

# Barriers To Reciprocity Communication Between Superiors And Subordinates When Working From Home

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## **Abstract.**

*Work from Home (WFH) is currently a popular term on social media, especially after the government officially urges businesses to assign employees to work from home. The appeal is related to efforts to reduce the spread of the Covid-19 outbreak. Against this background, the researcher conducted a study to see how reciprocal communication between superiors and subordinates occurs and how obstacles occur when working from home at PT Indonesia Comnets Plus (ICON+). This study uses the Post-Positive Paradigm and uses the Single Case method with a qualitative descriptive approach and research data obtained from interviews and observations and documentation. The research location was carried out at ICON+ in the Jakarta area. Managers and VPs are classified as superiors, while officers and staff are classified as subordinates. The results showed that the reciprocal communication between superiors and subordinates was dominated by using the written method. Communication barriers that occur between superiors and subordinates at ICON+ include semantic disruption, structural disruption, and behavioral disruption. The research findings say that the biggest obstacle experienced by superiors and subordinates at ICON+ is the frame of mind barrier, namely the difference in perception when the communication process occurs between superiors and subordinates. The overall communication barrier is more often experienced by subordinates than superiors.*

**Keywords:** *Work From Home, Organizational Communication, Communication Barrier*

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## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The coordination in a company has become a significant factor for all employees to work under the regulation (Stevanovic et al., 2015; Bucata et al., 2017; Jakuvieck, 2019). Ultimately under the current WFH situation where there is a more intense interaction between both higher leaders such as GMs or VPs and middle leaders such as managers (Uysal, 2020; ILO, 2020; Einwiller et al., 2021; Macnamara, 2021). Many failures in the organization are caused by the lack of order in the communication carried out by the actors in the organization, especially if it is done without meeting face to face as is being faced by all employees in a company (Chanana & Sangeeta, 2020; ILO, 2020; Neill & Bowen, 2021). This is in line with previous research (Luthans, 2006) which says that ineffective communication is the main root of problems in organizations. Still, according to Luthans, effective communication between superiors and subordinates is an important factor for achieving organizational goals. Work From Home (WFH) is a term used for working remotely. More precisely working from home, which is increasingly being discussed on social media forums, means employees do not need to meet face to face in the office. According to Crosbie & Moore (Ahmad, 2020), working from home means doing paid work that is conducted mainly from home (minimum 20 hours per week). Working from home will provide flexible time for workers and provide a more of a work-life balance for employees whilst also providing benefits for the company (Thorstenson, 2020). ICON+ is a subsidiary company of PLN group, one of the biggest ICT companies in Indonesia. ICON+ expand the FTTH business.

This business is called ICONNET. All employees need to collaborate and synergize to pursue this target. During work from home, there are so many communication barriers at ICON+ which ultimately make basic researchers want to do this research depth, and among them are working hours that can no longer be controlled because work cannot be limited. Virtual meetings are held until late at night and even hold more than one meeting at the same time. This condition then opens the way for communication barriers between superiors and subordinates. Communication barrier occurs frequently every day, resulting in discomfort between superiors and subordinates. One of the phenomena found at ICON+ is that employees not only being transferred from their positions but also end up resigning. Because two-way communication is very important to achieve the success of a company's goals, therefore, the objective of the research is to examine the barriers to communication between superiors and subordinates when working from home (WFH). The previous research regarding the working from home or teleworking as a recent trend had been researched, one of them the impacts on workers, employers, and society, and the challenges for policymaking. One of them the extensive literature review; a web survey; interviews with representatives of European and national stakeholders; and five case studies of EU countries: Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy and Romania (Lodovici, 2021). The difference from this research is that this is related to one of ICT company in Indonesia.

## II. LITERATURE

### Organizational Communication

To quote Redding and Sanborn: "Organizational communication is the sending and receiving of information in complex organizations. In this case what is meant is whether it is internal communication, human relations, management union relations, downward communication (communication from superiors to subordinates), upward communication (communication from subordinates to superiors), horizontal communication, or communication from people of the same level, listening, writing, and communication program evaluation. Giddens (Littlejohn, Foss, & Oetzel, 2017) believes that structuration always involves three major dimensions: (1) an interpretation or understanding; (2) a sense of morality or proper conduct; and (3) a sense of power in action.

The rules we use to guide our actions, in other words, tell us how something should be understood (interpretation), what should be done (morality), and how to get things accomplished (power). On the system level, Giddens refers to these respectively as signification, legitimation, and domination. If organizational communication runs effectively, then the flow of information within a division will run smoothly so that all employees will be motivated to complete work quickly. On the other hand, if organizational communication does not run effectively, or in this case, there are communication barriers, then employee motivation and productivity will decrease.

### Communication Barriers

Barriers can damage communication, anything that hinders smooth communication is referred to as noise (Effendi & Effendi, 1996). Some of the communication barriers conveyed by are divided into six types, namely (Wursanto, 2005):

1. Technical Barriers

Such as mastery of inadequate communication techniques and methods.

2. Behavioral Barriers

Barriers are caused by various forms of attitude or behavior, both from communicators and communicants. Such as: Communicating via Whatsapp during Work From Home (WFH) so that you cannot see the expression of the message giver (superior/subordinate).

3. **Language Barrier**  
What is meant by language here is all forms used in the process of delivering news; namely spoken language, written language, gestures, and so on.
4. **Structural Barriers**  
These barriers can also be referred to as organizational barriers; namely, barriers caused by differences in levels, differences in work in the organizational structure.
5. **Distance Barrier**  
These barriers are also called geographic barriers. In terms of distance or geography, communication will be easier if the two parties who interact with each other are in a place that is not far apart.
6. **Background Barriers.**  
Differences in the background can cause a gap or obstacle in the communication process. These barriers can be classified into two, namely social background and educational background.

### **III. METHOD**

This research was conducted at PT Indonesia Comnets Plus (ICON+) in the Jakarta area during the Large-scale Social Restriction (Indonesian: Pembatasan Sosial Bersekala Besar or PSBB) to Community Activities Restriction Enforcement Micro (Indonesian: Pemberlakuan Pembatasan Kegiatan Masyarakat Mikro or PPKM Mikro), which ranged from November 2020 to May 2021. In this study, the researcher used a qualitative descriptive method under the umbrella of a single case study. Thus, researchers can focus more on a scope that is not too large and can be investigated in depth in a one-time span, or a longer period. To get the results of in-depth research, in this study data were collected in natural settings (natural conditions), primary data sources and data collection techniques were mostly on participant observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2017).

In line with this theory, the interview process is also carried out as naturally as possible while still paying attention to the moment and time of the interviewees, so that the interview results can be studied more deeply. To achieve in-depth research results, the researchers chose research informants who had worked for more than 3 (three) years at PT Indonesia Comnets Plus (ICON+) with the Manager and Vice President classification being categorized as superiors, while officers and supervisors were categorized as subordinates. For this study, the researchers focused on ICON+ for the working area in Jakarta. The location was chosen because it has a supporting aspect so that the research can run well.

### **IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

#### **Superior-Subordinate Communication**

Motivational Language Theory by Jacqueline Mayfield and Milton Mayfoeld (Ganiem & Kurnia, 2019) elaborate to improve organizational performance, build the mentality of organizational members, underlining the contribution of employees in achieving organizational goals and achieving stakeholder welfare, then there are three communication languages that leaders need to have, namely the ability to convey meaningfully about the vision and mission, values, goals, organizational strategy. The ability to provide direction, guidance, related to company performance and the ability to convey messages of empathy, so that there is an interaction that expresses the human side to employees.

During Work From Home (WFH) the working hours can no longer be controlled with the number of meeting agendas being more frequent than usual. Some of them think that they rarely meet face to face

so that more meetings are needed to brainstorm and communicate with each other about work. It is not uncommon for some of them to carry out different meetings at the same time or even hold meetings outside of working hours until at night or even on holidays. This condition resulted in the occurrence of communication barriers between superiors and subordinates. In an interview, the interviewees said that "Online communication does not allow me to capture the other person's gesture correctly, sometimes I need it to catch moody, my subordinates agree or not, he is comfortable or not with what we convey through face-to-face meetings".

### **Subordinate-Superior Communication**

Face-to-face communication can also minimize misunderstandings, especially in Indonesian people who have a high-level culture, namely a culture that tends to be lacking express themselves in verbal form, but more express themselves in non-verbal. Reading text without the help of facial expressions, gestures, tone of voice, allows communication to be poorly understood. Once again, digital communication is indeed good and strong, but face-to-face communication is still needed (Ganiem & Kurnia, 2019). This then causes communication barriers because the phenomenon without meeting face to face and communicating directly is a new phenomenon in Indonesia. Based on the results of interviews, interviewees said that "During the WFH period, I did a lot of work until late at night, there was no clear working time limit. This reduces the work-life balance." Even in a day, at least carry out 3 meetings.

In fact, on the sidelines of a busy schedule, the interviewees are also required to make a report, but the working hours should be earlier at 07.30 (UTC + 07:00) related to the progress of what will be done today and what has been done on the previous day. Then at 20.00 (UTC + 07:00), a meeting was also held, but it was incidental related to any work that needed confirmation quickly. On another occasion, other interviewees, also said that he was an outspoken person, if he thought it was not following his thoughts, he did not hesitate to say it, even though it had to be conveyed to his superiors. One example, if the meeting schedule does not match working hours, the interviewees will not hesitate to refuse the invitation to the meeting. However, this situation eventually resulted in discomfort and communication barriers between superiors and subordinates. This then resulted in the interviewees getting a mutation letter to be transferred from their current position.

### **Barriers to Communication between Superiors and Subordinates**

When communication in a company takes place, of course, it results in a message flow. In this study, message flow is carried out from superiors to subordinates and from subordinates to superiors. Meanwhile, all of these messages flow occurred at PT Indonesia Comnets Plus (ICON+) which researchers have summarized based on the results of interviews with informants through the following table:

No	Barriers between Superiors and Subordinates	Description
1	Semantics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Subordinates cannot immediately understand the instructions given, resulting in repeated confirmations</li> <li>2. The occurrence of miss interpretation.</li> </ol>
2	Behavior	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Bosses are considered idealistic</li> <li>2. Perfectionist Superiors</li> <li>3. The Superior is a workaholic so he often invites meetings until late at night</li> <li>4. Subordinate is considered slow in doing the given job disposition</li> <li>5. Slow Responses</li> </ol>

3	Structural	1. Seniority in Organization, For example, subordinates are class seniors in university.
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No	Barriers between Subordinates and Superiors	Description
1	Semantics	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Simplification of language and words</li> <li>2. Use of punctuation on Whatsapp chat</li> <li>3. There is no intonation so that it is often misinterpreted</li> <li>4. Missed communication when there is a job disposition from superiors</li> <li>5. Superiors do not provide clear work directions</li> <li>6. Dominate communication so as not to give opportunities to subordinates</li> </ol>
2	Behavior	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Working hours become irregular</li> <li>2. Subordinates feel more experienced in their fields so that they close themselves to superiors who have just joined as leaders in the division</li> <li>3. Subordinates who close themselves because they feel uncomfortable with their superiors</li> <li>4. Subordinates who neglect their duties during Work from Home (WFH)</li> <li>5. Subordinates feel that their superiors do not trust them when carrying out work through Work From Home (WFH)</li> </ol>
4	Structural	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. During Work From Home (WFH), there are still many job transfers</li> <li>2. Minimize communication to superiors because they feel embarrassed or shy</li> <li>3. Subordinates feel lazy to communicate with superiors</li> </ol>

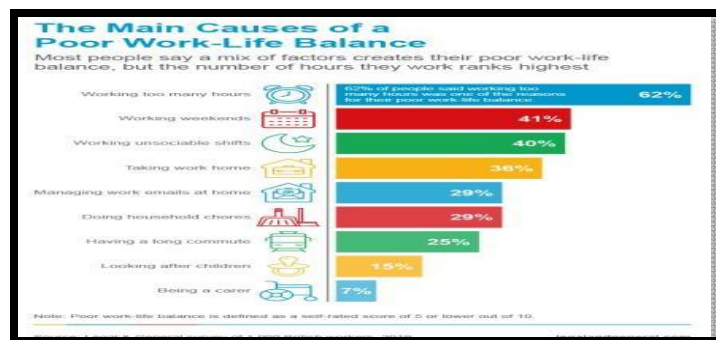
The table above is a category that researchers have successfully summarized from the results of interviews with a map of communication barriers between superiors and subordinates at PT Indonesia Connets Plus. In essence, the communication barriers above are related to how the process of reading the message is conveyed, the mood of the body when carrying out work, feedback, and the most important thing is how feedback occurs and opens discussions between superiors and subordinates. Thus, communication barriers can be minimized. Ideally, superior and subordinate communication does not only contain job information but also contains the formation of a good relationship building relationship. So that good social relations will be created which is one of the important aspects in determining the success of a communication (Haryati, 2020)

## DISCUSSION

In this study, it is not only discussed how the communication barriers that occur in a company during Work From Home (WFH), but furthermore, observations from interviews with informants also found the impact of Work From Home (WFH) on individual physiological conditions during a pandemic Covid-19 is important because it is expected to provide knowledge and scientific references about the impact of WFH. In 2019, Legal & General conducted a survey of 1000 employees from the UK regarding work-life balance. The survey results reveal that several factors affect a person's low level of work-life balance, including working longer hours than they should, working even on holidays, and working at night. Research from Bouziri et al., (2020) showed risk associated with transportation, risk associated with home working environment, psychosocial risk and behavioural risk during the working from home

in the time of Covid-19 and how to best preserve occupational health. The other research also similar to what has been summarized from the results of interviews with informants (Sakitri, 2020; Esra, 2020).

Following the results of the research above, PT Indonesia Comnets Plus also feels the same phenomenon. It is not only related to working time, ironically what is currently happening is that employees tend to experience a significant workload regardless of working hours. This phenomenon is also a dilemma, especially for employees who are married, because they also have to carry out their responsibilities at home and the most important thing is not to bring the tired condition of the body to work into the family. Such pressure eventually has the potential to encourage employees to feel tension, stress, as a way of adjusting to sudden environmental pressures. As an addition to this research, the good news we can learn from Aczel et al., (2021) to 704 academics found that work from home during pandemic decreased the work efficiency for some respondent, but around quarter of them were more efficient during this time compared to the time before. Around 70% of them think that in the future WFH will be more efficient because they are better at working on their manuscript, reading the literature and analyzing their data. Learning from this research, perhaps, some parts WFH may be beneficial even for companies for that it is important to learn more what is influencers factors and tactics to optimalize its conditions. Besides, the future policy decisions may shape a vital role for both employers and employee especially to respond a transitory element responding to the exceptional circumstances or for the permanent arrangement (Carinal-Go et al., 2021).



## V. CONCLUSION

In the end, the implementation of work from home has a varied impact on each company and employee, A number of basic strategies should be implemented by each company and employee in order to achieve a work life balance (Sakitri, 2020). In this study, the implementation of communication at PT Indonesia Comnets Plus (ICON+) is examined through two channels, namely reciprocal communication between superiors and subordinates with communication methods without face to face and dominantly using Whatsapp, email, teams, and zoom. The difference in perception between superiors and subordinates is usually caused by perceptual distortion, namely differences in perspective and way of thinking between communicators and communicants during the communication process.

Communication barriers that occur between superiors and subordinates at ICON+ include semantic disorders, structural disorders, and behavioral disorders. The study findings say that the biggest obstacle experienced by superiors and subordinates at ICON+ is the way of thinking, namely the difference in perception when the communication process occurs between superiors and subordinates. The overall communication barrier is more often experienced by subordinates than superiors. The results of this study indicate the occurrence of communication barriers where this condition begins with high pressure, longer working hours while working from home, resulting in psychological pressure, and ultimately communication barriers. Sometimes what often happens is, if the recipient of the message is

not in the mood, the message cannot be received properly, in this case even a good message can be interpreted as bad. Apart from that, if superiors or subordinates are unable to judge subjectively, then the message given cannot be conveyed properly. With good time management, employees will find it easier to find a balance between work and life (Elizabeth, 2020).

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