

SPECIAL ISSUE ARTICLE

The sociocultural barriers of work-from-home arrangement due to COVID-19 pandemic in Asia: Implications and future implementation

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Abstract

The rapidly escalating COVID-19 pandemic entails many unprecedented life circumstances, including in the way people work. The social distancing policy has forced companies to adopt work-from-home (WFH) arrangement to maintain business sustainability amidst both health and economic crises. While in many developed countries, WFH arrangement has been a common practice, this is not the case in some Asian countries, particularly in countries where high power distance emphasising heightened supervision and punishment among workers are still a preferred managerial style, such as Indonesia, China, India, and Thailand. While acknowledging that WFH is considered as beyond an option in this pandemic period, this commentary paper, built on existing literature presented in the narrative fashion, aims to critically identify key barriers of WFH implementation in some Asian countries, particularly in autocratic societies, using both theoretical and contextual approaches. The paper concludes by discussing recommendation for future studies and proposing strategic implications for companies and workers to effectively adopt WFH arrangement, especially in societies where WFH is still a new practice or is involuntarily held.

1 | INTRODUCTION

December 2019 marks an important milestone in the history of the human being as a new coronavirus (COVID-19) emerged in Wuhan, the capital of Hubei province in China, which became the epicentre of the outbreak (Zhou et al., 2020). Three months later, a significant widening of the virus has affected 143 countries, which pushed the World Health Organization (WHO) to escalate the status of the outbreak into a pandemic, signalling a maximum precaution of the alarming levels of spread and severity of the virus (World Health Organization, 2020). Lockdown procedure and social distancing policy come into play in affected countries to control the outbreak by *flattening the curve* (Stevens, 2020). With this strategy, human exposure is minimised to slow the spread of the virus by avoiding non-essential

gathering and by utilising technology to assist individuals in conducting essential tasks.

In work and employment context, social distancing policy is enforced by adopting an alternative working arrangement where employees are encouraged or even enforced to perform their work at home (work from home [WFH]), as much possible as their work nature allows. WFH practice actually has a considerably long-standing history. It was first introduced since the early 1970s with the term 'telecommuting' (Nilles, 1975), and continues to evolve with various nomenclatures, such as remote working (Hardill & Green, 2003), teleworking (Alizadeh, 2012), working at home, working at a distance, and home working (Baruch & Yuen, 2000). While no universally agreed term has been in place, WFH is the universally and widely used term in

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this COVID-19 pandemic (Yeung, 2020), and perhaps will be set as a benchmark for terminology in future studies.

In Asia, although flexible working arrangements are not a widely accepted practice (Chow & Chew, 2006), its popularity varies among countries. Hong Kong (Baruch & Yuen, 2000), Singapore (Dick & Tung, 2003), and Japan (Boston College of Global Workforce Roundtable, 2007) are among the first Asian countries to consider adopting flexible work arrangement. Some countries in other parts of Asia with high power distance and more traditional managerial approach, such as Indonesia, China, Thailand, or India, are still considering WFH as a less favourable practice. In general, the effectiveness and acceptability of WFH do not translate seamlessly from country to country, and this suggests that culture plays an imperative role in determining its suitability (Dick & Tung, 2003). Hence, adopting compulsory WFH arrangement due to the pandemic brings particular challenges for Asian societies.

Regardless of the favourability of WFH, the COVID-19 pandemic has triggered the world's biggest implementation of WFH (Yeung, 2020) as it is now practiced in almost all affected, if not all, countries and is arguably defended as the ideal strategy to flatten the curve. While work can be considered as one of the essential tasks for an individual, a company, or a nation to sustain, the essentiality of work also lies in the way that it contributes to individuals' psychological well-being by providing a sense of meaning and purpose in life (Litchfield et al., 2016). In this sense, whereas certain modification is required in the way and where people work given the pandemic, it is important to adopt the best available strategy that enables individuals to work not only for their survival, but also to maintain or even enhance their well-being.

To that end, this paper particularly aims at addressing sociocultural barriers to experiencing benefits of WFH arrangement in some Asian countries through theoretical and contextual approaches. We reviewed exiting relevant literature, which is appropriate to explore understudied phenomenon and inspire future research (Pautasso, 2013) and in line with the goal of this commentary paper. Given that WFH is a relatively new practice in Asia, we performed a narrative literature review to provide a balanced view of the field to describe and conceptualise the understudied phenomenon using existing literature and shed some light for possible future studies and practices. When discussing about WFH arrangement, our discussion will specifically focus on white-collar workers, or those who perform professional, managerial, or administrative work, where the job nature is generally accommodated through working from home arrangement. The paper concludes by suggesting modifications in implementing WFH in Asia by accommodating concerns from both employers and employees.

2 | HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WFH

WFH can be understood as combining work and living space to optimise resources and make the most of the space at hand for the benefit of both employees and employers. Historically, WFH can be traced

back to medieval times where the working-class society opened shops and traded from their homes (Applebaum, 1992). In such an era, rooms at homes were multifunctional – used for both house works (e.g., cooking for the family) and business works (e.g., butchery, dress-making to earn money). The popularity of 'offices' then started to emerge during and after the industrial revolution, where workers need to leave their homes to go to worksites and offices. Employees started to work inflexibly at a specific time of the day (e.g., 9 to 5) in employer-provided sites with employer-provided tools or equipment. With the increasing numbers of women entering the workforce in the early 1970s, more flexible working arrangements were necessitated (Schonberger, 1971), which underlies the emergence of WFH arrangement.

3 | CULTURE, MANAGEMENT STYLE, AND WFH ARRANGEMENT

A growing body of literature consistently suggests that national value systems play a vital part in describing various patterns of human relationship (Hofstede, 2001), including the employees' behaviour within an organisation (Jaeger, 1986; Key & Key, 2000; Schneider & De Meyer, 1991). Although the effectiveness of WFH largely operates on the corporate culture – which may be different from the national culture – national culture still has a significant influence in determining the knowledge management practices in an organisation (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2011; Hofstede, 2001). For example, an extensive comparative study between two nations demonstrated that national value systems have a meaningful role in shaping intellectual capital of the employees (Cegarra-Navarro & Sánchez-Polo, 2010) and in determining the patterns of knowledge management practices (Cegarra-Navarro et al., 2011). In other words, organisational cultures and national cultures are interrelated, and understanding the national culture gives us a useful insight regarding the societal characteristics in which WFH practices may or may not be well accepted.

We utilise Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions model in our analysis. Although McSweeney (2002) has raised sharp criticism towards the robustness of this model, many recent studies still found the model to be valid in guiding their analysis (Zhang et al., 2020), even at subculture and individual levels (Taras et al., 2010). Williamson (2002) argues that the predominant issue that underlies the McSweeney's (2002) scepticism is the different paradigms in interpreting the model: Hofstede relied on deterministic and functionalism (or positivism) paradigm, which definitely has its limitation, but is a widely upheld scientific paradigm (Girod-Séville & Perret, 2011). Furthermore, Hofstede's work is still acknowledged for its practicality in elaborating the complex cultural phenomena into generic and assessable terms, thus gain favourability in both practical and theoretical interests (Fang, 2010). We believe that Hofstede's model provides a significant contribution to our analysis, while at the same time also being careful of its limitation. Therefore, in our analysis, we use the model to describe the general cultural patterns of Asian countries rather than to draw a causal relationship between individual's values

and their societal culture. Our analysis is also not intended to assume the uniformity of a culture in all individual members. Rather, intend to depict a prototype of Asian cultures and draw critical analysis of how those cultures may serve as a barrier in the WFH implementation.

Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimension model provides a framework to understand the nature and structure of an individual's relationship in their societies through six dimensions: power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance, long-term orientation, and indulgence. Various studies in the literature suggest that most Asian cultures tend to have high power distance, high masculinity, high collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, low long-term orientation, and low indulgence (Dissanayake et al., 2015; Hofstede, 2001; Sweetman, 2012). In relation to the implementation of WFH, our analysis suggests that considerations could be particularly focused on the five dimensions: power distance, masculinity, collectivism, uncertainty avoidance, and indulgence.

3.1 | Possible cultural barriers of WFH

The effectiveness of WFH for both the company and the employees is illustrated in previous research. The most vivid benefits for companies are the reduced real estate cost, improved employees performance, and reduced turnover (Bloom et al., 2015; Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). For many employees, WFH can increase job satisfaction and decrease work stress due to the flexibility offered in arranging the work (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Golden, 2006; Himawan, Helmi, et al., 2021). While studies continue to suggest the potential benefits of WFH, this paper particularly highlighted the possible cultural barriers of WFH implementation in many Asian societies using Hofstede's (2001) cultural profile.

Societies that are characterised by high power distance may struggle in implementing WFH. It is plausible that individuals with a high level of power distance favour autocratic leadership style, where power is distributed unequally to satisfy the dependence need of people with no power. Power gap is not only acknowledged; it is needed for the sake of the leader and the one being led. Reduced physical encounter between employers and their employees may damage the authority exercised by the managers, especially the managers' role of monitoring as a control mechanism (Groen et al., 2018). For instance, in Asian cultures where supervisory power leans on visible cues and conservative form of supervision, the computer-mediated communication is less effective than face-to-face meetings (Raghuram & Fang, 2014). Autonomy and flexibility offered through WFH limit both manager's control and employee's need to be controlled, directed, or supervised. Without strict control over their jobs, the employees who are accustomed to the conventional working arrangement may find it difficult to manage the flexibility provided by WFH and eventually fail to exhibit their best performance. Such employees may misinterpret flexibility as insufficient work instruction; hence they might be underperformed when working from home.

High level of masculinity is reflected in the importance of status, attributes, and outward appearances as a part of an individual's

perceived prestige (Hofstede, 2001). Such a social status and outward appearance require physical displays, for example, a spacious and elegant workspace, parking privilege, and other facilities and arrangement. When the work is shifted into WFH setting, such a practice cannot be entirely accommodated. Considering that prestige is an important determinant of job satisfaction (Carmeli & Freund, 2002), shifting into WFH arrangement may be a threat towards job satisfaction for those high in the level of masculinity.

Employees with high collectivism scores may also find it challenging to adapt in the WFH arrangement. The need to belong, which is considered a fundamental human need (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), is plausibly a stronger motivating force to work for individuals in a collectivist society. In this sense, working alone at home provokes a sense of social isolation and disconnectedness (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015), which experience could be exacerbated in the societies where social connectedness is strongly upheld. In a field experiment in China, Bloom et al. (2015) found that many WFH employees requested to return to work from office because they feel lonely at home. Furthermore, loneliness was cited as the number one reason why WFH became less attractive and led employees to feel less motivated at work (Bloom et al., 2015). Although technology may provide social connection, many Asian studies have indicated the ineffective use of online-based communication to reduce loneliness (Himawan, Underwood, et al., 2021; Li et al., 2015).

Adapting to a new working arrangement also invites resistance for individuals who prefer to avoid uncertainty. WFH is a new practice for many individuals in Asia and transitioning to such a new environment requires certain degrees of openness and flexibility to tolerate adjustments as they deal with organisational change processes (Heuvel et al., 2010). Individuals with high tendency to avoid uncertainty prefer to maintain stability and traditions, and tend to view societal change with suspicion (Hofstede, 2001). Hence, these individuals may find it challenging to implement WFH.

Lastly, those with a low level of indulgence often find themselves being guilty when they are given more flexibility for self-care, autonomy, and independence, which are the key benefits of WFH arrangement (Elbing et al., 1975). Individuals with low scores of indulgences may interpret flexibility and less structured work schedule in a different and guilty way that forces them to work more than they should. In more extreme cases, such a pang of guilt may lead them to think that they have to work 24 hours a day at the cost of the freedom in regulating the work rhythm (Huuhtanen, 2003).

Table 1 summarises the possible barriers of WFH implementation in relation to the typical cultural profiles in many Asian societies. While this analysis provides a general picture that may assist in the country analysis as aggregate, a careful approach needs to be taken in interpreting the analysis. This is because not all individuals in the stated country have exactly homogenous cultural profiles (Williamson, 2002). The employees' age, work sector, and other demographic background may present distinct nuances in their match towards Hofstede's cultural profiles, although studies have suggested that Hofstede's dimensional concept of culture are still a reliable construct to explain the variance across behavioural patterns

TABLE 1 Cultural profile of many Asian societies and the possible barriers of WFH

Cultural profile	Possible barrier of WFH	Countries*
High power distance	Lack of supervisory control, employee's abuse of flexibility	Malaysia (100), Iraq (95), Saudi Arabia (95), Bhutan (94), Philippines (94), Russia (93), Qatar (93), Kuwait (90), United Arab Emirates (90), Kazakhstan (88), Armenia (85), Azerbaijan (85), Bangladesh (80), China (80), Sri Lanka (80), Syria (80), India (77), Indonesia (78), Lebanon (75)
High masculinity	Job satisfaction from work attributes (office privilege displays) is unmet	Japan (95)
High collectivism	Social disconnectedness and isolation	Indonesia (86), Pakistan (86), South Korea (82), Bangladesh (80), China (80), Kazakhstan (80), Singapore (80), Thailand (80), Vietnam (80), Armenia (78), Azerbaijan (78), Hong Kong (75), Kuwait (75), Qatar (75), Saudi Arabia (75), United Arab Emirates (75)
High uncertainty avoidance	Resistance to adopt new ways of working	Russia (95), Japan (92), Armenia (88), Azerbaijan (88), Georgia (85), Iraq (85), Cyprus (85), South Korea (85), Israel (81), Kuwait (80), Qatar (80), Saudi Arabia (80), United Arab Emirates (80)
Low indulgence	Work overtime due to guilty feeling of an increased autonomy	Pakistan (0), Hong Kong (17), Bangladesh (20), Russia (20), Kazakhstan (22), Azerbaijan (23), China (24), Armenia (25), Lebanon (75), Iraq (27)

Note: Index for each cultural profile is obtained from Hofstede Insights (2021). Countries are included when their index meets the minimum of the 75th percentile. Countries are displayed in the rank order. No score of indulgence is available for the following countries: Bhutan, Israel, Kuwait, Nepal, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Syria, United Arab Emirates. No data is available for the following countries: Afghanistan, Bahrain, Brunei, Cambodia, Cyprus, Kyrgyzstan, Laos, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, North Korea, Oman, Palestine, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Yemen.

(Beugelsdijk & Welzel, 2018; Taras et al., 2010, 2012). Furthermore, while culture could be a meaningful barrier in the WFH implementation, we acknowledge that culture is not necessarily the only variable. Other factors such as technological readiness, polarised perceptions of WFH between employees and the employers, and nature of work sectors may also interact in determining the effectiveness of WFH, which will be discussed in the next section.

3.2 | Contextual review: Sociocultural perspective on implementing WFH in Asia

This section outlines how the context and cultural bounds commonly observed in many Asian countries potentially hinder some individuals from experiencing the benefits of WFH. Since WFH is not a popular practice in Asia, the scarcity of the literature around this topic limits our discussion to those countries where WFH practices have been researched.

As of July 2020, although WFH has been involuntarily practiced due to the pandemic, most companies in Asia tend to think that WFH is not an ideal model for prolonged periods (Dancel, 2020). Large-size firms appear to be more ready in adopting WFH, which is understandable as they are usually more technologically equipped to do so. In South Korea, for example, while 60.9% of large firms have adopted WFH, only 36.8% of small firms and 50.9% of mid-sized firms had done so (So, 2020). A survey in Japan also suggests a similar report, with only 46% of small and medium-sized firms are adopting WFH when as many as 88% of large firms are practicing WFH (Dancel, 2020).

There might be a conflicting perception of WFH between employees and employers. The preliminary analysis of our online survey of 289 Indonesian white-collar workers suggests that 55% of them reported that their productivity has increased compared with work from office (Himawan et al., 2020). On the contrary, the Indonesian Workers Organisation believes that many Indonesian firms hesitate to adopt WFH as they are concerned about their employees' productivity (Dancel, 2020). Such a conflicting perception is highly related to the organisational and leadership culture established by the corporates.

The possible barriers of implementing WFH within Asian context are: (1). company incentive system that measures productivity based on the physical presence; (2). excessive responsibility at home that messes up with work duties; (3). poor designated workroom and work boundaries at home; (4). poor technological infrastructure; and (5). perceived social disconnectedness.

Organisational and leadership culture is the key factor that determines the effectiveness of WFH (Huuhtanen, 2003). This highlights the real struggles for implementing WFH in Asia as their organisational culture and company personnel policy often require physical presence for salary and incentive system (Shimozaki, 2003), which illuminates the high power distance of their corporate cultures. In Japan, for instance, most employee evaluation systems often emphasise on number of hours spent in the office rather than on the results as an indicator of productivity (Nakafuji, 2020). Similar pattern is also observed in Indonesia, where the autocratic approach and the lack of employees' trust are translated into a kind of reward system that provides a daily incentive ('*uang hadir*' or '*uang makan*', loosely translated as 'attendance allowance' or 'meal allowance') to

employees based on their fingerprint absence (Suarlan, 2017). With this policy, being absent in the office means having a salary cut. Apart from the personnel policy, employers in Malaysia (Teh et al., 2013) and Japan (Shimozaki, 2003) who are practicing WFH also express concerns of not being able to sufficiently supervise their subordinates without a face-to-face encounter.

From the employee's side, the excessive responsibility at home associated with the cultural responsibility to take care of elderly family members may act as a barrier towards WFH implementation in Asia. The custom of filial duty tends to be generally upheld by people in Asia, and is observed at least in Thailand (Debavalya, 2008), China (Lei et al., 2015), Japan (Yoshida, 2011), and Indonesia (Himawan, 2020). Unlike in many Western countries where elderly have access to public services, in most Asian societies, family remains the main support system and children are culturally responsible to take care of their elder family members. While international studies have suggested the benefit of WFH for parents with dependent children to maintain the balance between work and family roles (Kaduk et al., 2019; Troup & Rose, 2012), the effectiveness of WFH might be questionable for individuals who co-reside with their extended family members (parents, parents-in-law, and other dependent family members). Too many roles outside work can result in excessive demands and distraction when individuals have to perform their work at home, which may eventually lead to work–family conflict. This argument is supported by a study in Japan, where 34% of the employees who performed WFH reported that their productivity has declined because they have difficulty concentrating at home (Nakafuji, 2020).

On top of that, there is a common belief that people do not work when they are at home (Boston College of Global Workforce Roundtable, 2007). Such a belief may explain why designated workroom at home is either missing or difficult to set up, despite being one of the most important factors for effective WFH practice (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). Working in the office also allows a boundary to better manage work and non-work duties. This is especially true for working women in Bangalore, where WFH practices were found to erase all boundaries and created difficulties for them in juggling home and work duties (Dancel, 2020).

The other challenge is associated with the technological infrastructure to enable work at home. Internet connectivity holds a major and determining factor for an effective WFH. While Singapore has successfully established the fastest and reliable broadband connection (153.85 Mbps on average), most other Asian countries, such as Sri Lanka (25.17 Mbps), Indonesia (19.09 Mbps), Myanmar (16.84 Mbps), are still left behind (World Population Review, 2020). Internet connection in some Asian countries is still considered costly for the users (Azhar & Lin, 2017; Soriano, 2019).

Lastly, as many Asian countries tend to score high on collectivism, implementing WFH may lead to social disconnectedness among employees (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015). Although scholarly literature around this issue is still underway, the qualitative observation suggests that the link between loneliness and WFH appears to be more highly intensified among Asian workers during the pandemic (Dancel, 2020). A recent study from India shows that loneliness was

also experienced by most employees who performed work from home, and that online meetings failed to accommodate interpersonal bonding, teamwork, and commitment as face-to-face meetings did (Jaiswal & Arun, 2020).

The government measures in response to the COVID-19 pandemic may also account to the effectiveness of WFH implementation. The responsibility of assisting children who are studying online, particularly children at younger ages, may add a burden for working parents (Bhamani et al., 2020). Some countries (such as Singapore and Japan) are more successful in containing the virus than the others. The duration for which government restrictions are applied could be particularly related to the time perception in designing emergent knowledge strategies for organisations as a response to the pandemic (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2021). In societies where virus containment is conducted in a relatively shorter period, the organisations could perceive WFH to be temporarily practiced, hence the knowledge management strategies are leaning towards a temporary recovery. In Japan, for instance, after a successful containment, employees are now expected to return to work in the office (Oster, 2020). On the contrary, in societies where government response to contain the virus is rather at a slower pace, such as in Indonesia, some organisations have started developing long-term policies and knowledge strategies related that accommodate flexible work arrangement (Suwanti, 2020) despite the polarised perceptions surrounding the WFH practices (Dancel, 2020).

Figure 1 summarizes the possible cultural and sociocultural (contextual) barriers in implementing WFH in many Asian societies.

4 | DISCUSSION

4.1 | Theoretical and practical implications

The present paper has important theoretical contributions for the implementation of WFH regarding the cultural aspects. To our knowledge, this study is among the first studies that examine the possible barriers in implementing WFH in Asian societies using review of literature, while existing studies tend to discuss the barriers in the limited

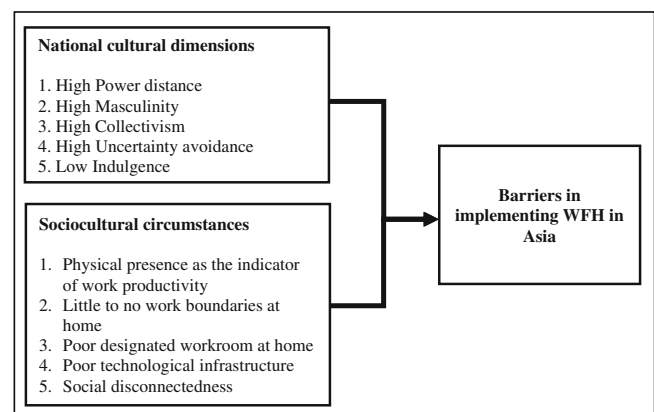


FIGURE 1 Theoretical framework

society scopes (Baruch & Yuen, 2000; Raghuram & Fang, 2014; Rathod & Miranda, 1999). Guided by Hofstede's cultural dimensions (2001), we argue that the challenges are rooted in cultural aspects that correspond to high power distance, high masculinity, high collectivism, high uncertainty avoidance, and low indulgence. Based on the reviewed literature, cultural barriers in implementing WFH in many Asian countries include high work–family conflicts, poor information technology infrastructure, perceived social disconnectedness, and the managers' demand for physical supervision.

The present paper extends prior research arguing that Hofstede's national cultures impact managerial decisions about WFH (Peters & den Dulk, 2003). In Europe, the practice of WFH is mostly found in Nordic countries (i.e., Norway and Sweden) where the score of femininity is high (Raghuram et al., 2001). In line with that, high individualism, low power distance, and high femininity in Europe cultures are found to provide the ideal ground for home-based telework (Ollo-López et al., 2020; Peters & den Dulk, 2003). These findings in a way have supported our arguments that there are challenges in implementing WFH in societies with high power distance, collectivism, and masculinity dimensions, which predominate many Asian societies.

The above-mentioned cultural challenges to WFH affect the implementation of knowledge management in organisations, particularly related knowledge sharing (King, 2007; Magnier-Watanabe & Senoo, 2010). Due to diminished social presence in workplace, WFH could reduce the chance of having social exposure with their co-workers and managers (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007). Such an exposure is necessary because co-workers share knowledge to each other better when they physically meet rather than via electronic communication (Allen et al., 2015). Therefore, as reported by Taskin and Bridoux (2010), WFH can jeopardise knowledge sharing among co-workers in organisations. Magnier-Watanabe and Senoo (2010) suggest that the four dimensions of national culture (i.e., power distance, individualism, masculinity, and uncertainty avoidance) are positively linked with knowledge management in the context of onsite working arrangement. In WFH arrangement, when physical meeting is non-existent, it is challenging for such cultural dimensions to positively influence the effectiveness of knowledge management process.

Practically termed, WFH essentially means that the work that was conducted at the office is now performed at home (or outside the office) to allow greater time flexibility to achieve a sense of work–life balance. However, the flexibility of WFH often comes with the cost of blurred temporal and spatial boundaries between work and household duties. Therefore, without careful implementation, WFH could end in work–family conflict, rather than balance. Research highlights the importance of having a designated working space (Donnelly & Proctor-Thomson, 2015) and time (Huuhtanen, 2003) to ensure the effectiveness of WFH. Hence, it is important to maintain regular life rhythms by allocating proportional time for work, family, and social purposes. An extra effort might need to be done to familiarise family members regarding the new habit of working at home. Dependent children and elder parents might need to be well-informed about this new adjustment so that they do not expect individuals to perform household roles during office hours. Setting up a workspace in a

private room could be an ideal strategy (Baruch, 2001) to minimise the distraction of others' presence as well as to introduce the new role at home to their children or elder parents.

4.2 | Limitation and future research direction

The fast-growing technology and shifting lifestyle that emphasises an individual aspiration (Himawan et al., 2019) seem to suggest that flexible work arrangement in Asia may be more about a matter of *when*, than *if*. Hence, much research needs to be done to examine and improve flexible work arrangement in Asia; perhaps this COVID-19 pandemic provides an ideal timing for conducting such studies. The present paper is built based on the existing knowledge strategies that are not sufficient to inform the effective management practices that correspond to the drastic changes in various domains of life (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2021). Future studies are called for discussing whether and how national value systems in Asia may inform unique, richer insights for management practice in the flexible work arrangement context. Given the wide disparity of cultures in Asia, future studies should establish clear geographical and cultural boundaries when investigating the phenomenon. It is also imperative to maintain fairness by considering both employer's and employee's perspective. The current sociocultural values often assume employees being in a more advantageous position in WFH arrangement, whereas they may actually experience frustration due to certain cultural burdens and technical limitations when performing work at home (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021).

4.3 | Policy recommendation

Although the preference towards certain management style very much reflects the cultural values upheld by the societies, it is important to note that the relationship between management style and the cultural values is rather descriptive and does not imply causality. While autocratic leadership may reflect high power distance cultural profile (Key & Key, 2000), it does not necessarily mean that autocracy is the most effective leadership approach. In fact, many recent studies suggest the preference for more participative leadership among employees in Asia (Rawat & Lyndon, 2016; Yukongdi, 2010).

In that sense, the more participative leadership approach in WFH practices can be obtained by nurturing a trustful work atmosphere. This should be translated into an evaluation system that rewards employees not based on the hours they spend for work, but on the quality of their work outcome. The company's policy to reduce employees' salary when they work at home (Cho, 2020; Hamdani, 2020) has no reasonable base. In fact, working at home entails an increased risk due to poorer ergonomic condition (Huuhtanen, 2003) and is associated with increased expenses of electricity and internet connectivity. Under the pandemic circumstances when salary cut is observed, the decision has to be viewed as to the

last available option for a company survival rather than due to the WFH policy.

To accommodate managers' controlling function and employees' social needs, a sense of presence could be endeavoured by utilising video conferences regularly for work coordination. This could address employees' social need and is an important strategy to gain a feeling of *being there* with team members despite being in different places (Fontaine, 2002). Furthermore, control mechanism could be modified to put more emphasis on the output rather than process, which would be better addressed through WFH (Groen et al., 2018).

Some workers may involuntarily perform WFH arrangement under this pandemic circumstance. Research suggests that involuntary WFH is associated with greater work-to-family conflict, stress, and burnout (Kaduk et al., 2019), which will affect their work performance. To address this issue, companies could engage in a participative approach by asking employees to raise and discuss their concerns and find mutual outcomes, which is found to be an effective strategy for both ends (Lee et al., 2019). Since this working arrangement is both inevitable and involuntary in this COVID-19 pandemic, employers could take an initiative to strategically prepare the organisations for these rapid changes with a potential to adopt this arrangement in the long run. Employers could adopt emergent knowledge strategies by exploring innovative insights that incorporate challenges rather than deeply relying on the existing strategies (Bratianu & Bejinaru, 2021). Practically termed, formal guidelines for employees in transitioning to WFH are needed that detail how the work is performed and measured (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021), and innovative knowledge and management strategies that accommodate both the cultural and contextual challenges need to be explored.

5 | CONCLUSION

Traditional work arrangement with both employees and employers meet in a designated office appears to remain a favourable practice in Asia as it accommodates the needs of both parties. However, the challenges brought by COVID-19 have posed a real risk to the sustainability of such a traditional work arrangement. While Asian employers and employees are forced to adopt a WFH arrangement in this pandemic, one might ponder the future of WFH in Asia. Our pilot study has proved both the favourability and effectiveness of WFH arrangement particularly to increase Indonesian married women's participation in industries (REMOVED FOR REVIEW), but more studies from different Asian societies are called for to test the efficacy of the claim while offering non-Western perspective regarding the implementation of alternative work arrangement.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

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