

Managing Emotions in the Covid-19 Pandemic Support of Freight (*Managing Emotions in Covid-19 Pandemic (Phenomenological Research towards Freight Forwarding Companies' Sales Support Employees in Semarang City)*)

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Abstract

Emotional intelligence is the ability to conceive and manage our emotions and surroundings. It is a crucial ability that needs to be mastered in someone's life in order that they can deal with all kinds of situations that might occur in life patiently. During this Covid-19 pandemic, there have been many changes that have appeared in people's lives, which cause them to feel stressed and Burnout. This issue was also felt by some employees that experienced some changes in their work patterns when they had to implement a work-from-home system. The purpose of this research is to find out and analyze the strategies of the sales support employees in freight forwarding companies in managing their emotions during this pandemic and find out whether the WFH systems they have been doing during pandemics affect their performance. The outcomes that were obtained from research respondents shows that the pandemic and WFH system make them experience Burnout, while they also had to remain responsible for their work. Thus they were required to have various ways of dealing with Burnout. In addition, the WFH system also has an influence on employees' performance and time flexibility at work.

Keywords

emotional intelligence; burnout;
work-from-home system



I. Introduction

In today's era of openness, emotional control is one of the characteristics of emotional intelligence that must be considered carefully. Apart from emotions, issues such as leadership, culture, and organizational development are also related to emotional intelligence, which is spread throughout the corporate environment. For employees, emotional management is an essential thing that can affect their performance and motivation in the company. Although, the performance of an employee is not only seen from how they are able to work, but also the ability to interact with other people.

As is the case now, the spread of the Covid-19 virus in Indonesia has had a significant impact in several sectors, one of which is the economic sector. In this sector, there were several declines in business activity, such as the disruption of export-import activities, large-scale layoffs (Terminations of Employment), which caused a spike in unemployment in Indonesia, and the closing of a number of well-known outlets to reduce company spending. Then implementation of the WFH (*work-from-home*) work system was also implemented in several companies to suppress the spread of this virus.

In practice, the WFH system is relatively new for some Indonesians. This system reaps the pros and cons. Several recent studies explain that this system is more profitable because it has more flexible, efficient working time and high productivity increases (Alipour *et al.*, 2021; Diab-Bahman & Al-Enzi, 2020; Hoffman *et al.*, 2020;

Narayanamurthy & Tortorella, 2021). On the other hand, Bellmann & Hübler (2020) consider this system to be inefficient and can even interfere with their performance if they do not have a good ability to manage emotions.

Along with the times, several companies have implemented special policies for employees in terms of managing emotions. This is referred to as *emotional labour*, which is divided into two dimensions, namely *surface acting* and *deep acting* (Lu *et al.*, 2019). Thus, employees are required to always behave well, show a positive side while working, and suppress their negative emotions when interacting with coworkers and clients (Lee & Madera, 2021). Thus, this research will focus on how employees manage their emotions so as not to cause *Burnout* at work during a pandemic. Covid 19 pandemic caused all efforts not to be as maximal as expected (Sihombing and Nasib, 2020).

Currently, service companies such as *freight forwarding* are booming as a forum for export and import activities. Where they are flooded with requests every day in export and import activities; however, this situation changed when the pandemic hit Indonesia, where several countries had restricted export-import activities to suppress the spread of the Covid-19 virus. As a result, this is very burdensome for sales employees *because* of changes in their work patterns. They still have to work according to the targets set by the company. This is also very burdensome for them because most of their customers or clients are having difficulties in carrying out export-import transactions. Then another problem also comes when the company requires them to work on a WFH basis. Some employees feel that the WFH system is very ineffective, considering their workload is increasing every day.

II. Review of Literature

2.1 Theory *Emotional & Social Intelligence (ESI)*

Theory Emotional and Social Intelligence (ESI) is a concept discussed by Kessler *et al.* (2013), where this concept discusses the use of one's emotions appropriately and intelligently. A more precise definition of ESI is a collection of thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that are driven by nerve centres originating from the *limbic system*.

ESI is very important as a combination of basic skills that enable one to effectively manage and lead others. These people are highly relevant to the process of identification, selection, promotion, success planning, career path, training and development where they are the people who oversee the characteristics and behaviours that should be encouraged and rewarded by the HRM system.

2.2 *Emotional Intelligence (EI)*

The idea of emotional intelligence was coined by Daniel Goleman in the 1990s and has become an interesting context for one's work-related behaviour. Goleman (2009) defines emotional intelligence as the ability to motivate oneself and persist in the face of frustration; controlling impulses and delaying self-gratification; to set the mood and keep stress from overwhelming the ability to think for empathy and hope.

2.3 *Emotional Labor*

Emotional labour is defined as the management of feelings to create a generally observable display of workers' efforts to comply with work and organizational rules (Adams & Mastracci, 2020; Choi & Kim, 2015; Yang *et al.*, 2019). Mastracci & Adams (2019) explain that *emotional labour* is fundamental in work when the person is working with "other people" or clients. This is an attempt to suppress emotions and distinguish

what is "appropriate" and "inappropriate" to be expressed because of the demands of the job, in the hope of becoming a professional employee and making clients happy.

Emotional labour is very closely related to *job engagement* so that they are able to align their emotions well in accordance with the demands of the job and get good results for the employees themselves and the company. For example, in public service work, if they fail to involve *emotional labour*, it means they also fail to do their job (Mastracci & Adams, 2019). There are two strategic dimensions to *emotional labour*, namely *surface acting* and *deep acting*.

2.4 Stress

Stress is caused by several trigger factors. Jamil (2019) states that the cause of stress can be referred to as a psychosocial stressor. These stressors can cause changes in a person's life from children, adolescents to adults. Thus, the person is forced to adapt to the stressor that arises. Some examples of psychosocial stressors are marriage, personal problems with those closest to them, interpersonal relationships, work, economic factors, and the social environment.

2.5 Burnout

Burnout is dominated by three main components, namely: fatigue, cynicism, and ineffectiveness in professionalism (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). *Burnout* refers to feeling excessive and depleted of one's physical, emotional resources. Those who feel exhausted will lack the energy to face the day and even other people. Cynicism refers to a negative, hostile, or too distant response to work, which is often associated with a loss of idealism; selfish attitude; feelings of indifference to work, coworkers, and the company; and feelings of insincerity (Bang & Reio, 2017; Cambridge Dictionary, nd). Meanwhile, ineffectiveness in professionalism refers to a decreased sense of competence and productivity in the workplace.

2.6 Company Freight Forwarding

Freight forwarding is a service company engaged in the agency that takes care of the delivery and receipt of goods, both exports and imports, thoroughly and completely from the beginning to the end of the load into the hands of the sender or importer (*door-to-door service*) (Ekananda, 2017). Nowadays, *modern freight forwarding* is trying to cooperate with each other to increase its efficiency (Wang, 2015).

Companies *Freight forwarding* have duties such as ordering *freight*, preparing necessary document files, managing warehousing issues, and assisting *custom clearance* on behalf of the shipper or importer (Sarker, 2011). In its role, the company is divided into several sections, namely *ocean freight transportation*, *ground freight transportation*, *air freight transportation*, and *rail freight transportation*. Each part has the same role in the delivery of goods and services but uses different modes of transportation. In contrast to *freight forwarding*, usually, the company has something to do with the EMKL company (Expedition of Shipments at Sea). This company only takes care of a written agreement containing documents and details of goods to be loaded using the ship from the owner and has been authorized.

2.7 Employees Sales Support

In business, companies must be able to market their products to potential buyers so that, in the end, they can develop and maintain long-term relationships with their main

customers (Arli *et al.*, 2018). An important factor in this success lies in a stable sales staff tasked with selling their products or services (Matthews & Rutherford, 2020).

Salespeople or *sales managers* have more access to the tools and knowledge to be a successful part of it. Team *sales* are led and run by people who master *consultative selling* (*sales IQ*) and *soft skills* (*sales EQ*) to accelerate sales results (Stanley, 2020). However, if you hire individuals who cannot manage emotions, it will affect the company's sales success. Employees *Sales* with high emotional management skills are able to deliver on-demand performance results. However, this also cannot be separated from the help of a *sales manager* and effective *sales* to understand the people, places, or situations that trigger their emotions and thwart sales transactions (Stanley, 2020).

2.8 System the *Work-from-Home Work*

Development of an increasingly advanced and sophisticated era makes it very easy for people to carry out daily activities anywhere. Like work and school, for example, these two things can be done anywhere as long as there is an adequate internet network. Currently, working remotely or better known as *work-from-home* (WFH), is being implemented all over the world to break the ropes of Covid-19 virus pollution (Hensher *et al.*, 2021).

III. Research Method

The method used in this research is qualitative with a phenomenological study approach, where this research observes the emotions of *sales support* when they have to work from home during the Covid-19 pandemic. The population and sample of this study were 11 *sales support* at two *freight forwarding* in Semarang City, where there were special criteria selected, namely employees with millennial demographics aged between 21-41 years. The data collection instrument used *in-depth interviews* with a semi-structured model, which was carried out directly and virtually through *WhatsApp video calls*.

To complete the interview above, several interview questions were asked, including:

- a. How long have you worked at this company?
- b. When you first joined here, how did you adapt to the company environment?
- c. Did you immediately get *a job desk* in *sales support* when you first worked here?
- d. Why did you choose *the job desk*? Are you a person who likes challenges?
- e. In your opinion, does *the job desk* have more quantity of work than other sections?
- f. How is the quantity of your work during this pandemic? Is there a significant difference or not?
- g. When the workload is a lot, have you ever felt stressed or *Burnout*?
- h. What is your strategy in managing emotions when you are *Burnout*?
- i. Have you ever vent your emotions/annoyance when interacting with a client?
- j. In a pandemic like this, can working WFH make you more comfortable or vice versa?
- k. When you feel *Burnout* during WFH, does it affect your performance?

Data Analysis

Method of data analysis while in the field using the model *Miles et al. (2019)*, where the model suggests that activities in qualitative data analysis are carried out interactively and take place continuously to completion so that the data becomes saturated. *Data condensation* (data condensation), *data display* (data presentation), and *conclusion drawing / verifying* (drawing conclusions / confirming the data).

IV. Results and Discussion

4.1 Respondent's Profile

Based on the results of interviews conducted with two *freight forwarding* in the city of Semarang, there are respondent profile data as follows:

No.	Initials	Gender	Age	Company
1.	Avinash	Male	23	GPI
2.	Mawar	Female	24	GPI
3.	Lili	Female	27	GPI
4.	Chrysanthemum	Female	27	GPI
5.	Sakura	Female	38	GPI
6.	Azalea	Female	39	GPI
7.	Leo	Male	37	GPI
8.	Alamanda	Female	39	MAP
9.	Dori	Male	40	M
	AP			
	Until	Male	27	MAP

In this study, the respondent's original name must be disguised with the initials using *Confidentiality* with a *pseudonym fictions*. Refers *Confidentiality* to all information that is withheld from everyone except the researchers themselves (Allen & Wiles, 2016; Saunders *et al.*, 2015), while the *pseudonym Fictonyms* are described as naming pseudonyms that are structured like real names (Aleksiejuk, 2013).

In qualitative research, it is very important to hide the identity and information of respondents, which is the responsibility of the researcher to be obeyed (Surmiak, 2018) and serves as a guarantee of the authenticity of the respondent's statements (Taylor, 2015) which requires protection at all stages of research Creswell & Poth (2018).

4.2 Employee Strategies Sales Support in Managing Emotional Intelligence when Burnout in a Pandemic

Based on the results of interviews that have been conducted, there are several strategies from *sales support* to reduce Burnout when their company implements WFH, including:

- a. Finding sources of *Burnout*,
- b. Silence and calming down while self-evaluating alone,
- c. Stay away from laptops, cell phones, and things related to work so that the mind is calmer,
- d. Call or send messages to colleagues just to tell stories, ask questions, and share complaints,
- e. Take a break while doing hobbies or personal pleasures (entertainment or playing with child).

Some of the examples above show that respondents in this study have various strategies to reduce *Burnout* while working from home. From several respondents, there are answers that, according to researchers, are very wise and good in managing their emotional intelligence, namely by evaluating themselves about the shortcomings and causes of the *Burnout* they experience.

The first strategy is to find sources of *Burnout*. The respondents, even though they are experiencing *Burnout*, they still have to be introspective so that *the Burnout* they feel

does not get worse and has an impact on their work balance. They are well aware that this will be bad not only for themselves but also for the people around them. So, things like calming down, meditating, and doing self-evaluation are also considered appropriate to *Reduce Burnout* and can improve their well-being.

In the second strategy, some respondents stayed away from things related to work for a while by sharing stories with colleagues. Sharing complaints and stories with colleagues is considered to be one way that can reduce their *Burnout*, although some respondents also understand the situation of their coworkers with each other. This shows that it is important for them to have colleagues who understand and support each other in every situation. When you are *Burnout*, presence of coworkers can be invited to complain and exchange ideas.

People who work in this field really need social support in the organization, so this can also reduce the psychological pressure they feel when they are WFH. In social life in the company, situations and coworkers who support each other are also beneficial for the company. If employees feel comfortable in that environment, then employees do not feel like leaving the company.

The next strategy is how to reduce *Burnout* by doing activities that become their personal pleasure, such as doing things that become hobbies, watching entertainment shows on streaming platforms, Listening to music, playing with children is also one of their efforts to reduce *Burnout* when WFH.

For some people, doing things that become a personal hobby is felt to be able to reduce the feelings of stress and *Burnout* they experience. Like the answers from several respondents above, they feel that when they are doing activities that become hobbies, hobbies, and something fun, it can restore a bad mood for the better so that these activities are considered effective in preventing *Burnout* from getting worse.

In addition to hobbies, for respondents who are married, spending time with children is also a strategy to reduce *Burnout*. Not only female employees, male employees (Until) also have the same opinion. For them, even in a state of *Burnout*, if they spend time with children, it can make their souls calm again. For parents who work WFH, taking breaks and spending time with their children for a while is necessary to reduce *Burnout*, stress, and tension during work (Okuyan & Begen, 2021) and can affect productivity and mood of parents (Aguiar *et al.*, 2021).

4.3 Employee Performance Sales Support when Working in a Work-from-Home

This field is an essential field, where they connect all company offerings to the target market and play out their sales strategy. However, when the WFH system was implemented in this company, employees complained about the difficulties they experienced and made them *burn*.

From the interviews conducted by the respondents, female respondents felt that WFH had an effect on their performance, especially some female respondents who held multiple roles that required them to do housework and work at the same time. They feel that working from home is stressful, although they also have to remain professional and responsible. They feel that if this is experienced continuously, they will feel *Burnout* endless.

For male respondents, their answers are inversely proportional to female respondents. They tend to be less *Burnout* when WFH. When they feel uncomfortable with work, they overcome these problems with various leisure activities such as drinking, playing with children, drinking coffee, or smoking.

4.4 The view of the Work-from-Home Work System for Sales Support

The Covid-19 pandemic that has occurred so far is an experience that has never been imagined before. These incidents have a devastating effect on the mental health and well-being of people, which can cause serious problems for many people around the world.

Several countries have also implemented lockdowns in an effort to contain the spread of this virus. Likewise with Indonesia, the Government also encourages the public to implement health protocols and limit mobilization outside the home and require activities from Homes such as school and work.

Based on the results of interviews with respondents, each respondent from the two companies has their own point of view in responding to the implementation of the WFH system, which may be new to them. Several respondents responded to their discomfort in working as a WFH. This is conveyed because they feel that in practice, they are often disturbed by unexpected things that happen around them. The distraction from their surroundings when WFH makes them prefer to work in an office even though they have to work according to normal working hours.

Apart from feeling uncomfortable and having lots of unexpected distractions, one respondent admitted that he was bored because he didn't have friends to talk to when WFH. Feeling bored and lonely when WFH is what is dangerous. If a person feels isolated, lonely, and depressed at home, it will not only kill productivity but also build a mental health crisis. Thus, even though you are currently WFH, there is a need for support from fellow coworkers who contribute to the satisfaction of the need to work from home.

In addition, a number of respondents feel that WFH is only suitable for non-essential sectors, not *job desk sales support*. Problems in terms of technology are also an obstacle when working from home. Not all respondents have gadgets and internet that support them at home. Thus, this can interfere with their productivity at work, and they must find a solution in solving this problem.

WFH's point of view may have mostly negative connotations, but there are respondents who respond to this from a good point of view. There are respondents who accept this gracefully because they also consider the security and safety of family members from the dangers of the spread and transmission of the Covid-19 virus.

V. Conclusion

Based on the research that has been done, this research yields the following conclusions:

1. WFH has made major changes in the organization and productivity of employees, especially in Indonesia. Changes in work methods that make employees have to stay at home make some respondents feel this system is not suitable for those who work as *sales support*.
2. Feelings *Burnout* experienced by female employees tends to be higher than male employees, at home and office *multitasking*.
3. Disturbances when WFH can come at any time and from anywhere, so social support is needed, and respondents must be smart to regulate and control their emotions when experiencing disturbances during WFH.
4. Changes in work rhythms and additional targets from their superiors made some respondents feel that WFH did not provide flexible time for them to work because of the many demands.
5. In implementing the WFH system, companies need to review some of the problems that employees might face.

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