

Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff During the
COVID-19 Pandemic: A Case Study of the Faculty of
Social Sciences, Naresuan University, Thailand
การปรับตัวในการทำงานของเจ้าหน้าที่สายสนับสนุน
ในช่วงการแพร่ระบาดของไวรัสโควิด-19:
กรณีศึกษา คณะสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนเรศวร
ประเทศไทย

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Abstract

This article aims to 1) study the work adaptation of supporting staff during the COVID-19 pandemic and 2) analyze problems and offer suggestions for supporting staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. The case study approach applied in this qualitative research engaged eighteen key informants selected through purposive sampling, consisting of supporting staff from the seven divisions of the Faculty of Social Sciences. This study used an interview guideline with participant observation techniques for data collection and the

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content analysis method for the data analysis. The findings revealed five (5) work adaptation dimensions of supporting staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. These are: 1) contact and communication, 2) document management, 3) organizing meetings, 4) obeying COVID-19 prevention measures, and 5) following the COVID-19 news and information. The supporting staff has adapted methods, created tools, and provided new equipment to operate their work during the pandemic. Problems of work adaptation vary accordingly in different functions of each division, such as lack of technological skills of supporting staff, limitation of phone calls' explanation in complicated tasks, not using all functions of the NU e-doc system, lagging internet speed, and weak computer performance, and confusion or unclear COVID-19 prevention measures of the faculty. The findings from this study may offer valuable insights to executive leaders, informing them of their plans and measures for addressing future disasters or crises, including the support and well-being of staff.

Keywords: COVID-19 Prevention Measures, Pandemic, Supporting Staff, Work Adaptation

บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้มีวัตถุประสงค์เพื่อ 1) ศึกษาการปรับตัวในการทำงานของบุคลากรสายสนับสนุนในช่วงการแพร่ระบาดของไวรัสโควิด-19 และ 2) วิเคราะห์ปัญหาและเสนอข้อเสนอนี้สำหรับบุคลากรสายสนับสนุนในช่วงการแพร่ระบาดของไวรัสโควิด-19 วิธีการวิจัยเชิงคุณภาพแบบกรณีศึกษาถูกนำมาประยุกต์ใช้ในการศึกษา ผู้ให้ข้อมูลสำคัญเป็นเจ้าหน้าที่สายสนับสนุน ได้มาจากการสุ่มตัวอย่างแบบเจาะจงให้ครอบคลุมกับทุกแผนกในคณะสังคมศาสตร์ มหาวิทยาลัยนครสวรรค์ รวม 18 คน การศึกษาครั้งนี้ใช้แนวทางการสัมภาษณ์และการใช้เทคนิคการสังเกตแบบไม่มีส่วนร่วมในการรวบรวมข้อมูล สำหรับการวิเคราะห์

ข้อมูลใช้วิธีการวิเคราะห์เนื้อหา ผลการศึกษาพบว่า การปรับตัวในการทำงานของบุคลากรสายสนับสนุนในช่วงการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด-19 ประกอบไปด้วย 5 ด้าน ได้แก่ 1) การติดต่อและสื่อสาร 2) การจัดการเอกสาร 3) การจัดการประชุม 4) การปฏิบัติตามมาตรการป้องกันการแพร่ระบาดของโควิด-19 และ 5) การติดตามข่าวสารและข้อมูลโควิด-19 นอกจากนี้ เจ้าหน้าที่สายสนับสนุนยังได้ปรับเปลี่ยนวิธีการ สร้างเครื่องมือ และจัดหาอุปกรณ์ใหม่เพื่อใช้ดำเนินงานในช่วงการแพร่ระบาด สำหรับการวิเคราะห์ปัญหาการปรับตัวในการทำงานพบว่า ปัญหามีความแตกต่างกันไปตามบทบาทหน้าที่แต่ละฝ่าย เช่น การขาดทักษะทางเทคโนโลยีของพนักงานสายสนับสนุน ข้อจำกัดในการปฏิบัติงานที่มีความซับซ้อนผ่านทางโทรศัพท์ การใช้ฟังก์ชันต่างๆ ของระบบ NU e-doc ไม่ครบถ้วน สัญญาณอินเทอร์เน็ตที่ล่าช้า และเครื่องคอมพิวเตอร์ขาดประสิทธิภาพ และความไม่ชัดเจนของมาตรการป้องกันการแพร่ระบาดของไวรัส COVID-19 ข้อค้นพบในครั้งนี้ได้ให้ข้อมูลที่มีคุณค่าแก่ผู้บริหาร ซึ่งสามารถนำไปใช้วางแผนและกำหนดมาตรการรับมือกับภัยพิบัติหรือวิกฤตการณ์ในอนาคต รวมถึงการดูแลและสนับสนุนความเป็นอยู่ของบุคลากร

คำสำคัญ: มาตรการป้องกันโควิด-19, การแพร่ระบาด, เจ้าหน้าที่สายสนับสนุน, การปรับตัวในการทำงาน

1. Introduction

In Thailand, the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected people's health and socioeconomics. The outbreak began in January 2020 and was reported by the Department of Disease Control, Ministry of Public Health, announcing a new strain of virus transmitted from person to person, causing respiratory illnesses like flu. Complications in some patients with severe symptoms lead to serious illnesses such as pneumonia, kidney failure, and even death (Department of Disease Control, 2022). On November 6, 2022, the Department of Disease Control reported that the number of people infected with COVID-19 accumulated at 2,458,697 hospital admissions and

11,297 deaths. In addition, the health crisis also hurt Thailand's economy, with the GDP decreasing to -5% in 2020. The pandemic affected the employment of more than 8 million workers (Office of the National Economic and Social Development Council, 2020), especially and most severely affected were the workers in the tourism and service sectors with city lockdowns and stern measures limiting business service hours (Nasueb, 2021).

The government issued laws, regulations, and measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19. On March 12, 2020, the Thai government established the Centre for the Administration of the Situation due to the outbreak of the Communicable Disease Coronavirus 2019 (CCSA). On March 25, 2020, the government announced the nationwide Declaration of an Emergency Situation, effective the next day, March 26, 2020, which prohibits people from 1) leaving the house at night and 2) assembly, 3) disseminating fake and distorting news, 4) going outside to public places, and 5) the transfer of people from the disease affected area to a safe area.

As COVID-19 prevention measures inevitably affect organizations and institutions in all sectors, they must change or adapt their working style, including the ways of the old to a new way of life (New Normal) (Office of the Prime Minister, 2020) In educational institutions, the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research, and Innovation issued announcements and measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (Version 3) on March 17, 2020. This issue requests that higher education institutions consider and follow its efforts to 1) change or adjust educational management online, 2) cancel all types of internship or cooperative activities, and 3) adjust the format of the examination and evaluation to an online format.

On April 7, 2020, Naresuan University announced enhanced surveillance measures for COVID-19, requesting cooperation from staff and students to directly monitor and acknowledge COVID-19 information from the University's

COVID-19 Center. On April 30, 2022, the university assigned all faculties to organize the learning process online. It allowed all officers to work from home (WFH) if it did not negatively affect their work activity and output (Naresuan University, 2020a; Naresuan University, 2020b). The Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) issued measures to prevent COVID-19 following the statement from Naresuan University. The FSS dean mandated the temporary closure of the office, directing the supporting staff and teachers to work from home (WFH), teaching, meeting, and working online while allowing staff to sign in for work through an online platform. Additionally, staff traveling back to Phitsanulok provinces must follow the Department of Disease Control measures. The COVID-19 pandemic prevention measures called D-M-H-T-T, the acronym for; 1) Social Distancing (D) - maintaining a distance between people of 1-2 meters apart and avoiding being in crowded places, 2) Mask Wearing (M) - wearing a mask or hygienic mask all the time, 3) Hand Washing (H) - washing hands often with soap and water or alcohol gel, 4) Testing (T) - temperature measurement and test for COVID-19 through the Antigen Test Kit (ATK) whenever symptoms related to COVID-19 happen, and 5) Thai Cha Na (T) - recording a compulsory registration through the Thai Cha Na online program when entering and exiting public (Department of Health, 2020; Faculty of Social Sciences Naresuan University, 2020).

As mentioned above, the measures to prevent the spread of COVID-19 at the Faculty of Social Sciences have certainly affected the work practice of supporting staff. Hence, a study on the work adaptation of support staff during the COVID-19 pandemic is paramount, especially as the results of this study will contribute and add value to the applied knowledge of executives for administration and work plans, especially in emergencies and crises.

2. Research Objectives

1. To study the work adaptation of supporting staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Faculty of Social Sciences at Naresuan University, Thailand
2. To analyze the problems faced by supporting staff and provide suggestions for improving their work adaptation during pandemics, the Faculty of Social Sciences at Naresuan University, Thailand.

3. Literature Review

The term “adaptation” has several related meanings. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2024), adaptation is “the process of changing to suit different conditions.” The key facets of adaptation include biological adaptation, psychological/social adaptation, technological/design adaptation, and adaptation in the arts.

Social adaptation refers to how an individual or group modifies their behavior, thoughts, and emotions to conform to a particular social setting or community’s norms, values, and expectations. Factors such as religiosity and self-esteem can promote higher levels of social adaptation, particularly in vulnerable or challenging contexts (Neely-Prado et al., 2021). The degree of social adaptability also determines an individual’s active engagement and acceptance within a social system (Terziev, 2019).

Previous research highlights that social adaptation involves individuals adjusting psychologically, behaviorally, and socially to integrate into their surrounding community and culture. It encompasses moral, political, legal, socio-psychological, economic, and professional dimensions. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have adapted in the following key ways:

1. Enabling remote work capabilities and digital collaboration tools to allow employees to work from home, including investing in necessary technological infrastructure and training (Buzás & Faragó, 2023; Singh, 2023).
2. Adopting new digital technologies such as online learning platforms, virtual events, and automation tools, as the pandemic forced many organizations to quickly integrate these into their operations (Singh, 2023).
3. Redesigning physical workspaces to enable social distancing, such as creating smaller work bubbles and shifting to more distributed models (Vowels, 2022).
4. Providing strong social support and understanding for employees facing disruption to their work and personal lives, to maintain morale, productivity, and a sense of community (Buzás & Faragó, 2023).
5. Promoting a culture of continuous learning and enthusiasm for change by encouraging blame-free sharing of lessons, improving access to learning resources, and incentivizing mentoring (Razmerita et al., 2021).

These findings highlight that successful organizational adaptation during the pandemic required a combination of flexible processes, adaptive planning, a learning-oriented culture, and operational changes to meet evolving challenges. The ability to quickly pivot, reprioritize, and evolve has been crucial for organizations to survive and thrive amidst the disruption. Researchers will apply this knowledge as a framework to study the work adaptation of supporting staff during the COVID-19 pandemic in the Faculty of Social Sciences at Naresuan University, Thailand.

4. Research Methodology

This qualitative research study employed a case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the essence of people's experiences by interpreting and creating meaning from their shared and individual accounts

(Creswell, 2013). The characteristics of the case study methodology are well-suited for examining specific areas, events, or situations on campus that warrant close investigation by a researcher (Hancock & Algozzine, 2011). As explained, the case study approach aligns well with the study of work adaptation among supporting staff during the COVID-19 pandemic. The details of the methodological design are as follows:

4.1 Key Informants: The data collection utilized the purposeful sampling method to select key informants (KI), which cover gender, position, function, work experience, and infection with COVID-19. Respondents for this research were eighteen individuals from seven groups: 1) three from the administration division, 2) three from the finance and procurement division, 3) three from the policy and planning division, 4) two from the educational service division, 5) two from the student and alumni relations division, 6) two from the research and academic service division, and 7) three from the department office.

4.2 Research Tool: This research employed the interview guidelines with four open-ended questions, which allowed the KIs to answer voluntarily: 1) How was your work during the COVID-19 pandemic, and was it different from before the COVID-19 outbreak? Why or how? 2) What did you change or adapt regarding the method, technique, tools, and equipment used for work during the COVID-19 pandemic, or none? How? 3) Did you encounter difficulties or problems at work during the COVID-19 pandemic? How? 4) Do you have any suggestions for improving your work or office if a similar emergency situation occurs?

4.3 Data Collection: The data collection utilized in this study is the semi-structured interviews with non-participants, including participant observation, to ensure a spontaneous understanding of the complex behaviors of members of society (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The interviews took

approximately 45 to 60 minutes per KI from January to February 2023. The semi-structured interviews began upon meeting the KI as scheduled. Rapport building began with greetings and informing the KI about the research objectives. The researcher applied the WH questions: what, where, when, why, and how to obtain holistic and in-depth information. During the interview, the researcher also observed and noted the KI's activities related to the questions for consistency, for example, work-from-home (WFH) practices, chatting and sending data via mobile devices or computers, using digital signatures, participating in online meetings, and wearing masks, among other adaptations.

4.4 Data Analysis: This research utilized the content analysis method. Each day, after interviewing the key informants, the researcher validated the interview data concurrently with observation. After transcribing the audio recordings, three steps of data analysis commenced: the researcher first reads the text and highlights key texts; secondly, reads the highlighted text again thoughtfully, selects and puts them in the 3-way tables; thirdly, analytically reads key texts in the table to conceptualize conclusions by comparing the method, tools, equipment adapting or changes of work practice before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

5. Research Results

The results of this research consisted of 3 parts: 1) structure, roles, and function; 2) work adaptation of supporting staff; and 3) problems, limitations, and suggestions. Below are details of the findings.

5.1 Structure, Role, and Function

Naresuan University re-established the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) in October 2003, separating it from the Faculty of Humanities. The FSS has been developing potential graduates and strengthening academic research to reach its goal of being an excellent center of social studies. The faculty incorporates four (4) academic departments, two (2) ASEAN Excellence community centers, and the office of the secretariat (Figure 1).

The Faculty of Social Sciences operates three major bachelor's degrees: 1) Bachelor of Political Science program in Political Science, 2) Bachelor of Science program in Psychology, and 3) Bachelor of Arts program in History and Social Development. It also offers two master's degrees: 1) Master of Arts program in Social Development and Southeast Asian Studies and 2) Master of Political Science program in Political Science. Moreover, The FSS has a Doctoral degree program in Social Development and Southeast Asian Studies (Figure 1).

Under the Head of the Supporting Office, six (6) divisions work collaboratively to support and service all academic departments and centers, facilitating effective learning processes and activities. In addition, every division supports educational services for teachers, such as teaching materials, document management, and communication between organizations, including student library services (Figure 1). All divisions also support professors' research activities, such as managing budgets for research projects, ethics, and other requests (Faculty of Social Sciences, 2022).

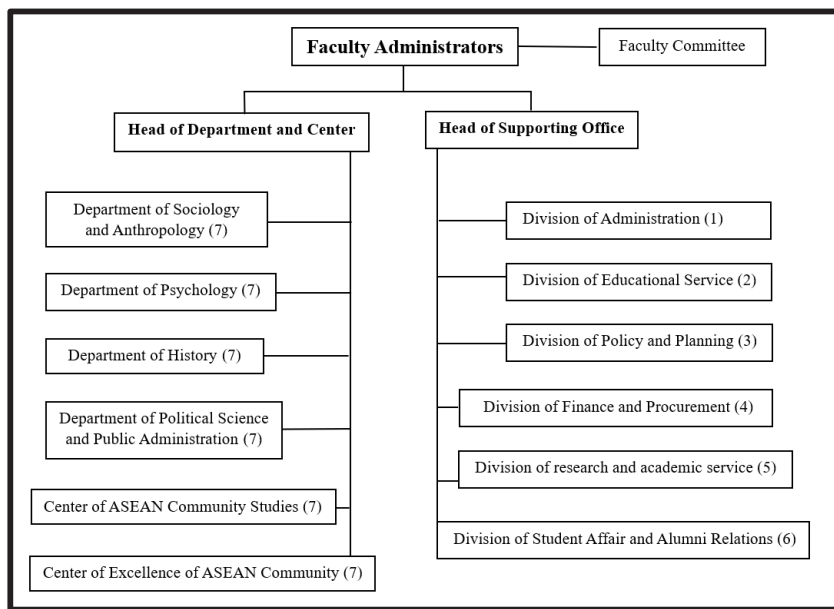


Figure 1 Organizational Structure of the Faculty of Social Sciences

5.2 Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff

The findings indicated five (5) dimensions of supporting staff work adaptation. These are 1) contact and communication, 2) document management, 3) organizing meetings, 4) obeying COVID-19 prevention measures, and 5) following the news, updates, and relevant information about COVID-19.

5.2.1 Contact and Communication

In terms of the communication adaptation dimension during the COVID-19 epidemic, this study revealed that the supporting staff adapted to various issues in communication methods and created work tools. All departments have adjusted similarly in terms of increased phone calls and correspondence in online communication programs, such as LINE, Facebook, and other messaging platforms; previously, the method mainly used was

direct and personal contact in the office. In addition, almost every division set up a box, a center point for receiving and sending documents in front of their office. This method streamlines exchanging documents without directly meeting each other. Setting up a center box enables each division to seamlessly exchange documents, such as financial documents and supplies, NU request forms, and other related documents. Moreover, the administrative division saw a decline in the frequency of document deliveries between internal organizations from the original five to three times a week (Table 1).

In addition, some divisions responsible for monitoring the work of supporting staff or providing services to students developed a new communication tool to operate their work smoothly and successfully. For example, the administrative division created an online work performance report via Google Forms during work-from-home. After time out, all staff must complete the Google form to report their work progress and work produced, including day-to-day work problems. Also, in the student affairs and alumni relations division, staff created an online booking form for students to fill out and make reservations for the student club room by submitting their names, dates, duration, and the purpose of using the room (Table 1).

5.2.2 Document Management

Work adaptation results in document management found that the supporting staff adapted to two main issues: 1) adjusting methods for storing files and disbursement and 2) creating a service and online form. All departments have increasingly adapted the method of storing documents into digital file formats using a scanner to save the document as a PDF file. The hard copy format was the standard storage before the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, signing online documents became more frequent,

increasing the use of the NU e-doc system for sending and receiving documents, a rare practice before the pandemic. Also, the acceptance of online money transfer slips instead of using formal receipts in the disbursement of remuneration for keynote speakers, which they must fill in and sign manually in the office (Table 1). The female support staff said, ***“...if an online project is organized, off-campus teachers can be compensated through money transfers. The online money transfer slips can serve as evidence of disbursement. However, approval from the dean is required to proceed with this approach...”***

Creating services and online forms involves the administration and the educational services divisions. First, the administration division creates the e-Form Send & Track online system for students to submit NU documents online, such as NU6 (course add-withdrawal form) and NU18 (general request form). Second, the administration division arranges a van service to receive and send documents for executives to sign thrice weekly while in quarantine due to COVID-19 infection (Table 1).

5.2.3 Organizing Meetings

This study revealed that supporting staff in all divisions had changed the meeting method to a hybrid model, including online and onsite; before the COVID-19 outbreak, meetings were in the onsite format only. Online meetings use MS Teams, allowing attendees to meet from home and talk face-to-face via their computers, including sharing files. Additionally, digital files replaced hard copies when preparing meeting documents. Sending digital files via email or online is more straightforward, as it involves scanning physical documents rather than delivering each copy to every meeting participant. The digital meeting files are also friendly for attendees to open through their mobile phones or computers, especially those with tablets and laptops, saving printing expenses.

5.2.4 Obeying the COVID-19 Prevention Measures

During the COVID-19 epidemic, all departments had to heed the disease control measures of the CCSA. This meant that during the severe outbreak, all sectors must work from home (WFH) until the severity of the situation subsided. Subsequently, the faculty allowed the staff rotation of each division to do onsite work. Staff working onsite must heed the following COVID-19 prevention measures of the faculty: 1) ATK testing every Monday, 2) temperature measurement before entering the building, 3) filling out the COVID-19 screening form, and 4) wearing a mask (Table 1).

A female administrative division staff member said, *“...the dean has tasked her with organizing the support staff to operate within the faculty. At least one person must cover each role onsite, while the remaining employees are permitted to work remotely from home, thereby eliminating the need for them to commute to the office...”*

In addition, the division of finance and supplies distributed masks, alcohol gels, and air purifiers for staff who work in rooms with poor ventilation to support the mandate for COVID-19 prevention. The department office also distributed masks to students during the market shortage, especially during examinations. The administrative division carries out a disinfectant spray in risky areas in the building whenever there is a COVID-19 infection among its personnel. Additionally, they created a COVID-19 screening form for outsourced technicians to fill in before entering the faculty. The library staff also adjusted their services to reduce social interaction and prevent the COVID-19 outbreak by limiting service users, extending the borrow-return period, and providing service via the post office. Moreover, the student affairs division has changed the format of organizing students' projects and activities to a fully online format. In sum, the work adaptation of supporting staff in

observing the COVID-19 prevention measures varies according to the roles and functions of each division (Table 1).

A male staff member from the finance division said, “...*the dean instructed him to quickly procure masks and alcohol to distribute to all faculty members. Although this was highly unusual at the time, the request was made...*”

5.2.5 Following the news, updates, and information about COVID-19

The staff across all divisions actively monitor daily COVID-19 news, obtain infection statistics, practice self-care, and follow disease prevention measures from the CCSA. They primarily access COVID-19 information from online sources such as the Ministry of Public Health’s Facebook page, LINE updates, and news websites. This reflects a shift from their pre-pandemic media consumption habits.

Moreover, staff exchange information on COVID-19 prevention, vaccination services, and the 50-50 co-payment scheme. The administrative division circulates provincial announcements on COVID-19 prevention measures to the faculty staff. Additionally, the division of educational services and the department office provide the latest COVID-19 announcements from NU and measures for managing the learning process for staff, lecturers, and students.

Table 1 Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic

| Dimensions | Division | Work Practice Before COVID-19 Pandemic | Work Practice During COVID-19 Pandemic |
|---------------------------|-------------------|---|--|
| Contact and communication | 1+2+3+ 4+5+6+7 | - Contacting the office directly and occasional phone and online calls | - Reduced direct contacts but increased phone and online calls more frequently |
| | 1 | - Sending and receiving documents between organizations five (5) times per week | - Reduced sending and receiving documents between organizations three (3) times per week |
| | 1+2+7 | - Receiving and sending financial documents directly to the office desk | - Provided a box for receiving and sending documents in front of the department |
| | 1 | None | - Additional daily reporting of work performance via Google Forms |
| | 2 | - Paying for thesis examination fee at the NU Finance Division | - Paying for thesis examination fee at the FSS |
| | 5 | None | - Created an online system for booking student club rooms |

Table 1 Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Cont.)

| Dimensions | Division | Work Practice Before COVID-19 Pandemic | Work Practice During COVID-19 Pandemic |
|---------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| Document management | 1+2+3+ 4+5+6+7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Storing hardcopy documents and digital files - Manual signing of documents for approval of projects and sending them back using the NU e-doc system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased storing of documents in digital files - Accepting digital signatures for approval of projects and sending them back using the NU e-doc system |
| | 1 | None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arranging van services for receiving and sending documents for executives to sign |
| | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using physical receipts for keynote speakers' remuneration | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilizing online slips for money transfers and disbursements |
| | 4 | None | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creating an e-Form Send & Track online system for students submitting NU documents |
| Organizing meetings | 1+2+3+ 4+5+6+7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conducting regular onsite meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adjusted to hybrid mode, online and onsite meetings |
| | 1+4+7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Printing hard copy documents for meetings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Utilizing digital files for meetings |

Table 1 Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Cont.)

| Dimensions | Division | Work Practice Before COVID-19 Pandemic | Work Practice During COVID-19 Pandemic |
|--|-------------------|--|--|
| Obeying the COVID-19 prevention measures | 1+2+3+ 4+5+6+7 | - Reporting regularly at the office | - Allowed staff to work from home (WFH) - Rotating staff of each division for onsite duties - *Obeying the faculty's COVID-19 prevention measures |
| | 1 | None | - Filling up permission forms and approval for outsiders before entering the building - Spraying of disinfectants in risk areas from infected COVID-19 individuals - Created a COVID-19 prevention measures chart for the public |
| | 2 | None | - Provided materials and equipment for measuring and screening COVID-19 - Provided air purifiers for rooms with poor ventilation |
| | 2+7 | None | - Subsidized masks for staff and students of the FSS |

Table 1 Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic (Cont.)

| Dimensions | Division | Work Practice Before COVID-19 Pandemic | Work Practice During COVID-19 Pandemic |
|---|---------------|--|--|
| Following the news, updates, and information about COVID-19 | 3 | - Regular library services without user restrictions and duration of borrowing and returning books | - Adjusted regulations such as limiting the number of users in the library, extending the duration of borrowing books, and utilizing post office services |
| | 5 | - Organizing onsite student activities at the faculty | - Changed onsite student activities to online arrangements |
| | 1+2+3+4+5+6+7 | - Watching the news and regular TV programs | - Following news about COVID-19 from TV and online media every day - Phone calls to family, relatives, and friends to share news about COVID-19 almost every day. - Monitoring announcements about COVID-19 from national, provincial, and local governments, NU, the FSS, and local communities |
| | 4+7 | None | - Circulating NU's COVID-19 announcements to teachers and students |
| | | | |

*1) ATK Testing Every Monday, 2) Measuring Temperature, 3) Filling Out the COVID-19 Screening Form, and 4) Mask Wearing

Note. by analysis of the researchers, 2023

5.3 Problems, limitations, and Suggestions

The findings revealed the varying problems encountered by the supporting staff and their suggestion specific to their functions from different divisions and classified into five (5) dimensions: 1) contact and communication, 2) document management, 3) organizing the meetings, 4) observing the COVID-19 prevention measures, and 5) closely following up with updates news, and information about COVID-19.

5.3.1 Contact and Communication

Telephone communication was essential during the pandemic but insufficient to explain complex instructions for complete understanding, requiring more discussion, time, and demonstration. The financial division confronts these problems in clearing receipts, such as in research and student project activities. In the academic service division, the staff faces challenging conditions in explaining the application of research ethics in the humanities and the steps to use budgets in research projects.

A male staff from the department office stated that ***“...explaining financial documents over the phone is more challenging compared to face-to-face communication, as the lack of visual cues makes it less clear and direct...”*** The staff suggests providing a manual or flow chart to illustrate when communicating for better understanding, especially on the phone. In addition, during WFH, teachers and students contact staff outside office hours, which affects the staff's rest and personal time. Frequent telephone and online calls happen, so the staff ensures they take them immediately by constantly checking or putting their phones nearby to take calls immediately. Delays in receiving phone calls appear irresponsible, making them feel stressed and pressured. The staff asks for cooperation from the lecturers and students to contact them only during office hours, except for emergencies. Also, the administrative division mentions that low-speed

internet affects the quality of communication. Therefore, the faculty should support the cost of internet speed of at least 10 Mbps for smoother and more effective communication (Table 2).

5.3.2 Document Management

While staff utilizes the NU e-doc system, they do not use all its functions. These problems are similar in the administrative, student affairs, and alumni relations divisions. The faculty should exemplify the benefits of this system and encourage its use. Hence, it is vital to incorporate skills training and knowledge to operate in these programs. The educational services division and the department office found problems with students using the e-Form Send & Track system. The NU documents they upload to the system are either incomplete, incorrect in format, or illegible because of blurry texts and small letters. The manual for NU documents may rectify this problem by stipulating what constitutes a valid document and showing an example. In addition, the department office noted the need for more information in the LINE group (e-Form Socsci) automatic notification and alert messages. The alert message must include the student's course level, which helps inform the direct staff responsible for that specific request, thus wasting everyone's time checking it. Resolving this matter involves the IT staff adding the level of the student's curriculum to the alert messages in the LINE group (Table 2).

Since COVID-19-infected personnel risk colleagues and must undergo quarantine, it interrupts and affects the timely clearing of finances and document processing, especially in the finance and supplies division. Therefore, a more agile staff to work and cover infected personnel is paramount in planning and scheduling. The policy and planning division encountered challenges while working from home (WFH) due to the unavailability of office documents. Furthermore, the administration must

completely and adequately inform teachers and staff about rules, regulations, and work plans to ensure everything is clear. To address this issue, digitizing document storage using a secure online cloud storage server is crucial. The department office personnel need help locating files saved on their computers. The faculty can alleviate this through personnel training on the principles of systematic file management and skills for digital storage filing (Table 2).

5.3.3 Organizing the Meetings

Problems in organizing meetings come from the two (2) divisions, the finance and procurement division and the department office. Firstly, the financial staff noted that online meetings frequently take longer, impacting work. They suggested that only crucial issues require the conduct of meetings; otherwise, circulating updates to members via NU mail or online chat application is sufficient. Secondly, problems related to using meeting applications are the main concerns of the department office. They recognize their inadequate skills and knowledge in using MS Teams or Zoom meeting programs, such as opening and closing microphones, sharing files, creating meeting rooms, and other technical difficulties. Conducting training programs on how to use MS Teams and Zoom for lecturers and staff facilitating the meeting ensures more efficient online meetings. In addition, supporting staff must prepare hard and soft copies of the meeting files. Encouraging and supporting digital proficiency in its workforce means cutting the time for staff to prepare hard copies in every meeting.

A female staff member from the department stated, *“...while working from home, we seem to have an excessive number of meetings that impede our ability to actually get work done. For instance, today, I had so many meetings scheduled throughout the day that I could not make meaningful progress on my tasks...”*

5.3.4 Obeying the COVID-19 Prevention Measures

The work problems in observing COVID-19 prevention measures come from the two (2) divisions, the administration and finance and procurement divisions. The staff in the first division face two (2) main issues that is 1) lack of staff in running work because there are no specific quarantine criteria, and 2) difficulty in the work process plan because they do not know the exact date to approve the request form to entering office, therefore they cannot pass the job through the other staff involved in the job. To solve these problems, the supporting staff recommends setting up the quarantine duration criteria clearly for those infected with COVID-19; if any staff members are at high risk, they should be allowed to WFM 100%. The faculty should also set an exact date for approving the request form to enter the office; this helps the administration staff perform their work smoothly and efficiently.

Secondly, the finance and procurement division's problem with long delays in repairing broken and damaged equipment is due to the unclear date for approving the request form to enter the office. This problem had a ripple effect on the administration division. The finance division relies on the document received from the administration division to process and proceed further. Therefore, the faculty should set an exact date for the approval of the request forms for office entry. It benefits the outsourced technician by repairing the office's equipment quickly and keeping it in line with demand.

5.3.5 Following the news, updates, and information about COVID-19

The two (2) main problems in this dimension are 1) the health hazard anxieties and 2) the uncertainties concerning the COVID-19 situation. The staff from 4 divisions agree with the first concern. The anxious feeling of not knowing the exact person infected with COVID-19 or at high risk refrains them from touching or using office equipment. In addition, they also share

the concern that upon returning from work, they may be carriers of the virus, which could infect family members. Hence, strict faculty compliance with COVID-19 measures (D-M-H-T-T) while publicizing the laws, rights, and personal data protection secures a safe and peaceful feeling.

The second problem is the uncertainties of the COVID-19 situation; this problem comes from the administration division and the department office. They expressed that these information uncertainties regarding the COVID-19 situation in the faculty affect staff planning and work difficulties, especially in arrangements and communication with colleagues and outsourced service providers. They suggested establishing a COVID-19 information center within the faculty to monitor and publicize information. They also noted that the faculty should provide welfare such as food, drink, and supplements for staff infected and quarantined due to COVID-19 infection.

A female staff member from the finance division said that *“...establishing an emergency management unit for our faculty would be highly beneficial. It could serve as a centralized information hub and a place to support and assist colleagues during times of crisis...”*

Table 2 Problems and Suggestions of Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff During COVID-19 Pandemic

| Dimension | Division | Problems, Limitations | Suggestions |
|---------------------------|----------|---|--|
| Contact and communication | 1 | - Low-speed internet connection, resulting in intermittent and difficult online communication | - Support of internet speed during WFH of at least 10 Mbps |
| | 2+6 | - Inadequacy of phone conversations in communications of complex concerns such as financial, research documents, and other intricate issues | - Aid phone communications with flow charts and other related materials for visual context |
| | 5 | None | - Encourage staff to use free online communication software such as the Discord app |
| | 7 | - Stress and pressure from using the phone and online programs all day, including break time, and personal time | - Request cooperation from teachers and students to contact only during office hours, except for emergencies |
| Document management | 1+5 | - Staff sometimes utilize the NU e-doc system but do not use all its functions | - Provide training and explain the benefits of NU e-docs for staff and encourage them to utilize the system |
| | 2 | - COVID-19 infection of staff interrupts the timely delivery of documents | - Staff agility to work and cover for each other during COVID-19 infection and quarantine |

Table 2 Problems and Suggestions of Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff During COVID-19 Pandemic (Cont.)

| Dimension | Division | Problems, Limitations | Suggestions |
|---------------------|----------|--|--|
| | 3 | - Inability to provide complete information on documents physically stored at the office | - Storing documents in digital files via an online server |
| | 4 | - Uploading incomplete or incorrect format of NU Documents by students to the e-Form Send & Track online plan | - Provide instructions and an example of an acceptable format for NU documents |
| | 7 | - Difficulty searching files on the computer when needed - Lack of information in the automatic notifications alert on the LINE group's e-Form Socsci | - Provide upskill training for digital file management for all staff - Update the alert system for notifications on the LINE group's e-Form Socsci to include the students' curriculum to specify the staff in charge of processing the documents |
| Organizing meetings | 2 | - Frequent online meetings take a long time and impact work progress | - Conduct meetings for crucial issues only; otherwise, utilize online chat applications to circulate regular communications |

Table 2 Problems and Suggestions of Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff During COVID-19 Pandemic (Cont.)

| Dimension | Division | Problems, Limitations | Suggestions |
|---|----------|---|---|
| | 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient skills, knowledge, and training in using MS Teams or Zoom meeting - Preparing both hard and soft copies for meeting files is inefficient and redundant | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Conduct training programs on how to use MS Teams or Zoom meetings efficiently - Support and encourage meeting participants to use digital files |
| Obeying the COVID-19 prevention measures | 1 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Insufficient staff physically working in the office resulted from ambiguous quarantine criteria - Work process plan difficulties resulted from delayed approval of request forms to enter the office | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up the quarantine duration criteria for COVID-19-infected personnel and allow high-risk staff to WFM - Set precise approval date for request forms to enter the office |
| | 2 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Repair of broken equipment takes longer because of delayed approval of request forms to enter the office | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Set up a specific date to approve request forms to enter the office |
| Following the news, updates, and information about COVID-19 | 1+2+4+7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anxious feelings of high-risk infection of COVID-19 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Announce the laws, rights, and personal data security |

Table 2 Problems and Suggestions of Work Adaptation of Supporting Staff During COVID-19 Pandemic (Cont.)

| Dimension | Division | Problems, Limitations | Suggestions |
|-----------|----------|--|---|
| | 2+7 | - Uncertainties of the COVID-19 pandemic situation in the faculty affect personnel work plan | - Establish a faculty COVID-19 information center to monitor and publish necessary and relevant information |
| | 7 | None | - Assistance for COVID-19-infected faculty members such as food, drink, and supplement |

Note. by analysis of the researchers, 2023

6. Conclusion and Discussion

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, the measures implemented to curb its spread brought about significant disruptions in the operations of educational institutions, with the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) being no exception. Swift and effective adaptation became imperative, particularly for support staff services. This qualitative research seeks to shed light on two primary objectives: firstly, to delve into the adaptive employed by support staff during the COVID-19 pandemic, and secondly, to critically examine the challenges and constraints encountered during this process, offering insightful recommendations for potential future crises. This study has unveiled five key dimensions of work adaptation among support staff during the COVID-19 pandemic: 1) contact and communication, 2) document management, 3) organizing meetings, 4) adherence to COVID-19 prevention measures, and 5) staying updated on COVID-19 news and information. Confronting the

challenges posed by the pandemic compelled support staff to embrace novel methods, tools, and equipment to fulfill their roles effectively. Notably, the Faculty of Social Sciences' approach to work adaptation has reduced the risk of COVID-19 transmission among staff and contributed to attaining the organization's objectives. This alignment with Bouquet's (2002) concept of adaptation underscores the vital interplay between an entity's internal and external environments, promoting evolution and survival within a specific ecosystem.

Implementing work-from-home (WFH) arrangements and utilizing online meetings have proven successful strategies in protecting support staff from potential COVID-19 exposure. A similar approach has occurred in a Polish university, where they have harnessed online teaching and conferences for educational management. However, it is worth noting that they have encountered specific technological challenges affecting professional learning, including audio quality and internet connectivity issues during classroom sessions (Smith, Ralston, Merk, & Waggoner, 2022). In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, organizations have rapidly adopted and integrated online learning platforms, virtual events, and automation tools into their operations (Singh, 2023). This technological adaptation has enabled organizations to continue functioning effectively despite the disruptions caused by the crisis. Students and teachers must adapt to online teaching and learning to prevent the spread of the Coronavirus. This will ensure the continuity of the course without any interruptions in teaching and learning management (Mathurad, 2021). Online meetings have distinct advantages over in-person meetings due to their integrated chat features and camera capabilities.

Additionally, they provide a unique opportunity for staff to gain insights into their colleagues' personal lives within their home environments (Karl, Peluchette, & Aghakhani, 2022). The adaptation witnessed here aligns with the trends in the industrial-organizational sector in Bangkok, Thailand's capital city. Organizations have made substantial investments in information technology, with up to 30 percent augmentation in their procurement during the COVID-19 pandemic (Noonin, 2021). Furthermore, within the household context, there has been a 30.57 percent increase in the utilization of social media platforms like Facebook and Line, among others, to strengthen familial relationships (Ussasarn, 2023).

The FSS has given top priority to safeguarding the health of its staff against COVID-19 infection during work implementation, which includes allowing employees to work from home (WFH) and adhering to DMHTT measures: Distancing, Mask wearing, Hand washing, Testing, and Thai Cha Na. These actions align with the Faculty of Social Sciences' commitment to complying with the university's COVID-19 guidelines and the Centre for the Administration of the Situation due to the outbreak of the Communicable Disease Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19). Furthermore, providing COVID-19 protective equipment for staff, including alcohol gel, ATK test kits, masks, and other protective supplies, demonstrates the administrative leaders' dedication to the health and well-being of faculty personnel. These practices are consistent with McDonald's corporate behavior during the COVID-19 outbreak, emphasizing social distancing and cleanliness in stores using temporary plastic protection shields on counters, frequent cleaning of high-touched surfaces and high-traffic areas, and the installation of hand sanitizer stations in the kitchen, dining area, restrooms, and other frequently visited zones (Martina, Palos, Putri, & Kamilah, 2023). The Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) has demonstrated strong social support and understanding

for employees facing workplace and personal disruptions due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This is consistent with Buzás and Faragó's 2023 study, which emphasized the importance of providing robust social support, maintaining morale and productivity, and fostering a sense of community during times of upheaval.

The development of information technology plays a pivotal role in supporting staff adaptability. Four areas primarily rely on information technology when examining the five dimensions of work adaptation. These include using e-Form Send & Track and NU e-doc for document communication and management, utilizing MS Teams for online meetings, and adopting various technological tools. These tools mirror the IT system's development aimed at addressing the challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak. The two factors contributing to the Faculty of Social Sciences' capacity to develop an IT system are 1) the provision of an IT system to all employees, which undergoes upgrades every 4-5 years, and 2) the IT staff with extensive knowledge and expertise, holding bachelor's degrees in IT and over a decade of accumulated experience. Nevertheless, this study finds that many staff encounter difficulties installing and operating MS Teams for online meetings. At the same time, students face challenges with the e-Form Send & Track service. These findings will guide the Faculty of Social Sciences in enhancing the staff and students' IT knowledge and skills, specifically through online application training, to improve their work and study efficiency and effectiveness.

Upgrading IT systems involves intricate processes leading to diminished performance of previous IT equipment and slow internet connectivity. This underperformance poses a significant challenge when adapting to work due to insufficient budget allocation for IT system upgrades. According to the budget disbursement regulations of the bureaucratic system, the Faculty

of Social Sciences must devise a budget plan one fiscal year in advance, which is subject to approval by the university's executive leaders. Furthermore, the implementation and disbursements must comply with Naresuan University's regulations regarding Budget and Revenue Management in 2018, which consists of several steps and necessitates ample time for approval (Financial Division, Naresuan University, 2018). Due to these constraints, the capacity to provide IT upgrades to all staff is limited. This process has a detrimental impact on work adaptation and productivity, including work-from-home arrangements and online meetings. Therefore, the Faculty of Social Sciences should develop a method or budget plan for emergencies, including organizational risk management, in case of future disasters such as the COVID-19 outbreak.

Establishing a COVID-19 information service center is a crucial step that the Faculty of Social Sciences should undertake. Although the university has established an information center to address issues related to coronavirus disease 2019, the FSS did not launch a dedicated COVID-19 information center. Consequently, when staff are required to work at the office, they lack access to updated COVID-19 information and precise prevention measures. This situation instills fear and anxiety among staff when interacting with colleagues and other individuals at the office. Additionally, individuals infected with COVID-19, especially those residing alone in dormitories, face limitations and difficulties in self-care when experiencing fever and other symptoms. Therefore, to enhance the morale of COVID-19 patients and provide support, the Faculty of Social Sciences should establish a communication and service center to assist them during the COVID-19 pandemic.

7. Recommendation and Further Research

The results indicate that the support staff have adapted and developed new methods, tools, and equipment to fulfill their duties. However, during implementation, they encountered challenges such as a need for IT knowledge and skills, slow internet speeds, and subpar computer performance. Therefore, lecturers, staff, and students must receive immediate IT training. Furthermore, the organization should promptly upgrade and provide high-performance internet and computers for all staff.

The findings revealed that the executive leadership faced problems and constraints in the management process during the COVID-19 pandemic. To prevent or mitigate adverse outcomes, the executive leadership should prepare and plan for dealing with uncertain or risky situations in the future, such as by developing a comprehensive risk management plan and emergency response plan.

Furthermore, organizations should establish an emergency management center to address staff confusion and panic. This can support staff in work planning and operational efficiency and prepare them to prevent and respond to Coronavirus disease infections. In addition, to establish an effective emergency management center, organizations should primarily consider the latest situations, the availability of organizational resources, and the needs of the personnel.

For further research, the study and development of virtual organizational management models is a compelling topic, as it offers significant benefits in both mitigating the spread of infectious diseases and reducing administrative expenses.

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