Comparative Study of Employee Motivation for Those Working from Home Versus Those Working in the Office

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ABSTRACT

Introduction/Main Objectives: Remote work has been one of the most effective solutions for companies during the recent pandemic. It has transformed our perspective on work by offering employees significant flexibility in both their work locations and schedules. **Background Problems:** With the pandemic now considered endemic, some individuals are choosing to return to the office, while others still prefer working from home. An employee's choice between office work and remote work is strongly tied to their work motivation. It is essential for companies to identify the factors driving these preferences to manage their employees effectively and efficiently. **Novelty:** The first comparative case study on employee motivation between remote work and office work in Indonesia's IT industry. **Research Methods:** This case study employs a qualitative approach, utilizing semi-structured interviews with six informants from an IT company. **Finding/Results:** Employees are more motivated when they work in the office compared to when they work from home, with office-based employees generally feeling more motivated due to factors like improved communication, tangible recognition, a stronger sense of achievement, better growth-supporting tools, and a more comfortable work environment. **Conclusion:** The research shows that working from the office is generally favored over working from home. However, the company should continue offering both options, not only due to the nature of the IT industry but also to combine the benefits of both in-office and remote work. leverage the benefits of both work environments.

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1.   Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, which started in March 2020, has significantly transformed the work environment. As the virus spread, numerous countries-imposed lockdowns and social restrictions, resulting in temporary and permanent business closures, layoffs, and widespread job losses. While industries like tourism and entertainment have struggled, the technology sector, exemplified by PT Multipolar Technology Tbk., has seen growth, marked by a rise in both client numbers and stock prices.

During the pandemic, working from home (WFH) became a new norm, altering work habits and interactions. Working from home (WFH) has transformed how people find motivation in their work. While it offers flexibility in the work environment, its impact on motivation is nuanced. For some, the ability to manage their own schedule, avoid commuting, and enjoy a comfortable workspace increases motivation. However, others may feel less enthusiastic and engaged due to being distanced from the social setting of the office. While WFH offers flexibility (Purwanto et al., 2020), it also presents challenges, particularly in communication and collaboration (Hammargren & Hendriks, 2022), with certain departments like Quality Assurance (QA) experiencing more difficulties. Despite PT Multipolar Technology Tbk.'s successful growth, employees' opinions on WFH differ. The Application Developer team noticed minimum changes, whereas the QA department encountered issues with web and hardware testing.

By July 2023, the pandemic had turned into an endemic, and most people returned to working in offices. However, some companies, especially in the technology sector, are maintaining the WFH model. PT Multipolar Technology Tbk., still allows its Application Developer division to work from anywhere. Questions arise about whether employees are more motivated when working at home or in the office, as WFH provides flexibility but can also reduce social engagement and involvement in teams (Dryselius & Petterson, 2021). This study addresses a gap or expands upon the existing literature on work motivation in the context of WFH and WFO in the IT industry, with a focus on how IT companies can effectively integrate both working models.

From the background provided, the research question can be formulated as follows: Is there a difference in work motivation between employees who do WFH and those who work in the office at PT Multipolar Technology Tbk.? This study aims to explore these differences. Additionally, the findings are expected to offer valuable insights for IT companies to determine whether working from home, working in the office, or a combination of both is the most effective approach for them.

2. Literature Review

Work Environment

Work environment is a set of conditions in which workers carry out their work (Qiu et al., 2023). It refers to the set of conditions under which an organization operates, including physical, social, and psychological factors. The work environment also encompasses the surroundings that can either enhance or hinder employee motivation. This includes both the physical aspects, such as lighting and ventilation, as well as non-physical factors, such as relationships with supervisors, colleagues, and subordinates, the indicators of the work environment are as follows (Sedarmayanti, 2018):

1. **Working Relationships Among Employees**: Establishing strong working relationships is crucial, particularly for those who work in teams. Conflicts can create a negative work environment and lower overall morale.

2. **Working Relationship Between Employees and Leaders**: The perception that superiors have of their subordinates can impact task performance. A positive and respectful relationship between leaders and employees is essential for effective collaboration and achieving company objectives.

Motivation

American Psychological Association describe motivation as a person's willingness to exert physical or mental effort in pursuit of a goal or outcome (APA Dictionary of Psychology, 2024). Moreover, motivation has been defined as the process whereby goal-directed activities are initiated and sustained (Cook & Artino, 2016). According to (Bitsch & Hogberg, 2005), motivation refers to the internal or external drive that encourages individuals, groups, or companies to pursue and achieve their goals. The indicators of motivation include:

1. **Recognition**: This involves acknowledgment, praise, or criticism from superiors, clients, or colleagues.

2. **Achievement**: Success is measured by tangible results; failure or lack of accomplishment can diminish motivation.

3. **Growth**: The opportunity for personal and professional development in terms of knowledge, skills, and career advancement.

4. **Progress/Advancement**: Changes in job status, such as promotions or vertical progressions in one's role.

5. **Responsibility**: The assignment of responsibilities for one's own work or that of others.

6. **The Work Itself**: The nature of the work, including whether it is engaging or monotonous, easy or challenging, can impact motivation.

7. **Salary**: Compensation for services rendered, including base salary and bonuses.

8. **Technical Supervision**: The supervisor's skills, fairness, and willingness to provide guidance, which can enhance motivation.

9. **Company Policies**: Company rules and procedures that may affect motivation, especially if they are overly restrictive or difficult.

10. **Work Environment**: The physical and social conditions of the workplace that contribute to employee comfort and effectiveness.

11. **Bonuses or Incentives**: Additional financial rewards provided beyond the regular salary.

12. **Job Security**: The stability of one's position and the company, which can influence motivation.

Several previous studies have shown mixed results regarding employee motivation while working from home (WFH). For example, Zamani et al. (2021) found that employees are more motivated when working from home due to reduced commuting costs. On the other hand, Schade et al. (2021) reported no significant change in motivation, particularly for experienced employees. However, Supriyono & Susmonowati (2022) found that WFH can negatively affect motivation, citing issues like poor internet connectivity, communication challenges with colleagues and clients, and a less conducive work environment as key factors.

3.   Method, Data, and Analysis

This study employs a qualitative approach aimed at understanding the experiences of research subjects by observing them directly. Case study is used in this research. Case studies are an inquiry strategy where the researcher conducts an in-depth exploration of a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. These cases are defined by specific time frames and activities, with detailed information gathered through various data collection methods over an extended period. However, the findings from a case study are not intended for generalization (Yin, 2013). The sampling method applied is non-probability sampling, specifically purposive sampling. This technique is often used in qualitative research as it allows researchers to focus on specific areas of interest and gather in-depth information on those topics. It is also commonly used in small-scale studies with a limited participant pool. According to Guest et al. (2006) 6-12 interviews are enough for one qualitative research project.

The research focused on employees of PT Multipolar Technology Tbk. who had experienced both WFH and WFO. Data collection involved semi-structured interviews (42 questions that focus on work environment and work motivation) held between November 10, 2023, and November 24, 2023, with six employees: three from the Quality Assurance Division and three from the Application

Developer Division. These participants were chosen by their availability to conduct interviews. These employees were located in various areas, including Tangerang, Jakarta, Bandung, Salatiga, and Bekasi.

In qualitative research, data analysis occurs both during and after data collection over a defined period. During the interviews, the researcher begins analyzing the responses. If any answers seem inadequate after initial analysis, the researcher will ask additional questions until reliable data is obtained. The data analysis process includes data collection, reduction, presentation, and drawing conclusions and verification, as outlined in the Miles and Huberman Model of Data Analysis. Data from the qualitative research is validated using the triangulation method. This technique involves combining multiple data collection methods to assess and verify the credibility of the information gathered (Sugiyono, 2016).

4.   Result and Discussion

The findings are divided into two categories: work environment and motivation, as detailed below:

Work Environment

- Relationships Between Employees

   The interview results indicate that during remote work, nearly all participants reported that relationships among colleagues were generally positive. However, a significant issue noted was slow response times, which can hinder work effectiveness. This problem was highlighted as a major challenge during remote work. When employees returned to the office, there was a noticeable improvement, with all interviewees agreeing that in-office communication was effective due to the absence of time constraints on interactions. This result aligns with the study that found employee motivation for remote work is decreasing, primarily due to issues like unreliable internet connections and challenges in communicating with colleagues or clients (Supriyono & Susmonowati, 2022).

- Relationships between employees and superiors

   All interviewees concurred that their communication with superiors during remote work was very effective. The same was true when working in the office, as communication with superiors was quicker than with colleagues, and mutual respect for each other's time was maintained. It was noted that there were no issues with communication with superiors; in fact, interactions with superiors were more seamless and faster compared to those with colleagues.

Motivation

- Recognition

   All interviewees agreed that superiors provided recognition for employees' efforts, whether working remotely or in the office. However, there is a slight difference: during remote work, recognition was primarily verbal, whereas in the office, it included additional forms of acknowledgment such as periodic awards and team meals after project completions. These findings indicate that superiors consistently offer recognition for employees' work, and in some cases, this recognition extends beyond verbal praise to include tangible rewards like team dinners.

- Achievement

   All interviewees reported that they were able to meet their work standards, particularly during remote work, as employees had more time to complete their tasks. However, one respondent gave a less favourable assessment of their achievements, despite meeting the company's standards. The feedback was similar for office work, where all interviewees felt they not only met but exceeded the set standards and experienced greater satisfaction with their accomplishments. This increased satisfaction may be attributed to the more supportive environment provided by working in the office.

- Growth

   All interviewees agreed that they can continue to develop their knowledge due to the company's project-based system. However, some expressed dissatisfaction with their growth, feeling that their development remained stagnant whether working remotely or in the office. Conversely, upon returning to the office, many employees reported greater satisfaction with their knowledge growth, especially because they had access to additional resources that were unavailable during remote work. For example, one interviewee was able to use facilities for learning about servers, which was not possible while working remotely.

- Progress

   All interviewees acknowledged that progress was possible, but it was not experienced by everyone. For instance, one informant was promoted to Quality Assurance Leader because superiors recognized their sufficient skills and knowledge. Similarly, while working in the office, another informant advanced to team leader on several projects and was appointed session head. However, despite the potential for career advancement, no other employees reported experiencing similar progress by the time of the interviews.

- Responsibility

The interview results regarding responsibilities showed some interesting variations. While working remotely, half of the interviewees reported an increase in their responsibilities. This finding contrasts with other sources, which indicated that there was no change in responsibilities when all work shifted to remote settings. Those who noted an increase in responsibilities referred to personal accountability rather than work-related tasks. In contrast, upon returning to the office, some employees felt their responsibilities lightened due to the ease of performing their tasks. Nevertheless, several respondents felt that their responsibilities neither increased nor decreased when they resumed working in the office.

- The Work Itself

The interview results regarding job difficulty are quite interesting, as they reveal a consistent pattern between remote work and office work, though with opposite effects. During remote work, all Quality Assurance Division employees reported that their tasks became more challenging due to slow responses from the Developer Division. This finding aligns with study by Sadiqin (2022) found that employees have lost their motivation to work due to changes in the organizational structure and their lack of familiarity with the work-from-home system. This loss of motivation is reflected in less satisfactory results and slower completion of tasks. In contrast, developers found their work easier because they had more time to complete their tasks. When employees returned to the office, the situation reversed: Developers faced increased difficulty due to new distractions, such as frequent questions from colleagues, which disrupted their focus. Conversely, the Quality Assurance Division found their work easier because developers responded more quickly.

- Salary

The interview results regarding salary show consistent findings for both remote work and office work. During remote work, employees felt that their salaries were adequate and sufficient to maintain their motivation, with no dissenting opinions. Similarly, upon returning to the office, employees continued to find their salaries satisfactory. This satisfaction may be due to the office covering additional expenses, such as providing transportation for commuting or meeting clients, which reduces employees' out-of-pocket costs.

- Technical Supervision

During remote work, all interviewees agreed that supervision from their superiors was either insufficient or lax, with oversight primarily focused on whether deadlines were met. However, opinions on technical supervision when working in the office varied. Some respondents feel

that technical supervision had not improved and remained inadequate or non-existent. Conversely, two new perspectives emerged with in-office work: one positive, noting that supervision felt more relaxed, and the other indicating that supervision had become more stringent. This increased supervision was attributed to the presence of CCTV in the office, which made employees feel more monitored, even though it wasn't always direct attention.

- Company Policy

  The interview results regarding policy changes indicated that there was indeed a shift during remote work. Specifically, the company altered its attendance procedure by requiring employees to report their working hours using Excel spreadsheets. Despite this change, none of the interviewees reported negative feedback about it. Similarly, when employees returned to the office, the policy reverted to using ID cards for attendance. This return to pre-pandemic procedures suggests that there was no significant impact on employee motivation due to these changes.

- Working Conditions

  The interview results regarding remote work conditions revealed mixed opinions. Some respondents felt demotivated due to a lack of care for their work environment, which negatively impacted their motivation. This suggests that working conditions can affect employee motivation. However, other employees reported that their work conditions varied, often depending on their mood. A few respondents actually felt very positive about their remote work environment, noting that it did not affect their motivation at all. In contrast, when discussing office work conditions, most interviewees had positive feedback. They appreciated the assistance provided by office staff, which reduced concerns about their work environment and, in turn, boosted their motivation. Nonetheless, a few respondents felt that working conditions were similar whether remote or in the office.

- Bonus and Incentive

  The interview results concerning bonuses during remote work showed varied responses. Some employees felt that the bonuses were enhanced because they were allowed to order food, with the cost covered by the company. Others perceived the bonuses as unchanged from pre-pandemic levels, leading to no change in their work motivation. Additionally, some employees felt they did not receive any bonuses at all. When employees returned to the office, those who had previously felt they didn't receive bonuses now reported receiving them, although this did not significantly affect their motivation. Conversely, some employees were very satisfied with the bonuses they received, feeling that they even received additional perks, like a Play Station

5, which helped alleviate boredom during work. The differences in bonus perceptions could be attributed to the various locations where employees worked. Overall, the feedback indicates that bonuses are provided to all employees, although the perception of receiving them may vary, particularly during remote work.

▪ Job Security

All interviewees expressed a strong sense of safety working in the technology industry. They shared similar sentiments about the security and stability of technology companies when transitioning back to office work. This sense of security is attributed to the continuous growth of the technology sector and the constant influx of new projects, which ensures ongoing employment opportunities for those in the industry.

The findings align with Herzberg's hygiene factors, which propose that meeting a worker's "lower-level" needs—like company policies, supervision, relationships with colleagues and supervisors, salary, job security, personal life, work environment, and status—merely prevents dissatisfaction but doesn't boost motivation. Conversely, the findings also reflect Herzberg's motivators, such as the nature of the work, responsibility, recognition, achievement, advancement, and growth, which focus on fulfilling a worker's "higher-level" needs to increase motivation (Herzberg et al., 2011).

Table 1. Analysis findings comparing working from home and working from the office

Factors	Findings	WFH	WFO
Recognition	Although both receive recognition, it is more noticeable in the office compared to at home.	X	√
Achievement	Achievements are often more noticeable in the office than at home, due to the supportive work environment.	X	√
Growth	Growth can happen both at home and in the office, but the office provides an environment that fosters and accelerates the development of learning and skills.	X	√
Progress	While promotions can happen both in the office and at home, they occur more often in a remote setting, showing	√	X

Factors	Findings	WFH	WFO
	that achievements in a work-from-home environment are also appreciated and recognized in a positive way.		
Responsibility	Responsibilities at home and in the office share similarities, but in the office, they can sometimes feel a bit more urgent or positively demanding.	X	√
The Work Itself	The level of difficulty encountered is the same when working both at home and in the office.	√	√
Salary	The salary received consistently meets needs adequately.	√	√
Technical Supervision	Supervision is equally effective both at home and in the office, but it can sometimes feel more intensive or closely monitored in an office setting.	X	√
Company Policy	Despite several changes over time, the policy adjustments have not placed any burden on employees.	√	√
Bonus and Incentive	Although bonuses are consistently earned both at home and in the office, they sometimes feel larger or more frequent in the office, which increases employee motivation.	X	√
Working Conditions (relationship with colleagues)	Interpersonal relationships are generally stronger in the office than at home, as it facilitates more direct and collaborative communication among colleagues.	X	√
Working Condition (relationship with supervisor)	Relationships with supervisors are well-developed in both settings, thanks to open	X	√

Factors	Findings	WFH	WFO
	communication and mutual understanding.		
Job Security	The tech industry's ability to provide a safe and comfortable working environment demonstrates that a sense of security is maintained whether working in the office or at home.	√	√

Table 2 indicates that PT Multipolar Technology's WFO approach is more effective than the WFH approach in fulfilling both motivators and hygiene factors. Psychologist Frederick Herzberg suggested that the best way to motivate employees is through job enrichment, which involves redesigning jobs to give workers more opportunities for responsibility, achievement, growth, accomplishment, and recognition, thereby increasing motivation. This is achieved by empowering employees, such as by giving them the authority and skills to inspect their own work instead of relying on supervisors. Herzberg believed that empowered workers would perform better because they are motivated to do so, leading to improved quality and productivity. This concept serves as the foundation for self-managing, team-based jobs in many companies worldwide today (Dessler, 2020)

5.   Conclusion and Suggestion

Here are some insights from the interview results. A clear distinction in motivation is observed between employees working remotely and those based in the office. Employees tend to feel more motivated in the office environment due to several factors, including:

- Easier communication
- More visible recognition, such as through annual awards
- A stronger sense of accomplishment
- A more comfortable workspace
- Better tools that foster professional growth, consistent with study by Setiawan (2020).
- Job performance, which aligns with previous research by Setiawan & Fitrianto (2021) and Supriyono & Susmonowati (2022).

It is evident that there are both advantages and disadvantages associated with each working arrangement as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Table of Advantages and Disadvantages of WFH and WFO

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Work From Home (WFH)	▪ Offer employees flexibility in their working hours and allow them to choose their work location	▪ Communication with colleagues becomes more challenging ▪ Creates the impression that the company does not provide bonuses to employees.
Work From Office (WFO)	▪ Enhance communication among employees ▪ Provide employees with access to various tools that assist with their work ▪ Offer improved and more comfortable working conditions ▪ Allow employees to receive annual awards	▪ Employees must spend time and effort traveling to the office or meeting with clients.

The implications of this study for the company are:

▪ Offer platform tools to improve communication among all employees at PT Multipolar Technology, such as the Microsoft Teams application. This can streamline communication for each project and team, making it easier and faster, and reducing confusion by avoiding the use of multiple communication platforms.

▪ Since some employees are still working remotely, the company could implement online recognition or reward programs, such as the Best Teamwork award and gold medals for outstanding teams. This approach can help enhance motivation among teams.

▪ PT Multipolar Technology can promote flexibility by allowing employees to alternate between working from home and working in the office, as long as they maintain job effectiveness and efficiency. Alternatively, the company could implement a rotating schedule, alternating between remote and office-based work every two weeks.

- The company should keep applying Herzberg's motivation theory by finding a balance between hygiene factors and motivators to effectively inspire their employees in both remote (WFH) and in-office (WFO) environments.

This study has certain limitations, and future researcher are encouraged to consider the following suggestions: explore various sectors and expand the sample size to obtain a more thorough understanding of the topic. By doing so, future research could provide a broader perspective on the differential factors influencing remote versus office-based work across different industries.

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