lack of interest in and difficulty concentrating on the ongoing task) and self-efficacy (the belief in one's capacity to perform as hoped) were the determinants of perceived stress among civil servants who carried out WFH during the lockdown [9].

In a research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on public sector organizations in Australia, it was found that the impact of the pandemic, including the implementation

of WFH, had both positive and negative impacts. The positive impact was in the form of increased creativity and initiative, and the negative impact was reduced satisfaction with team work [10]. WFH for public sector employees also triggered stress because employees were constantly exposed to news about the virus which in turn affected their productivity. The IT platform helped them in running WFH, but some also complained about the lack of access to technology only available in the office. For managers, they felt that they had lost control of their subordinates because they cannot see them directly [11].

The implementation of WFH in the public sector also poses a challenge to the implementation of transformational leadership. This is a leadership approach that is considered the most appropriate in dealing with crisis situations such as a pandemic. During WFH, supervisors in the public sector find it difficult to lead effectively due to obstacles in the form of high workloads, time pressure, role conflicts, and narrowing of freedom of action, especially in the area of personnel responsibility. The key factors in transformational leadership in the form of direct-personal communication and strong relationships between superiors and subordinates also cannot be executed properly during the implementation of WFH. This is because many leaders do not feel they have the authority and technical equipment to lead video conferences. To overcome these obstacles, things that can be done so that transformational leadership can be carried out during the implementation of WFH in the public sector are reducing the workload of leaders, increasing their scope of action, and reducing formalization and centralization in the decision-making process through more participatory decision-making and sharing of responsibilities through shared leadership [12].

3. Method

This research was conducted using a qualitative method in the form of a literature study. The data obtained is secondary data in the form of relevant journals, articles, news, statistics, and regulations. The findings obtained from various data sources are investigated to see the broad pattern and their interrelationships, which then used as a basis for carrying out further interpretations presented in the analysis. The purpose of this paper is practical, namely in the form of proposition statements that are expected to be a guide for the formulation of policy of WFH for Indonesian public sector in the future post-pandemic era.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. WFH Condition of Civil Servants in Indonesia during Pandemic

The seminal WFH policy actually started before the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of National Development Planning/National Development Planning Agency for example, has tested the WFH or remote working concept on December 2019 within its two deputies. Claimed to be a work system that is in line with President Joko Widodo's mandate to foster innovation and simplify the bureaucracy, the system was planned to be implemented more widely in 2020. Furthermore, the change in the work system will be accompanied by the provision of performance allowances or rewards for employees who perform well and increase their productivity [13].

Likewise, the Ministry of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform (*Kementerian Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara dan Reformasi Birokrasi*/Kemenpan RB) in January 2019 prepared 6 central agencies and 10 local government agencies as pilot projects for the implementation of WFH. In the concept at that time, WFH was given as a reward for employees who were ranked in the best 20 percent in terms of performance within an agency. Another reward is in the form of a flexible working arrangement, where employees can come to the office later in the day and do not have to fill out an attendance list according to working hours. It was also emphasized that WFH cannot be carried out by all employees, but only for employees who work in certain fields such as strategic analysis and research [14].

However, before the WFH trial was considered for wider adoption, the pandemic that has hit Indonesia since March 2020 has forced government to implement WFH for State Civil Apparatus due to public health and safety considerations. Considering that there was no rule that provided as a legal basis for the implementation of WFH due to force majeure conditions such as a pandemic, the Minister of State Apparatus Empowerment and Bureaucratic Reform (*Menteri Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara dan Reformasi Birokrasi*/Menpan RB) issued Circular Letter (CL) No. 19 of 2020 concerning Adjustment of State Civil Apparatus Work System in Efforts to Prevent the Spread of COVID-19 in Indonesia. Through this CL, all State Civil Apparatus are able to do WFH during pandemic, with a note that there are at least two highest levels of managers still working in the office so that services to the public are not hampered. After ended in 31 March 2020, the CL was then renewed several times which essentially extending the implementation of the original CL with slight modification.

In addition, Menpan RB also issued CL No. 58 of 2020 concerning the State Civil Apparatus Employee Work System in the New Normal Order. It states that the Staffing Officers (*Pejabat Pembina Kepegawaian*) in ministries, institutions, and local governments located in risky areas of virus infection or called Large-Scale Social Restriction (*Pembatasan Sosial Berskala Besar*) areas assign employees to carry out WFH fully, except for employees whose duties and functions are strategic. The CL was then amended by CL No. 67 of 2020 which regulates the allocation of employee attendance based on four risk zoning categories with the following provisions: for areas not affected or no case, the maximum number of employees entering the office is 100 percent; for low risk areas, the maximum number of employees who can enter is 75 percent; for areas of moderate risk, the maximum number of employees who can enter is 50 percent; and for high risk areas, the maximum number of employees who can enter the office is 25 percent. Lastly, Menpan RB issued CL No. 23 of 2021 which divides public sector work into three sectors (non-essential, essential, critical) in addition of four risk zoning categories as the basis for WFH arrangement.

Based on Menpan's CL No. 19 of 2020, agency leaders are required to evaluate the effectiveness of WFH implementation and report the evaluation to the Menpan RB. However, until now the result of summative evaluation which is comprehensive in nature has never been announced, so the overall effectiveness and impact of WFH cannot be really known by the public. Therefore, what can be presented is only fragments regarding the condition of WFH implementation in various agencies as described below.

Various strategies are carried out by government agencies both at the central and regional levels to meet the effective implementation of WFH. In Badung Regency, Bali, the Communication and IT Agency introduced an electronic signature that is able to verify who owns the electronic signature and guarantee its authentication. Meanwhile, the Investment and One Stop Service Office launched an online licensing service that facilitates officers to verify files from home. Regarding attendance, it is done using an application or electronic message for agencies that do not yet have an online attendance application. In addition, training was also provided for State Civil Apparatus who have not mastered IT [15].

In the National Civil Service Agency (*Badan Kepegawaian Negara*/BKN), all employees work from home except for employees who are in charge of protocol, health, correspondence, security, technics, driving, and cleaning with a composition of 10

percent of the total number of employees in these fields. To support the implementation of WFH, BKN has provided various applications that help employees, such as e-Kinerja for performance reporting. There is also SiPendekar application for attendance. The obstacle faced in its use is that the application cannot show the location of the employee's location accurately, which triggers BKN to refine the application [16]. Similarly, The Minister of Public Works and Public Housing issued a CL No. 4 of 2020 as a guide for the employees to continue to carry out their duties effectively in the midst of a pandemic. The CL also regulates official travel procedures, training, and public service delivery during pandemic [17].

In her article on the role of the internal compliance unit in the implementation of WFH in the regional office of the Directorate General of State Assets, the Ministry of Finance of West Java Province, Dewayani [18] explained that the internal compliance unit was helped in carrying out its work even though doing WFH because it had utilized several online-based report applications, online reservation system, and online presence system. However, due to WFH, there are some work that cannot be carried out because it must be done physically such as checking the completeness of files and monitoring the observance of ethical code among employees during working hours.

Not all State Civil Apparatus can work from home. At the Ministry of Health, the practice of WFH is excluded for employees working in health care facilities, especially those directly related to pandemic response. In addition, higher level managers also do not carry out WFH. Employees who carry out WFH are given online assignments and are not allowed to leave their homes on working days and working hours, except for emergency reasons by reporting to their immediate supervisor. Employees should also be easily contactable. If they cannot be contacted within 60 minutes, except for valid reasons, they are considered negligent and will be subject to a sanction of not receiving a performance allowance. The training activities have also changed its method from face-to-face to online lectures. Teleconference becomes the new habit to conduct meeting. Meanwhile, the obstacles faced during the implementation of WFH at the Ministry of Health are the unavailability of a centralized online employee attendance system, the difficulty in using daily work journals, and the presence of some employees who cannot work online because they do not have required electronic devices [19].

In their research on the effect of WFH on employee performance at the Financial and Development Supervisory Agency of North Sumatra Province using a questionnaire, Nasution, Zulhendry, & Rosanti [20] found that there was a significant relationship between WFH and employee performance. Meanwhile, using descriptive qualitative

methods, the positive effect of WFH on performance was also found in employees at the Class I Immigration Office in Medan [21].

In addition to performance, another thing that is examined in the implementation of WFH among State Civil Apparatus is productivity. For example, Simarmata [22] researched the impact of WFH on the productivity of Ambon State Polytechnic lecturers. By using linear regression, it was found that the WFH variable partially had a significant positive effect on lecturer productivity. In addition, Praptana & Riyanto [23] studied the connection between three variables (motivation, work experience, and utilization of IT) on the productivity of back office employees during WFH. Separately, these three variables only partially affect productivity. But simultaneously, the three variables affect the productivity of State Civil Apparatus during WFH with an effect of 76.6 percent.

In their study to measure the level of State Civil Apparatus readiness to carry out WFH, Febriani, Ariyanti, & Fathurrahman [24] found that there are three demographic variables that determine the level of State Civil Apparatus readiness in conducting WFH, namely type of position, age, and level of education. State Civil Apparatus who are more prepared to carry out WFH are those who occupy managerial positions, are younger, and have a higher level of education. Meanwhile, the working period does not affect the level of WFH readiness.

In his research which analyzed the implementation of WFH on the mental workload of employees at the Tanjung Priok Type A Customs and Excise Main Service Office, it was found that the mental workload conditions of employees after the implementation of WFH showed an average decrease of 9.49 percent. This decline was experienced by all after being grouped by work unit, age, position, and gender, except for the age group of 50 years and over. From these results, it is recommended that the WFH policy can be continued [25].

The positive benefits of WFH that are proven to be real are budget savings. At the Ministry of Finance for example, because practically all meetings are conducted via video conference during the pandemic, the budget previously allocated for official travel, hotel room rental, and food can be saved [26].

The study with the most representative sample to see the conditions of the WFH implementation among State Civil Apparatus in Indonesia was conducted by Akbar, Nurliawati, Muchtar, & Ramdhani [27] who looked at the perceptions of 437 State Civil Apparatus at the central and regional levels in carrying out WFH. In this study, it was found that the most positive thing about WFH is independence in work arrangements. However, negative perceptions of WFH were also found. Regarding independence,

female State Civil Apparatus showed a negative perception because they preferred to work in groups. Male State Civil Apparatus showed a more negative attitude because WFH were less likely to eliminate unnecessary interactions in the home. They also felt that their careers will be more successful if they work in an office because of the assumption that WFH has a negative impact on work continuity. Other finding was that the theoretical benefits of WFH such as flexibility of time and place, higher work motivation, work-life balance, and reduced travel time were not felt significantly. Other negative impacts were higher performance expectations from superiors, excessive working time, communication problems due to the impossibility of face-to-face interaction, and poor internet quality at home. In general, respondents with a higher level of education had a higher level of readiness to do WFH than those with a lower level of education. Similarly, younger respondents perceived WFH more positively, and older generations saw dependence on technology as hindering the implementation of WFH because they were not as adaptive as the younger generation in using technology.

In his assessment related to the implementation of public services during the WFH period, the Indonesian Ombudsman concluded that there were four disturbances in public services that could arise and harm the public. First, there was no clear communication between superiors and subordinates regarding the division of labor, resulting in a misperception that WFH is a holiday. Second, the picket scheme to get around the social restriction protocol actually had an impact on the decline in service quality. This can be seen from a number of agencies that implemented picket which often closed the administrative counter or service reception before the end of operational time. Third, the weak supervision of the performance of State Civil Apparatus who have special abilities such as physicians, lecturers, and teachers. Fourth, the use of public agency communication facilities was not optimally used. In checking a number of hotlines or emails provided for public services, the responses were disappointing [28].

Another issue that arises is related to digital data security. While doing WFH, employees process and transmit a lot of important and sometimes sensitive or confidential government data. Ideally, the data should be sent in encrypted form to prevent leakage. Until now the government has not yet developed an application that ensures digital safety during WFH. The implementation of video conferences using foreign applications such as Zoom also becomes a concern because the recordings are controlled by third parties [2].

4.2. Propositions for Future Implementation of WFH

Based on the sketches of WFH conditions in various agencies above, emergent pattern and collection of lessons can be discerned. The pattern and lessons are then transformed into the following propositions as a rough guide for future regulation of WFH for State Civil Apparatus after the pandemic ends, that is when public health factor does not count as the sole motive behind WFH policy.

First, not all State Civil Apparatus can do WFH. This is true even in the peak of pandemic, when State Civil Apparatus working in hospitals and other health facilities must continue to work due to their status as frontline personnel in handling the pandemic. The nature of some of their work also cannot be done from home. Not only cannot do WFH, they also work harder and longer than usual [2]. After the pandemic, the same proposition remains. Not all State Civil Apparatus can do WFH because some positions can only be done in the workplace, for example security personnel, protocol, drivers, and building maintenance officers.

Second, WFH should not be forced but should be an open option. Even for positions that can objectively do WFH such as researchers, lecturers, and policy analysts, they cannot be forced to do WFH because working in an office is also an employee's right. Thus, WFH is not a binding requirement for all who are permitted to do so, especially for those who choose not to do so, whatever their reasons.

Third, post-pandemic WFH policy should be based on a more formal policy. Currently, the policy is only regulated by CL which is basically an appeal without binding force. In the future, more formal policy which applies nationally must be in place, whether in the form of Law (*Undang-undang*) or Government Regulation (*Peraturan Pemerintah*). The policy should regulate the details of WFH: who can do it during what time, what are the rights and obligations during WFH, how is the accountability mechanism, etc. Standard operating procedures regarding WFH are also needed for each type of work and service.

Fourth, WFH policy must remain a post-pandemic option. The studies of Akbar, Nurliawati, Muchtar, & Ramdhani [27] and Febriani, Ariyanti, & Fathurrahman [24] show that those who are most enthusiastic about WFH are the millennial generation and those with higher education. In the future, employees with that character will become the majority of State Civil Apparatus and leader of public sector agencies. Therefore, things that prove attractive to them must be maintained. Millennials and Generation Z tend to be interested in jobs that offer flexibility in terms of time and space with the support of sophisticated technology [29]. Thus, WFH policy as a permanent feature

within public sector can be a means to attract the talented young generation to the profession of State Civil Apparatus.

Fifth, WFH policy must be evaluated. As with policies in general, WFH policy must be monitored on an ongoing basis and evaluated to see whether it achieves its purpose. By this logic, WFH policy should state explicitly the purpose of WFH as the basis to conduct the policy evaluation. Considering that WFH can be carried out based on various purposes such as work-life balance, increased productivity, and increased work satisfaction, the government must choose wisely which purpose suits best for State Civil Apparatus, including its attendant indicators. The results of the evaluation become the basis for improving the WFH implementation or revising the WFH policy in the future. Besides the evaluation at the macro level, WFH evaluation at the individual level of employee also needs to be carried out by assessing employee performance when conducting WFH. If the evaluation result shows that an employee's performance has decreased, then the employee's right to carry out WFH can be revoked. Likewise, if during WFH the employee performance remains or even increases, the right to carry out WFH can continue to be given to the employee. However, the challenge of this provision is to determine the extent to which the WFH condition is related to the level of employee performance because it is very possible that there are factors outside of WFH condition that affect performance.

Sixth, digitalization of public service. WFH will be a logical move and inevitable option if all public services can be delivered digitally via online platforms. With all services can be done remotely, working from office to deliver service will be a redundant and irrelevant practice. Currently, many services are still conducted manually. Some services which can be delivered via online are not perfect because some steps in the overall service procedure need to be conducted physically. The challenge to implement this requirement is creating a system of public service digitalization at all levels and all kinds in a comprehensive manner. It is much better if the system is integrated in one single platform.

Seventh, ensuring access to technology. Doing WFH requires all employees to possess or at least have an access to the needed technology such as computer, smart phone, and internet access to conduct activities like video conference, online service, and online reporting. Without the aforementioned technology, WFH practically cannot be done. However, it is possible that not all employees have this technology due to various reasons. Thus, it is the obligation of government to provide all the required technology for its employees who conduct WFH, especially for those who do not have

access to it. It is better if this obligation is stated in the WFH regulation. Because of this technological factor, it goes without saying that employees who work in areas not covered by internet technology cannot and do not need to do WFH because remote public services cannot be performed in such condition.

Eighth, WFH is not an excuse to make overtime work as a routine. One of the things often complained by employees during WFH is the excessive length of work time. WFH moment is used by some superiors to instruct their subordinates outside working hours by using flexibility principle as a pretext. As a result, employees become more tired compared to working conventionally in the office. This kind of practice should not be continued. WFH does not mean forcing longer working hours. It does not mean that working overtime is not allowed during WFH. However, if the employees work longer than normal working hours, then they are entitled to receive overtime pay.

Ninth, trust instead of excessive control. By doing WFH, employees work in a private space away from the office so they cannot meet directly with their superiors and colleagues. In such circumstance, high trust must be given to employees. Superiors must believe that employees are not abusing WFH, for example by going outside for a walk or just relaxing at home. By giving trust to employees, employees will feel empowered and appreciated as responsible adults. This approach is more effective than its alternative, which is giving employees excessive control during working hours, for example by calling employees to confirm their location every few moments. By providing excessive control, a culture of trust will not be built which in turn will have an effect on decreasing work motivation and productivity.

5. Conclusion

The practice of WFH for State Civil Apparatus in Indonesia which has been running for more than the last 1.5 years needs to be used as a stepping stone to formulate evidence-based policy of WFH after the pandemic is over. Although it was done out of necessity, the implementation of WFH among State Civil Apparatus is a valuable experiment to see the effectiveness and impact of WFH, especially since this is the first time in the history of the public sector in Indonesia. Unfortunately, until now an official evaluation from the government as a policy maker regarding the effectiveness and impact of WFH has never been carried out or announced. Therefore, by utilizing the fragments of findings from previous studies regarding the implementation of WFH for State Civil Apparatus during the pandemic, a list of general propositions is formulated

as the basis for formulating WFH policy for State Civil Apparatus after the pandemic is over.

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