The Impact of Organizational Culture on the Challenges of the WFH Setup: A Case Study of a Higher Education Institution

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Abstract— This study aims to explain how organizational culture and its three layers can help with the challenges created by the Work From Home setup. This research also aims to provide a framework for organizations to use their organizational culture to address the growing concerns of remote work. Adopting a critical realist research philosophy, it anchors on the theoretical foundation of Organization Culture Onion and the Four Realms of Remote work. Data collection is primarily through qualitative Private Higher Education Institutions (HEI) interviews. The administrators of the College of Business and their different department chairpersons were the study's respondents.

Although organizational culture and WFH literature have been around for decades, it is the country's first experience of WFH brought about by COVID-19. This cataclysmic event has been around for two years since the nationwide lockdown. Thus, studies on these concepts, specially set in academic institutions, were limited.

The challenges identified in the study were increased workload; communication issues; complicated processes; no official time, and blurring lines of the Work-life balance. The conclusion showed that the University's culture, anchored on faith, service, and community as values, has alleviated these challenges.

Index Terms—organizational culture, work from home, COVID-19, Higher Educational Institutions.

I. INTRODUCTION

History has witnessed various interventions to contain the disease's spread. For example, quarantine mitigated the Black Death pandemic's spread [1]. The Spanish Flu also witnessed the importance of business and school lockdowns. The virus's death toll in America is higher than those killed in World War II [2, 3, 4]. After the Spanish Flu, the latter part of the 20th century witnessed two more influenza strains: the Asian Flu of 1957 and the Hong Kong Flu of 1968. He further shared in his article the low casualty and contained Swine Flu of 1976 and the Russian Flu of 1977.

One hundred years after the Spanish Flu, the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic last 11 March 2020 [5]. The rising cases and impact on 118 countries made The World Organization declare this an outbreak. 15 March 2020, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte imposed Enhanced Community Quarantine throughout Metro Manila, restricting people from leaving their houses. Businesses are closed, mass gatherings such as attending church services are restricted, and schools become virtual classrooms.

Because of this phenomenon, companies inevitably sought ways to thrive in these challenging times. However, unfortunately, companies have turned to these so-called Work From Home Arrangements due to the community lockdown.

A. Objectives of the Study

This study aims to understand the challenges the Higher Education Institutions faced when they shifted to the WFH setup. It identified how can the organization's culture mitigate these challenges. Finally, it aimed to present whether an organization's culture is still relevant in this new normal or, all the more important, as workers in the institution are now delivering their outputs remotely.

To achieve this, the study objectives were:

1. Gather initial data from selected administrators, identifying the challenges they faced with the sudden shift to WFH;
2. Collect best practices of the different departments and offices on how they adapted to the WFH;
3. Define the organizational culture of the University at the level of middle management;
4. Explain the impact of WFH on the University's organizational culture; and
5. Assess the extent of the organization's culture in addressing the challenges of the WFH.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

The concept of Work From Home, telecommuting, Teleworking, and Remote Work are in their infancy stage. The forefather of this work setup was Homeworking, a study by Baruch and Nicholson [6] a quarter of a decade ago. Their study presented the motivation of both employers, which are more work, quality output, and savings on office space, and employees, which revolves around the achievement of QWL or quality work-life, less travel, childcare duties, and flexibility, among others. The seminal work of Baruch and Nicholson [6] presented a win-win situation to all stakeholders, albeit with a bit of a disclaimer. The researchers

emphasized that while the employer saves up on office rent, the latter must motivate employees in this new setup and eventually give rise to new management styles within the purview of trust, open communication, and self-management.

A. Challenges brought by the WFH setup

Various pandemics have struck humanity throughout history. Despite this, the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath came as a complete shock to every business and organization.

The academic journals in this literature review that speak of the WFH challenges were organized in the following themes: Work Environment, Emotional, Well-being, Digital Transformation, Human Resources Concerns, Ergonomics, Academia Challenges, and Mindfulness.

Wang, Liu, Quan, and Parker [7] have identified four significant challenges in the WFH: household interruptions, poor communication, the ability to procrastinate, and the state of being lonely.

Hamouche [8] shared the same sentiment as Wang, Liu, Quan, and Parker [7], sharing that the working conditions are one of the significant challenges of a WFH scenario. Further, her research explored how the new setup has challenged the HR department and its practices. Sahni [9], on the other hand, identified the various stress triggers and the blurred boundaries of WFH. The author presents that the stress was triggered by the lack of resources & directions, interruptions inside the home, fear of the unknown, and technology issues. Similar to the suggestion of Wang, Liu, Quan, and Parker [6], where performance and well-being are the expected remote working outcomes if self-discipline is present as a mediating variable, Sanhi [9], on the other hand, suggested coping mechanisms such as time management/planning, deep breathing, effective communication, relaxing activities and connecting to a family as measures to a successful stress reduction. It threshed out what "self-discipline" be like in the study conducted by Wang. It also suggests the presence of organizational support or resources such as technology, training, flexibility, and supportive manager as variables, so WFH will be a desirable mode of working for people post-COVID.

It is essential to highlight that the work of Wang, Liu, Quan, and Parker [6] and Sahni [9] have identified that their respective study respondents tend to overwork to compensate for the "hours freed" from their daily commute. Palumbo [10] identified the concept of work-related fatigue that the participants in his study self-assessed. He concluded that because of the WFH setup, there is indeed exhaustion on the part of the workers. Shao, Fang, Wang, Chang, and Wang [11], similar to the work of Sahni [9], have identified stressors, and the former output enumerated five: Work-family boundary, technology, work coordination, workload, and COVID-19 infection-related as the primary stressors present in this kind of setup. Kramer & Kramer [12] sees this brand-new setup as problematic, as the WFH arrangement changes people's attitudes toward the company.

Their study claimed employers and employees could reap benefits when there is an exemplary structure for doing WFH. WFH has been around for quite some time, and pre-pandemic, it seems to be working in the outsourcing industry. Before the pandemic, people tended to bring their work home, claiming that they could finish the work better as there were no distractions as it is done beyond office hours. This was also the exact findings of the study of Connely, Fieseler, Cerne, Giessner, and Wong [13] regarding the "digitized economy or the rise of the gig economy. The digital transformation that paved the way to make workers do their work transcending time and space is now a norm. Jaiswal and Arun [12] argue that not all industries apply to WFH setup. The authors clearly showed a stark comparison of the Manufacturing sector and its requirements for doing WFH compared to the IT sector. Manufacturing sector respondents came out with the themes such as stress-related due to ambiguity, significant changes that took place, increased work hours, and saw advantages in the WFH.

Meanwhile, in the Technology-enabled sector, themes that emerged were decreased productivity, increased stress, specific changes in their work, and nurturing oneself as the major themes that surfaced in the study. Overall, in both sectors, the presence of stress was familiar. Due to the lockdown restrictions, the manufacturing sector only allows half of their workforce to report to work, thus cutting down the hours of their line workers. Because of this, the paid hours decreased; line workers started to fear an inevitable job loss in the future. Putting these factors together, the respondents experienced further stress because of the WFH setup.

B. Problems in the Academia

Next to emotional well-being, teachers' concerns or online teaching mode has been the third most prevalent theme in this literature review. There are six primary themes out of the 53 articles reviewed focused on the issue of teaching online. These were the work of Aboagye, Yawson & Appiah [14]; Aczel, Kovac, Van Der Lippe, and Szaszi [15]; Bollinger and Wasilik [16]; Stadtlander, Sickel, LaCivita, and Giles [17] and Yusuf [18], Lloyd, Byrne, and Mccoy [19]. Each of these studies presented fascinating findings contributing to this literature review's robustness.

What makes this section different from the initial is that the challenges faced by the academe in the section are unique compared to the rest of the workers in the WFH setup. This is because academics are both researchers and conduits of knowledge. In addition, a stakeholder is involved in the process. These are the students and the quality of learning they acquire. These have drastically changed as the WFH setup came in too abruptly, leaving a limited time for these academics to adjust, acquire training, and, more importantly, address the technical issues that are essential to the WFH. From this, the paper can identify relevant, focused, and connected themes in answering the research questions.

Before the pandemic, the works of Bollinger and Wasilik [16] and Lloyd, Byrne & McCoy [19] dealt with online

teaching issues. One crucial concept this research presents is the value of student satisfaction [16]. On the flip side, Lloyd, Byrne & McCoy [19] identified the barriers to online learning such as "interpersonal, training and technology, institutional and the cost/benefit analysis. Take note that these were studies on pre-pandemic online learning institutions of learning will always have the option not to optimize distance education as a medium. However, some stakeholders find distance education or online learning beneficial. These are the part-time faculty who juggle multiple engagements in various institutions and, in order to cut down travel time, opted to be virtual teleworkers [17]. The study of Stadtlander, Sickel, LaCivita, and Giles [17] threshed out the opportunities that Part-Time faculty members see in online teaching. However, at the same time, the study respondents shared the challenges they faced, such as using the kitchen as their area to work, dining chair as their seat, and frequently, working wherever there is a space for their laptop anywhere in the house. As these participants are not spared from interruptions and poor connectivity, these virtual workers, also known as online instructors, face loneliness and the lack of separation between work and family time. Thus, the researchers suggest providing these employers with virtual communities so that they get to interact with their cohorts daily.

The remaining three (3) pieces of literature on WFH, with members of the academia as stakeholders, discuss the impact of the pandemic. This means that in the earlier works on WFH in the education sector where there is an option, these other three (3) literature posed a challenge where educators have no choice but to learn as quickly as possible the learning management system, adapt to the technology, and ultimately transform whatever space they have at home to be the virtual classroom.

C. Organizational Culture

Another construct of this research is Organizational Culture. The concept of Organizational culture has been around for almost four decades. This was the seminal work of Pettigrew in 1979 [20], published in the Administrative Science Quarterly entitled "On Studying Organizational Cultures ."Because of this work, the term "organizational culture" entered mainstream academic work.

From this 40-year background, we can look at the various definitions of Organizational Culture. One popular and most recent definition is that of Larentis, Antonello, and Slongo [21] (2017 citing (Alvesson, 2013; Hogan and Coote, 2014; Van Maanen and Barley, 1985; Vetrakova and Smerek, 2016; Yin, Lu, Yang, and Jing 2014) as: "Culture is a historical product from a group as it affects interpretations, and it guides behaviors." Since this research will focus on the layers of the Organizational Culture of Edgar Schein, we will use his definition for this study.

Schein [21, p. 3], this is how he defined Organizational Culture: as analyzing why members behave the way they do; we often look for the values that govern behavior, which is

the second level. However, as the values are hard to observe directly, it is often necessary to infer them by interviewing key organization members or analyzing artifacts such as documents and characters. However, in identifying such values, we usually note that they accurately represent only a culture's manifest or espoused values. They focus on what people say is the reason for their behavior, what they ideally would like those reasons to be, and what are often their rationalizations for their behavior. Nevertheless, the underlying reasons for their behavior remain concealed or unconscious. In order to understand a culture and ascertain more completely the group's values and overt behavior, it is imperative to delve into the underlying assumptions, which are typically unconscious, but determine how group members perceive, think, and feel.

III. METHODOLOGY

This research used Case Study as its design. As defined by Creswell [22], a case study is a methodology that focuses on "developing an in-depth description and analysis of a case or multiple cases." Its unit of analysis is more on studying an event, a program, an activity, or more than one individual. As this study's research problem is to get an in-depth understanding of the WFH phenomena using the lens of Organizational Culture, it is consistent with the foundational consideration of the Case Study approach. The forms of data collection in the Case Study use multiple sources such as interviews, observations, documents, and artifacts, where the latter is one of the dimensions of Schein's Organizational Culture Onion Model. A case study analyzes data through the description of the case and themes of the case as well as cross-case themes.

Literature mentioned that the researcher must consider the time spent transcribing and analyzing interview data in a case study. Thus, given the time constraints, the researcher opted for a case study from the Higher Education Institutions or HEIs where he worked during the COVID-19 pandemic. This would mean that the unit of analysis would be the phenomenon of the challenges of the WFH experienced by the University, and other data sources will come from the interview results, company website, DOLE and DOH circular, the institutions' policies on the online setup, and existing literature.

It will be exploratory because all of the questions were targeted to a realm of the WFH study of Baruch and Nicholson (1997). The interview guide questions allowed the respondents to mention anything the company did during COVID-19's WFH. The structure of their interview merely focused on their role, the challenges encountered in the WFH, the workaround they did, and the definition of their Organizational Culture. There was a total of 13 respondents in the interview consisting of the college's administrators, the top administrator responsible for the organization's culture, and the department chairpersons of the six college departments. The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to an

hour.

A. Interview Questions

The interview questions are seen below:

1. Can you briefly describe your role/position? What are the goals you have for that position?
2. How long have you been in that position/role?
3. What were the challenges encountered in the role before the pandemic?
4. What were the challenges faced when the WFH started?
5. How did you, as an individual, manage these challenges?
6. How did your office/department address these challenges?
7. Given this new setup, what would be the "ideal situation"?
8. What are the benefits that you see in this current setup?
9. Do you think the WFH is more beneficial? Why or why not?
10. What is your wish list/support needed from the University? College? Peers?
11. What would it be if you were to define our college culture?
12. What comes to mind if you hear the word University Mission?

B. Methods of Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data gathered from the respondents through a thematic analysis of their responses. The other data sources, aside from the interviews of the respondents, were studying the physical artifacts, including the HEI website and the directives from their top management regarding the various work setups that occur during the WFH phase. It studied the government circulars from the Department of Health, Commission on Higher Education, and the Department of Labore and Employment and how these government agencies gave directives to Higher Education Institutions. Throughout the interviews, the researcher kept a journal to validate observations.

Once the data were input through creating a database, it was coded, and themes were identified using web-based word cloud applications. This step, also known as Disassembling, will simultaneously look at the research questions and sort the compiled data into fragments and labels. This is made possible by looking back at the research questions at hand.

The next step of data analysis used is where these phrases of fragments and labels are placed in their rightful themes, and this is called reassembling process. This is where the clustering and categorizing of the themes that emerged from the different HEIs will be sequenced. In this reassembling part, it searched for patterns, comparisons, negative instances, and rival thinking of the respondents. It will be neatly presented in a tabular form for easy cross-referencing and aid in the next step of the analysis plan, which is interpreting.

The second to the last step, which is interpreting, fortified the conclusions and recommendations of the study as this will check on constructs' attributes, completeness, fairness, and empirical accuracy. The data encoded was checked on its credibility and how it is value-adding. Descriptions in this stage will be more on the visual displays, leading to the concluding part and the last step of the data analysis.

From the rigorous four steps, the study came up with conclusions in the next section.

IV. FINDINGS

Based on the preceding, here are the results of the interviews conducted:

A. Figures and Tables

Table 1: Array of Issues Tallied

Array of Issues	Number of times it appeared in the interviews
Complicated processes	Eleven times
Increased workload	Nine times
Communication	Seven times
Blurring Lines of Work-Life Balance	Three times
No official time	Two times

It can be inferred that the respondents saw that the WFH had created complicated processes as what can be achieved on a face-to-face transaction has to undergo additional steps for it to be completed. These complicated processes were perceived as an additional workload for the college administrators. The department and office secretaries who are supposed to aid these administrators created an additional workload as their office equipment was not provided to them not until the quarantine restrictions eased. Travel was granted to the so-called frontliners. Moreso, even after the secretaries received their office equipment and used what was available to them at home (laptops of other family members), communication has become an issue as these secretaries are used to going from one office to another and making requests verbally. Now the secretaries are forced to make all requests via email, which was quite challenging for them to compose in a professional business correspondence format.

Finally, with so many things to do with such limited time, the respondents find the WFH creeping into their time, making three respondents believe they no longer have a work-life balance. Two respondents did not mention the lack of work-life balance, but they see that they are already working beyond office hours, thus, making them conclude that the pandemic is no longer respecting the official time.

Table 2: Responses based on negative, neutral, or positive categories.

Category of Response	How did your office/department address these challenges?
Negative	5
Neutral	2
Positive	35

However, there is a light at the end of the tunnel. Despite the array of issues shared, the department and office heads addressed these problems positively, having 35 responses sharing how the WFH caused by COVID-19 brought out the best in them. Table 2 shows the breakdown of the responses based on the count of the interventions used to address the challenges

Admittedly, the change of work setup was confusing, cumbersome, and, for most, challenging initially. However, these respondents realized that the University should be business as usual. The solutions below optimized the existing mechanisms in each office and department: the organizational structure, the different committees, and the observance of office hours. Due to the uncertainty of the times, some participants tended to address all emails and work in a short sitting. Later they fail to realize that they have missed essential household duties, even as basic as eating their meals on time.

As the pandemic progresses, the University's stakeholders, such as the students, administrators, faculty, and parents, have understood the situation. No longer are emails have to be addressed straight away. Students understand that the situation their professors and administrators are going through is as complex as theirs. From this understanding, the University's culture anchored on communion has been practiced. Despite the challenging times, the extent and desire to fully provide service to the students and faculty members continued. The administrators perceived that the University's values of service had been put to the test. Finally, given the nature of the higher education institution as a Christian university, the community anchored its strength in prayer to the Almighty. The creation of group chats has been a good portal for everyone to share one's best wishes of good health, perseverance, and strength when losing a loved one due to COVID-19. The group chats for the departments were two-fold: one for the socials and the other for official business. The college administrators also created a College Socials Committee, comprising volunteer faculty members from the different departments sponsoring game nights, monthly social gatherings, and parties to keep everyone's sanity in check.

Overall, the college has digitalized the institution's culture and strengthened the culture from the pandemic and its challenges from the values of faith, service, and communion.

Solutions from the Participants	Number of Participants
Optimized the different committees/residency	4
Follow Office hours/efforts to Achieve Work-Life Balance	3
Have a "concierge" because Admin has become clerical – admin + plan + report. The admin "firefighting" is time-consuming—other roles, like hiring, permanency, managing people	9
Communal and collective effort not just by the staff but the faculty	2
Consultation and communication. Especially since there is no Face-to-Face, we should connect.	4
Once submitted their residency, I can know when I can reach out to them. I have to reach their availability, especially for the Part-Time and on their emergency meetings. So, they have no reason since I know they're available.	1
"Our org chart is explicit in the admin committees. I know who is responsible and accountable."	3
Respect everyone's space and communicate unless it is urgent; the response will not be real-time.	1
We created committees and delegated the work to these committees.	2
Tap the different offices and departments to help the students	2
the staff should work as if we are on a face-to-face. It is like going to the person's table and getting the response ASAP.	1

Table 3 provided this study with a snapshot of the respondents' different actions to manage these different arrays of issues.

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