

# Policy Analysis on the Alternative Work Arrangements in Government Offices during Pandemic

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## ABSTRACT

The COVID 19 pandemic brought the Alternative Work Arrangement (AWA) into the spotlight as employees from the government offices will have to adapt to the new normal as they deal with the current health and economic environment and achieve a sustainable future. Previous research outputs before the pandemic showed an increased demand for flexible work arrangements and a better work-life balance might have contributed to the growth in alternative work arrangements. This research sought to analyze the policy on Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) in government offices utilizing the guidelines set by the Civil Service Commission (CSC) in response to the pandemic. Using a descriptive quantitative method, a survey questionnaire was administered to the respondents composed of human resource officers representing government offices in the province of Pangasinan, Philippines in five categories such as: local government units, police stations, fire stations, rural health units and public schools. Results show that government agencies adhered to the guidelines in the establishment of their own Alternative Work Arrangement program to ensure that daily work operations continue during the pandemic. The offices also established a monitoring scheme to track reports of those who availed the work alternative scheme. The skeletal workforce arrangement is the most preferred scheme. The findings have implications for organizations who want to revisit work-from-home policies. The study concludes with the analysis of research data and ideas on further studies on AWA.

**Keywords:** *Policy analysis, pandemic, productivity, alternative work arrangement, and human resource, descriptive design, Philippines*

## INTRODUCTION

The Corona Virus Disease (COVID-19) pandemic has greatly affected everyone and radically changed various aspects of everyday life, particularly in the workplace. The Civil Service Commission (CSC) is mandated to promulgate policies, standards and guidelines for the Civil Service and adopt plans and programs to promote economical, efficient and effective personnel administration in the government. On this premise, the CSC has modified the guidelines on the Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) in government to align with the rules set by the Inter-Agency Task Force on the Management of Emerging Infectious Diseases (IATF). According to CSC Resolution No. 2000912 promulgated on 14 October 2020, and circularized via CSC Memorandum Circular No. 18, s. 2020, agencies located in areas under Enhanced Community

Quarantine (ECQ) and Modified Enhanced Community Quarantine (MECQ) shall adopt work-from-home arrangement, while skeleton workforce may be allowed unless a different operational capacity is provided in agencies providing essential or critical services (Civil Service Commission, 2020).

Congruent with the Government's goal for the preservation of employment, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) issued Labor Advisory No. 17, series of 2020 ("Employment Preservation Guidelines") which aim to assist employers to protect jobs and prevent layoffs (DOLE, 2020).

According to an article written on the Philippine News Agency website, Manila Mayor Francisco Domagoso signed and released Executive Order No. 34 which adopts "an appropriate alternative work arrangements in all departments, offices, and units of the city government of Manila from August 4-18, 2020." The order states that proactive measures were to be taken to protect the health and well-being of Manila's city officials and employees to ensure the unhampered operation and functioning of the city in delivering essential services and needs of its constituents (Moare, 2020).

Furthermore, the Department of Education (DepEd) has released guidelines to ensure that heightened precautions are observed in DepEd offices and schools, postponement of various national and regional activities, and temporary suspension of school-related undertakings. Consequentially, the work arrangement in DepEd emphasizes on the protection of all DepEd personnel (Department of Education, 2020).

Likewise, during the virtual meeting of ASEAN Heads of Civil Service conducted in Jakarta in November 2020, policies and support for remote and flexible work arrangements have been introduced by most ASEAN Plus Three countries for civil servants. The meeting adopted the ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM) Work Plan 2021-2025 that highlighted activities that contribute to the implementation of ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework which is ASEAN's exit strategy for the COVID-19 pandemic (ASEAN, 2020).

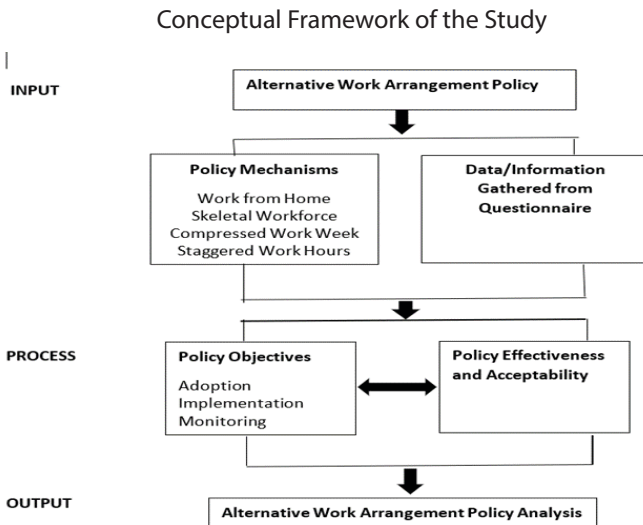
While employers perceive the productivity of working from home (WFH) to be lower than productivity of work at the office in normal times (Bartik et al., 2020; Morikawa, 2021), social distancing reduced the productivity of work at the office so drastically that WFH became more productive by comparison (Davis et al., 2021).

To reduce the spread of COVID-19, many countries enforced mitigation measures such as lockdowns and stay-at-home orders, forcing many workers to work from home (Malkov, 2020). The 1998 Workplace Employee Relations Survey (WERS98) reflected that the decision to work from home is more probable in the public sector, large establishments and work environments in which individuals

are responsible for the quality of their outputs (Felstead et al., 2006).

On the other hand, telecommuting is described by Gajendran and Harrison (2007) as “an alternative work arrangement in which employees perform tasks elsewhere that are normally done in primary or central workplaces, for at least some portion of their work schedule, using electronic media to interact with others inside and outside the organization,” notably, they indicated that “elsewhere” refers to “home.”

The framework of the study is anchored on the policy mechanisms indicated in the CSC guidelines on Alternative Work Arrangement and takes into consideration whether identified policy objectives are met in terms of adoption, implementation and monitoring.



The AWA as defined in the CSC policy which government offices may adopt singly or in combination are the following:

1. Work-from-Home – refers to an output-oriented work arrangement that authorizes the worker to produce outputs/results and accomplishments outside of the office;
2. Skeleton (Skeletal) Workforce – refers to a work arrangement where a minimum number of employees is required to staff the office to render service when full staffing is not possible;
3. Four-day (Compressed Workweek – refers to a work arrangement whereby the employees’ workweek is compressed to four (4) days each week



4. Work Shifting/Flexible (Staggered) Working Hours – refers to a work arrangement applicable to offices/agencies that observe work shifting or flexible working time; and
5. Other Alternative Work Arrangements – refer to work arrangements consisting of a combination of the above enumerated work arrangements or other work arrangements subject to the prevailing community quarantine in the area where the agency is located and appropriate/applicable to the agency mandate/functions.

The significance of this study is to find out if the policy on alternative work arrangement is being implemented by government agencies according to the provisions indicated in the CSC guidelines to ensure that government workers can continue to work safely during the pandemic and that government agencies have the capacity to implement an effective work mechanism to continue their operations in the new normal.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The research study was designed to analyze the effectiveness and acceptability of the policy on Alternative Work Arrangement in Government Offices during the Pandemic. Specifically, it aimed to: (1) assess the effectiveness of the policy in terms of implementation of the Alternative Work Arrangement in government offices; and, (2) determine the acceptability of the policy with its government stakeholders.

### **METHODOLOGY**

#### **Research Design**

This study employed the descriptive quantitative method of research. Descriptive research methods have been common practice for conducting research in many disciplines, including education, psychology, and social sciences.

The goal of descriptive research is to describe a phenomenon and its characteristics. Descriptive research is concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened. Therefore, observation and survey tools are often used to gather data. The outcomes of educational research are classified into the four categories of description, prediction, improvement, and explanation. Descriptive research describes a natural or man-made educational phenomenon that is of interest to policy makers and educators (Gall et al., 2007).

Descriptive research can be either quantitative or qualitative. It can involve collections of quantitative information that can be tabulated along a continuum in numerical form, such as scores on a test or the number of times a person chooses to use a certain feature of a multimedia program, or it can describe categories of information such as gender or patterns of interaction when using technology in a group situation. Descriptive research involves gathering data that describe events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection (Glass & Hopkins, 1984).

This study employed a correlational design to determine the extent to which the different variables are related to each other in the population of interest. The researchers were able to establish how much variation is caused by each of the independent variables to the dependent variable. The extent and direction of the relationship were ascertained and utilized for further computations to predict the value of the dependent variable.

## **Respondents**

The research subjects of this study were twenty human resource officers representing twenty government offices in Eastern, Central, and Northern Pangasinan who have the authority to implement the CSC revised interim guidelines on alternative work arrangements.

Each of the government offices are represented by the human resource officer since all employees are following the same policy throughout their agencies. The respondents were grouped into classifications such as Local Government Units, PNP Police Stations, Fire Stations, Rural Health Units and Schools.

## **Instrument**

The researchers made use of a Survey Questionnaire devised by them using references coming from the web and books which have a direct bearing on the study to gather data from the respondent government agencies. The instrument has indicators which will be answered by the respondent using a scale of 1 to 5 with a descriptive rating as follows:

- 5 – Strongly Agree
- 4 – Agree
- 3 – Neutral
- 2 – Disagree
- 1 – Strongly Disagree

The instrument was composed of the Revised Interim Guidelines for Alternative Work Arrangements (AWA) and support mechanisms for workers in

the government during the COVID-19 pandemic. The questionnaire seeks to find out if agencies shall establish and formulate their internal rules, procedures and regulations governing the Alternative Work Arrangements as they adopted and implemented in their agency, awareness of workplace health and safety, extent of concern that the virus will affect everyone including the family, availing of the Alternative work arrangement in the organization, the effectiveness of the implementation of AWA, rate of effectiveness of the organization during the implementation, how the organization extends help to the employee during pandemic, immediate action steps that the organization is taking to help employees and address their concern.

### **Procedure**

Before the conduct of the study, the researchers got permission from the head of the school/agency. To get accurate and reliable information and a 100 percent of retrieval of the instrument, the researchers personally administered it to the respondents. The researchers gathered the target returns from the respondents. Explanation of the instructions and parts of the questionnaire were clearly stated in the questionnaire. The survey was administered to the respondents. In case the respondents have clarifications with the questionnaire, the researchers can answer at once and can make necessary explanations. For data collection, the researchers employed the paper survey. The questionnaires were given to the said offices and were retrieved.

The data gathered were tabulated, analyzed and presented in textual and tabular form. For sub-problems number 1, 2, 5 and 6, Average Weighted Mean (AWM) was utilized to analyze the answers to questions having scaled responses. The obtained frequencies for each alternative response were multiplied by the assigned weights in the selected point, from the highest to lowest, the total number of frequencies was divided by the number of respondents to find the average weighted mean. The obtained weighted averages or mean were the basis for the verbal description of the responses of the evaluators to a given item. To answer sub-problem number 3, 4, 7 and 8, Frequency counts and percentages were used to present the data on the profile of the respondents. The results of the sub-problems were the basis of coming up with the conclusion and recommendation with regards to the implementation of the alternative work arrangements.

### **Data Analysis**

To interpret the data gathered on the extent of implementation, the following scale below was used.

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Descriptive Equivalent</b>
5	4.26 – 5.00	Strongly Agree
4	3.26 – 4.25	Agree
3	2.51 – 3.25	Neutral
2	1.76 – 2.50	Disagree
1	1.00 – 1.75	Strongly Disagree

<b>Scale</b>	<b>Range</b>	<b>Descriptive Equivalent</b>
5	4.26 – 5.00	Very Effective
4	3.26 – 4.25	Effective
3	2.51 – 3.25	Neither Effective nor Effective
2	1.76 – 2.50	Ineffective
1	1.00 – 1.75	Very Ineffective

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Formulated internal rules and procedures to implement the AWA (n=20)

Indicators	Mean	Description
Everyone goes through the minimum health standard and protocols (temp check, disinfection, contact tracing)	4.50	Strongly Agree
Management has put in place systems and procedures in implementing AWA	4.15	Agree
Priority to avail AWA is given to employees who are below 21 years old, those who are 60 years old and above, as well as those with immunodeficiency, comorbidities, or other health risk/ conditions and those residing with those mentioned above, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and persons with disabilities (PWDs)	4.30	Strongly Agree
Conduct of health status survey is being done to ensure that all those reporting to the office is not exhibiting any of the symptoms of COVID-19 disease;	4.45	Strongly Agree
Modification of the workplace layout is observed to ensure observance of physical distancing requirements of those who will be reporting to the office	4.00	Agree
Employees have access to or are provided with any communication equipment or facilities, such as computer/laptop, internet or e-mail, facsimile, telephone or cellular phone;	3.60	Agree
Management has provided appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE) to frontline service providers and employees	3.95	Agree
Sub-Mean	4.14	Agree

Legend: 1.00 – 1.75 – Strongly Disagree (SD), 1.76 – 2.50 – Disagree (D), 2.51 – 3.25 Neutral (N), 3.26 – 4.25 – Agree (A), 4.26 – 5.00 – Strongly Agree (SA)

Table 1 shows that various indicators in the formulation of internal rules and procedures to implement the AWA. Results based on the respondents' answers reflects a sub-mean of 4.14 corresponding to a descriptive equivalent of "Agree," however, respondents "Strongly Agree" on three items such as everyone goes through with the minimum health standard protocols, on the priority availing of identified persons as per criteria of the IATF (Inter-Agency Task Force), in the conduct of health status survey. This result correlates with the results reflected in Table 6 which showed that respondents unanimously agreed that their organizations have "Effectively" implemented the AWA in adherence to the policy set by the CSC most especially on the provision of health security.

All other indicators, the respondents gave a rating of agree. The two indicators on the provision of personal protective equipment and provision of communication equipment got the two lowest mean among all the seven indicators with mean at 3.95 and 3.60, respectively with a descriptive equivalent of Agree.

It can be gleaned from the results that the government offices where the respondents work adhered to the guidelines and procedures provided by the Civil Service Commission in implementing AWA in their respective organizations.

The policy on the AWA for government workers in the Philippines ensures that employees and their families are protected from the health risks of the pandemic. This supports the motivational theory of Maslow's hierarchy of needs wherein one of the basic need of man next to physiological needs is safety needs. The actions of man are motivated to achieve a certain need. By satisfying the safety needs of the employees making them less anxious, they become more focused on doing their jobs, thus, increasing productivity.

Moreover, the Social Contract theory says that people live together in society in accordance with an agreement that establishes moral and political rules of behavior. The formulation of the internal rules and procedures for the implementation of the AWA for government workers is such that the organization made a social contract with its employees. By doing so, it provided a valuable framework for harmony within the organization.

According to Herzberg's two-factor theory, by improving the hygiene factors which include working conditions and policies and rules, this decreases job dissatisfaction. The government policy on the implementation of AWA provides an avenue for government agencies to improve the hygiene factors of their employees leading to more satisfied and motivated workforce.

For the Department of Education and the Commission on Higher Education, they crafted their guidelines on the required health standards in basic education offices and schools and the Guidelines for the Prevention, Control and Mitigation

of the Spread of Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), respectively.

This finding of the study supports the result of the WERS98 Survey which claims that decision to work from home is more probable in the public sector, large establishments and work environments in which individuals are responsible for the quality of their own outputs (Felstead, et. al, 2006).

Another study in Hong Kong supports states that WFH has become a policy priority for most governments to cope with the pandemic. In doing so, the policies must be made keeping in mind the practicality for both employers and employees as there will be some consequences for the two groups in one way or another (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021).

The indicator stating that employees have access to or is provided with any communication equipment or facilities, such as computer/laptop, internet or e-mail, facsimile, telephone or cellular phone received a weighted mean of 3.6 equivalent to "Agree" which suggests that not all employees were given access. This is more likely because of the limited budget allocation that government offices receive.

This finding of this study confirms the reported result of the study of Greer, et. al in 2014, which stated "lack of adequate work-related resources including technological equipment and files stored at the main worksite that are required to perform work-related tasks while teleworking" as one of the drawbacks of working from home.

In a study that took place in Hong Kong, civil servants were permitted to WFH during the city outbreak, various government departments provided information technology support such as newly installed computers, mobile devices or other equipment, software along with enhanced capacities of communications, networks, or databases for their staff to WFH efficiently. Comparable to the studies by Baker et al. (2007), and Grant et al. (2019), it is revealed that organizational factors such as support from organizations, influence WFH (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021).

Table 2. Workplace health and safety awareness (n=20)

Indicators	Mean	Description
Health and safety regulations at work are effectively communicated	4.70	Strongly Agree
I have read/know the internal guidelines and procedures of my office regarding the AWA	4.55	Strongly Agree
I know that I need to be available during the working hours if I avail of the AWA	4.40	Strongly Agree
I am required to submit my weekly plan and targets together with my weekly accomplishments	4.50	Strongly Agree
I have attended zoom meetings or any other online video conference calls/meetings	4.05	Agree
Sub-Mean	4.44	Strongly Agree

Legend: 1.00 – 1.75 – Strongly Disagree (SD), 1.76 – 2.50 – Disagree (D),  
2.51 – 3.25 Neutral (N), 3.26 – 4.25 – Agree (A), 4.26 – 5.00 – Strongly Agree (SA)

In terms of Workplace Health and Safety Awareness, Table 2 shows that four out of five indicators resulted in a “Strongly Agree” descriptive rating with a 4.44 sub mean.

This implies that the government agencies were effective in their efforts of informing their employees of the internal guidelines and procedures regarding health and safety mechanisms being implemented under the alternative work arrangement scheme. Also, it was pointed out that the first indicator got the highest mean of 4.70 equivalent to a descriptive rating of “Strongly Agree” which suggests that health and safety regulations at work were effectively communicated as it is the most needed in time of the COVID19 health crisis.

As shown by the data, among the five indicators the “I have attended zoom meetings or any other online videoconference calls/meetings” has the lowest mean of 4.05 in its mean and with descriptive equivalence of “Agree.” It can be inferred that a correlation exists between the findings that the employees have limited access to communication equipment and facilities to their limited attendance to zoom meetings.

Moreover, the institutions have conducted meetings only if there are essential matters to raise. Regular meetings are conducted once or twice every month, unless for emergency meetings. Most of the attendees in a meeting are those in high positions. Primarily, the memorandum is used to disseminate concerns from the highest ranking to the lowest ranking employees in each department minimizing the use of online meetings. It is noted that respondents’ presence in online meetings is observable.

The human relations management theory identified communication as one of the important human relations skills. Open lines of communication are essential to any workplace ensuring that both the organization and its employees are on the same page. The results indicate that terms and conditions pertaining to the implementation of the AWA was effectively communicated to the employees and that duties and responsibilities are properly disseminated. The “Strongly Agree” sub mean showed the level of awareness of the respondents and validated that the efforts of the organization in raising employee awareness was effective.

Table 3. Respondents’ concern on their family being affected by COVID-19 virus (n=20)

Indicators	Percentage
To a very great extent	30.00%
To a great extent	65.00%
To a moderate extent	0.00%
To a small extent	5.00%
To no extent	0.00%

Table 3 shows the respondents’ perception as for the extent the virus may affect their family. Most of the respondents representing 65 percent, believed the virus affected their family “to a great extent,” 35 percent claimed they were affected “to a very great extent”, and no one perceived that “to no extent” will it affect their family.

The 0 percent rating for the indicator “to no extent” shows that all of the respondents believed that their family can be affected by the COVID19 virus and that they might get infected in the workplace or while in transit going to their workplace and back to their homes. This also reflects that all the respondents believe that the COVID19 virus is a cause for alarm because its effect can get worse and may cause death to anyone who gets infected.

Security needs is one of the basic needs as indicated in Maslow’s motivational theory of hierarchy of needs. The results show that the need to feel secure at a time of pandemic is of utmost concern to the employees not only for themselves but also for their families. The implementation of the AWA on government workers indicates that their organizations are doing their part in satisfying their security needs.



Results reflected in Table 3 which showed that 65 percent of the respondents were concern “To a great extent” on their family being affected by COVID 19 correlates with the results indicated in Table 4 wherein 90 percent of the respondents availed the AWA offered by their organization to ensure their own health security and that of their family members as well.

As indicated in previous studies, WFH is influenced not only by organizational factors but also by “individual and family factors.” For example, household characteristics such as size of the living area, number of family members sharing the same accommodation and the number and age of children in the household are considered as family factors influencing WFH (Baker et al., 2007; Solis, 2016).

The Civil Service Commission policy on AWA considers family settings by specifically identifying who among the employees will be given priority to avail the AWA. The policy states that employees who are below 21 years old, those who are 60 years old and above, as well as those with immunodeficiency, comorbidities, or other health risk/conditions and those residing with those mentioned above, pregnant women, nursing mothers, and persons with disabilities (PWDs) may avail of the AWA.

Table 4. Respondents’ availing of the alternative work arrangement in the organization (n=20)

Indicators	Percentage
Yes	90.00%
No	10.00%

In the context of Availing the Alternative Work Arrangement reflected in Table 4, 90 percent of the respondents responded “yes” in the availing of AWA for health and safety measures in the current health crisis and only 10 percent responded for non-availing as shown in Table 4. This means that an AWA has been put in place across all the five groups of respondents that is why most of the respondents availed the alternative work scheme.

It can also be inferred from the data that most of the respondents may have fulfilled the requirements set by the CSC on who may avail the AWA as indicated in Table 1 and that they believe that the AWA can help reduce the probability of contracting the virus because of decreased exposure to other people in the workplace and outside of their households.

Table 5. Type of alternative work arrangement scheme availed by respondents (n=20)

Indicators	Percentage
Work From Home	27.78%
Skeletal Workforce	55.56%
Four-Day Compressed Workweek	16.67%
Staggered Working Hours	0.00%
Other Alternative Work Arrangements	0.00%

Table 5 shows the type of alternative work arrangement scheme availed. This result is associated with the results of Table 4 which showed that 90 percent of the respondents availed of the AWA. Out of the 90 percent respondents who availed of the AWA, 55.56 percent were part of the skeletal workforce, 27.78 percent of them chose the Work from Home scheme and 16.67 percent availed of the Four-day Compressed Work Week. No one among the respondents chose the staggered working hours and other alternative work arrangement. This also indicates that the five group of respondents namely local government unit, police station, fire station, rural health unit, and public education maintain existing skeletal workforce in their organization.

A study published in Sun Life also highlighted workers favoring and supporting WFH measures (73 percent), flextime (83 percent), and compressed working hours (77 percent) (Sun Life 2020). Another study conducted in April 2020 showed that over 80 percent of workers preferred at least partial WFH measures in place, with numbers varying in how many days a week that should be, suggesting a preference for a mixed mode of working.

Table 6. Effectiveness of the AWA Implementation according to respondents (n=20)

Indicators	Mean	Description
Did your organization effectively implement the AWA?	4.20	Effective
How would you rate the effectiveness of your AWA implementation?	4.05	Effective
Sub-Mean	4.13	Effective

Table 6 shows the perception of the respondents on the effectiveness of the AWA in their agencies. The effectiveness of implementation by the agencies was perceived by the respondents as effective as indicated by the overall mean of 4.33 with a descriptive equivalent of "effective."

In the effectiveness of the implementation of the AWA, the opinion of the people should be considered, and in this case, the respondents have unanimously spoken that their organizations have effectively implemented the AWA in adherence to the policy set by the Civil Service Commission.

The human relations theory by Mayo concludes that making the employees feel valued and giving them personal attention just like the Hawthorne effect makes them more productive. The implementation of the AWA in government offices made the employees more feel valued and their security need were also met making them perceive that the policy was effective.

In contrast, the exploratory study in Hong Kong concluded that better guidelines and policies from the government should be in place to properly regulate and make WFH feasible. One area of policy where planning and implementation is an absolute necessity is guidance into adapting to remote online work (Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021)

Nonetheless, a lot of organizations fear that employees exploit the freedom when working from home and lower their individual work effort (Gariety & Shaffer, 2007).

According to a study, regardless of the initial overall favorability seen from Hong Kong workers for WFH practices, obvious issues to be addressed includes discontent with the internal infrastructure, such as either no or limited access to resources such as office documents (FastLane Team, 2020; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021). This finding implies a level of amiss preparedness for this situation, however considering this is a new work practice the degree of preparedness is limited, both for employers and employees. This has resulted in inconsistent or delayed output from the employees and lack of flexibility, and tolerance by employers. It can be argued that employers might have been making efforts, but there has been a lack of uniformity, with only 32% of employers investing in new forms of communication technology, and even less in other areas (FastLane Team, 2020; Vyas & Butakhieo, 2021).

Table 7. How could your organization help you as an employee during this pandemic (n=20)

Indicators	Percentage
Safety and Health Issue	80.00%
Communication	10.00%
Mental Support	10.00%

Table 7 asks the respondents on how their organization can help their employees during this time of pandemic and the results reflected that 80 percent of the respondents said that they prefer to be given assistance which addresses Safety and Health issue while only 10 percent prefer communication and mental support. Nobody among the respondents answered financial concerns.

The result validates that security needs is indeed a basic need of man as stated in Maslow's theory of hierarchy of needs. Safety and health issues are of utmost importance to the employees during this time of pandemic and serves as a significant motivation factor for employees.

It is noteworthy that the respondents were more inclined to ask help for Mental Support rather than Financial Concerns. At this time of pandemic, the World Health Organization stated that fear, worry, and stress are normal responses to perceived or real threats, and at times when people are faced with uncertainty or the unknown, thus, it is normal and understandable that people are experiencing fear in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2020). This can be a particularly difficult time for people with pre-existing or past mental health problems. Staying at home may be bringing back memories of bad times to people who have experienced depression or trauma (Mental Health Foundation, 2020).

Across the globe stories continue to emerge of people's experiences of anxiety, fear and depression due to the uncertainty and stress brought on by the virus (WHO, 2020). Job losses, financial and housing insecurity, the challenges of working from home, home schooling, restricted access to health and social care services and social isolation coupled with reduced support and contact with family and friends have all impacted people's well-being (Heale & Wray, 2020).

In Pangasinan State University, the employees were given sets of health and safety kit which contains a box of masks, bottle of alcohol and ten face shields to show support to the health and security of its people. In terms of communication, all faculty members received a tablet to be used for the online learning platform (psu.edu.ph, 2020)

For the Department of Education, the office issued Memorandum No. 058, series of 2020 which called for an orientation for all regional and schools division offices across the country on mental health and psychosocial support services in the time of COVID19 for learners and DepEd personnel (Department of Education, 2020).

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The researchers conclude that the government offices in Pangasinan have implemented the Alternative Work Arrangement in their agencies in accordance with the policy's provisions. Most of the employees have availed of the alternative work arrangement and that the agencies have set monitoring mechanisms such as submission of reports. All of the subject agencies also established minimum health protocols which is being observed at all times. Provisions of PPEs and communication requirements were provided but to a minimum extent only. Analysis of the AWA policy therefore shows that the policy has been effective in ensuring that the government agencies established their guidelines in its implementation to mitigate the effects of the COVID19 pandemic to their employees and be able to adapt and continue the operations of their organization as well.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The researchers recommend the conduct of more studies to evaluate further and analyze the provisions of the policy to enhance its features and include other areas which might not have covered by the policy to date to increase health security for government employees.

The government agencies may consider including in their guidelines for the implementation of AWA some requirements for training on information communication and technology to capacitate employees on the requisites of online platforms in the new normal for them to adapt better and be able to deliver quality service and better productivity. They could also evaluate the possibility of alternative work arrangement as the new normal in labor and employment. The national government should also build network infrastructures and other communication facilities to support the rise of the digital economy.

Moreover, an urgent need for COVID19 vaccine is a must for all government agencies. Although it is included in the policy to provide PPEs, the specific provision of the vaccine is not yet included in the policy. The researchers highly recommend that government offices should include in their organization policy the procedure to provide the needed vaccines to all their employees as part of

their medical assistance and health benefits ensuring the employees' protection from health risks brought about by the pandemic. The said policy should be implemented as soon as the COVID19 vaccine is made available to address the rapid spread of transmission. The new COVID UK variant was found out lately in December 2020 has now entered in the Philippines. It has now spread based on the local transmission affecting some of the provinces in Luzon.

The recommended massive implementation of administering vaccine to all government employees should also be strictly monitored and evaluated following the proper health and medical guidance imposed by the Inter Agency Task Force and should form part of the policy on AWA.

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