

# Employee Well-Being During COVID-19 Pandemic: The Role of Adaptability, Work-Family Conflict, and Organizational Response

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## Abstract

Well-being has always been a topic of interest for individuals, organizations, and policy-makers. COVID-19 pandemic made it tremendously relevant as employees were forced to work from home due to the successive lockdowns that governments have implemented to curb the spread of the virus. This crisis has raised concerns about employees' well-being due to the implementation of these tight measures. In the present study, we examined the direct and indirect effects of employees' adaptability, work-family conflict, and organizational response on employees' well-being through the mediating role of perceived stress. Data have been collected from 184 employees working in various organizations in Malaysia and analyzed using Smart-PLS Structural Equation Modeling with the bootstrapping procedure. The results indicated that organizational response, work-family conflict, and adaptability directly affect perceived stress and well-being, except for organizational response, which has no direct effect on well-being. Furthermore, it was found that perceived stress mediates the relationship of organizational response and work-family conflict with well-being but not adaptability.

## Keywords

employee well-being, perceived stress, work-family conflict, adaptability, organizational response, COVID-19

## Introduction

Although the well-being of people is likely to be associated with the nation's development, mounting professional and family pressures certainly influence the quality of welfare. This can be particularly true at the age of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic which has affected lives, often in all-encompassing and multifaceted ways; personally, psychologically, emotionally, economically, and socially. The scale of the pandemic prompted the lockdowns of areas, cities, and countries, directly limiting people's ability to work which unpredictably influenced the viability of organizations among different sectors (Akkermans et al., 2020). The travel and tourism industries have been hit particularly hard, and the way people conduct their daily activities, especially work, has dramatically changed.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, countries, and businesses around the globe have experienced some form of lockdown. Recent statistics indicate that 93% of global workers reside in countries that implement lockdowns. Around 30% of them reside in countries that experience complete workplace closures, except for essential businesses, and 42% reside in countries where closures of certain businesses or

certain categories of workers have occurred. Nearly 20% live in countries where workplace closure is recommended but not required. Additionally, there was a 14% drop in working hours in the second quarter of 2020 as compared to the last quarter of 2019; which is equivalent to almost 400 million full-time jobs (International Labour Organisation, 2020a).

Most organizations have shifted their operations from on-site to remote working due to the lockdown restrictions. To face this challenge, companies and employees alike must experiment with different methods to meet their work commitments and rapidly adapt to a new work environment,

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which is often at home (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Remote work from home challenges the work-life balance, especially when family and work responsibilities coincide spatially and temporally to create a conflict between, or a blurring of, the two domains (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020). Working from home, teleworking, and other remote working features seem to be problematic under normal conditions, but it is even more so during the pandemic. According to the International Labour Organization, people with children find it more challenging to rapidly switch to full-time home-working for a prolonged period of time. This was necessitated by the closure of schools and childcare facilities. The report added that at least one in five people with children younger than 12 years were less able to concentrate on work activities, and single parents and families with disabled children found this experience very stressful (International Labour Organisation, 2020b). The dramatic change in work locations and the way meetings and teaching are conducted brought about numerous challenges and uncertainties to employees (Sun et al., 2020), negatively affecting their health and well-being in the process (Restubog et al., 2020). The well-being of employees is vital for organizations to exist and perform. Therefore, effectively mitigating the negative consequences of working from home, or buffering them, is key for organizations to survive (Carnevale & Hatak, 2020).

Restubog et al. (2020) discussed the three challenges that are associated with outbreaks and pandemics, such as COVID-19: the challenges of maintaining psychological well-being, uncertain labor market with changing working environments and managing work and family responsibilities. To overcome these challenges, the International Labour Organisation (2020b) published a guide on remote working which provided guidelines for businesses to ensure employee well-being, productivity, and performance which can ultimately contribute to the organization's effectiveness. The guidelines include working time and work organization, digitalization, performance management, communication, occupational safety and health, legal issues, training, and work-life balance (International Labour Organisation, 2020b).

Research on employee well-being is of great and increasing interest in organizational settings (Sutton, 2020), likely due to its perceived importance as a desired outcome for individuals, corporations, and nations at large. The factors related to employee well-being include transformational leadership (Kelloway et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2010; Montano et al., 2017), inclusive leadership (Choi et al., 2017), career adaptability (Ng et al., 2022; Urbanaviciute et al., 2019), leaders' spiritual values (Mathieu et al., 2014), psychological capital (Kim et al., 2019), work-family conflict (Obrenovic et al., 2020), customer incivility (Arnold & Walsh, 2015), autonomy and organization-based self-esteem (Gardner, 2020), as well as mindfulness (Wilson et al., 2020). However, the combination of personal and contextual factors that either promote or hinder employee well-being have not been

explored. The current study investigates well-being from three different aspects during the COVID-19 pandemic in Malaysia: personal, family, and organization. This study is expected to add value to existing well-being research and is pertinent to the ongoing COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to address the following questions:

- How do adaptability to uncertainties, work-family conflict, and organizational response (communication) affect perceived job stress and employee well-being?
- Does perceived job stress mediate the relationship between adaptability to uncertainties, work-family conflict, and organizational response (communication) and employee well-being?

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. First, an overview of COVID-19 is provided. Subsequently, the theoretical background highlighting the main themes of the study including well-being, adaptability, work-life conflict, organizational response, and the study framework are discussed. The study method and data analysis are then presented. The paper ends with the discussion, limitations, and recommendations for future works.

## Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

### *Employee Well-Being*

Well-being is a multidimensional and broad construct that has been conceptualized in at least two major distinguishable approaches: (1) hedonic and (2) eudaimonic well-being (Baselmans & Bartels, 2018; Ryan & Deci, 2001). Hedonic well-being (HWB) signifies the emotional and cognitive evaluations of one's life and is referred to as subjective well-being. It features three concepts: life satisfaction, positive affect (frequent pleasant feelings), and negative affect (infrequent unpleasant feelings; Tov, 2018). Eudaimonic, or psychological, well-being (EWB) requires psychological needs to be fulfilled for people to develop, grow, and function well. Those who function well enjoy autonomy, competence, relatedness, self-acceptance, purpose in life, and personal growth (Ryff, 1989). Both approaches to well-being have been extensively studied in work and organizational settings (Baselmans & Bartels, 2018; Fadda et al., 2017). The factors that are likely to strongly influence employees' psychological well-being during the COVID-19 lockdown include adaptability, work-family conflict, organizational response, and perceived job stress. However, in this study, the focus is on key factors believed to have a strong influence on employees' psychological well-being during the COVID-19 lockdown; namely, adaptability, work-family conflict, organizational response, and perceived job stress. A detailed theoretical discussion

regarding the influence of these factors on well-being is presented in the following sections.

### *Employee Adaptability*

Adaptability refers to the individuals' capability to regulate their thoughts and feelings as well as their behaviors in response to new, changing, or uncertain events, conditions, and situations (Martin et al., 2012). Similarly, Ployhart and Bliese (2006) viewed it as "an individual's ability, skill, disposition, willingness, and/or motivation to change or fit different tasks, social and environmental features" (p. 13). Ployhart and Bliese's (2006) definition of adaptability is based on the I-ADAPT theory that they had proposed. Though the definition is based on previous research, it incorporates some distinctions such as: first, adaptability reflects the individual differences not characteristic of situations; second, it does not reflect adaptive performance third, it is determined by a multidimensional set of knowledge, skills, abilities, others (KSAOs); forth, the definition emphasizes change and/or fit and lastly, the definition lets change happens in multiple ways including task, social, and environment. Accordingly, this theory highlights individual differences in adaptability and conceptualizes adaptability as a higher-order construct that consists of eight dimensions: crises, stress, creativity, uncertainty, learning, interpersonal skills, cultural, and physical dimensions (Ployhart & Bliese, 2006). What is probably common among the different views of adaptability is how people react to changes and uncertain or unpredictable circumstances. People show different levels of adaptability since they have varied personal capabilities and resources. Change has become inevitable due to reasons such as natural crises, technology, and politics (Martin et al., 2012). People can face changes and uncertainties at any point in time. Therefore, adaptability to changing events and situations is necessary to avoid negative outcomes. This study follows Ployhart & Bliese's theory of adaptability, however, it utilizes the uncertainty adaptability dimension only because it is strongly related to the current COVID-19 crisis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered the way people work and do things. This brings along several uncertainties that could disturb work and workers which will eventually represent major sources of stress, threatening individual, and organizational health and well-being. Employees' work experiences, attitudes, and performances are thus influenced (Cullen et al., 2014). Therefore, adaptability and adjustment to new norms help reduce stress and enhance well-being. The ability to efficiently respond to such uncertainties is an important ingredient for effective performance at the workplace during times of crisis and career shock.

According to the extant literature, adaptability in the workplace has shown an association with organizational outcomes such as performance, well-being, job satisfaction, life satisfaction, etc. In Malaysia, for instance, a recent study that used a sample of 200 working adults who were also doing

postgraduate programs found that career adaptability was positively related to well-being (life satisfaction) through the moderating role of connectedness and the mediating role of job satisfaction (Ng et al., 2020). Similarly, career adaptability was found to have a positive effect on employee performance and job satisfaction and is also influenced by emotional intelligence (Sony & Mekoth, 2016) and the life satisfaction of working adults with intellectual disabilities (Santilli et al., 2014). Research also revealed that it is positively related to the general well-being and professional well-being of working and non-working adults in Switzerland (Maggiori et al., 2013) as well as to subjective career success (Ocampo et al., 2018). Recent evidence has further shown that the adaptability of science teachers is positively related to their self-efficacy (Collie et al., 2020). Similarly, adaptability was found to be positively related to teachers' usage of adaptive instructional methods in the classroom (Loughland & Alonzo, 2018) and negatively related to teachers' work disengagement (Collie et al., 2018). Concerning stress, the more people can adapt to uncertain situations or events, the less stress they experience. Both studies of Johnston et al. (2013) and Fiori et al. (2015) have confirmed this effect through 1,204 German-speaking Swiss workers and a longitudinal study applied on a sample of over 1,600 respondents in Switzerland, respectively. Based on this background, the following hypotheses are formed:

H1a: Employee adaptability is positively related to employee well-being.

H1b: Employee adaptability is negatively related to perceived job stress.

### *Work-Family Conflict*

Work and family are two life domains that tend to have a mutual effect on each other. When work responsibilities interfere with family responsibilities or vice versa, it becomes difficult to balance, making conflict inevitable. Due to the limitation of energy and time, the two domains become incompatible (Brenning et al., 2020). According to Vieira et al. (2018), work-family conflict is "assumed to reflect an individual's difficulties in fulfilling simultaneous and/or competing demands from multiple and salient roles, resulting in the depletion of limited time- and energy-related resources" (p.153). Work-family conflict is normally treated as a bidirectional construct that consists of two distinct but highly related concepts: work interference with family (e.g., the inability of a person to accomplish family demands because of work responsibilities) and family interference with work (e.g., the inability of a person to fulfil work demands because of family pressures; Byron, 2005; Netemeyer et al., 1996; Zhang et al., 2019). According to Drummond et al. (2017), work interference with family (WIF), also known as work-to-family conflict, occurs when there are high levels of work demands and work-related

stressors that lead to significant negative effects on family life and overall psychological well-being. Similarly, family interference with work (FIW) is triggered by family pressures and demands that lead a person to have less time to effectively fulfil work goals. Arising family issues ultimately leads to lower well-being and satisfaction and increased psychological strain (Drummond et al., 2017).

Previous research had highlighted the effect of work-family conflict on various jobs and family-related outcomes. For instance, Amstad et al. (2011) and Byron (2005) conducted two meta-analyses to investigate three categories of potential outcomes related to work, family, and domain-unspecific factors. Their findings emphasized that both domains exert stronger effects on the same domain outcomes than on the cross-domain. WIF is linked to work-related outcomes such as job satisfaction, turnover intention, absenteeism/withdrawal, deviant behaviors, commitment, performance, and organizational citizenship behavior, whereas FIW has a stronger effect on family-related outcomes such as family satisfaction (Botsford Morgan et al., 2018). FIW has also been found to negatively influence job safety perception and compliance, and positively impact psychological strain and cognitive failure among employees (Johnson et al., 2019). Generally, work-family conflict is recognized as a major source of stress and job burnout that undermines people's physical health and psychological well-being as well as their quality of life (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006). In a longitudinal study of employees from China, Hong Kong, Australia, and New Zealand. Drummond et al. (2017) found that work-family conflict reduces when employees receive support from their supervisors and family members, which consequently leads to less psychological strain and higher employee job satisfaction in collectivist societies such as Hong Kong and China. Similarly, a study on school teachers in Malaysia found evidence that work-family conflict has an impact on teachers' psychological well-being (Panatik et al., 2011). Specifically, work-family conflict makes teachers angrier and more aggressive, thus affecting their mental health and causing them to quit their jobs. Similar results were found in the context of Bahrain, where psychological well-being and psychological safety were negatively influenced by work-family conflict (Obrenovic et al., 2020). In China, the findings of Zhou et al. (2020) were not significantly different; work-family conflict negatively affects the organizational commitment of pre-school teachers. Likewise, Terry and Woo (2020) confirmed the positive relationship of work-family conflict with perceived stress and burnout and the negative relationship with job satisfaction. The current study investigates both competing roles and treats work-family conflict as a higher-order construct in its relation to perceived stress and employee well-being. Therefore, the following hypotheses are offered:

H2a: Work-family conflict negatively relates to employee well-being.

H2b: Work-family conflict positively relates to perceived job stress.

## Organizational Response

Organizational response to crises examines how communication patterns in organizational settings change in response to environmental uncertainties. During crises, organizations prepare and manage communication plans to mitigate possible adverse effects. Crisis communication management is defined as "a process that is designed to prevent the damage a crisis can inflict on an organization and its stakeholders" (Rubinstein et al., 2016). According to Argote et al. (1989), adapting effective communication channels, especially in uncertain situations, could enhance a decision-making process and prevent imminent risk. Moreover, it has been confirmed that communication channels and leader actions are likely to have a significant impact on employee well-being as they are the most trusted sources of information for employees during a crisis (Best et al., 2014). Hence, adapting communication tools that are clear, simple, and frequent can improve organizational performance. Leaders should focus on keeping employees safe and healthy by conveying crucial information and keeping them simple.

In the workplace, organizational response to a crisis can effectively and significantly reduce stress among employees, ultimately enhancing their well-being (Johansen et al., 2012). According to Adamu and Mohamad (2019), early and consistent organizational response to crises enable employees to efficiently cope with stress. Previous studies have confirmed that effective response to crises along with empowered communication diminish employees' stress and heighten their performance (Zhong & Pheng Low, 2009). Hence, it is hypothesized that:

H3a: Organizational response has a positive impact on employee well-being.

H3b: Organizational response has a negative impact on perceived stress.

## Perceived Stress

Perceived stress at work is one of the core concepts of organizational psychology. Stress has been defined as "an uncomfortable state of psychological tensions that result from an appraisal that the perceived demands of the workplace exceed the individual's perceived resources to successfully meet the demands" (De Bruin, 2006, p. 68). The prevailing understanding in research and daily life is biased towards the distress factor where there is a mismatch of demands and resources. This has negative consequences on individuals and organizations alike (Bell et al., 2012). Stress results from discrepancies between job requirements and employee capabilities and resources. The concept of perceived stress covers aspects that range from mild irritation to drastic dysfunction. Recent evidence has shown that stress frequently co-exists with burnout and depression (Looseley et al., 2019), incurring an emotional cost on the individual level and entailing consequences for both employees and organizations.



Significant research had documented the adverse association of perceived job stress with employees' psychological and physical well-being in numerous sectors, particularly healthcare, education, and information technology (Bell et al., 2012; Fortes-Ferreira et al., 2006; Shani & Pizam, 2009; Tsaur & Tang, 2012; Wang et al., 2017). Bell et al. (2012), for instance, examined the effect of perceived job stress (threat and pressure-type stressors) on well-being among a sample of 139 academicians in Australia and found that high job threat-type stress was a significant predictor for poor well-being. The study further discovered a positive association between perceived job stress with other indicators that directly or indirectly reflect on well-being, work-life balance and work-life conflict. In Malaysia for instance, a recent study on a sample of 300 nursing staff found that perceived job stress has a significant effect on their well-being (Meguellati et al., 2019).

In light of the aforementioned discussion, the current study seeks to further assess the mediating role of perceived stress on the relationships between career adaptability, organizational response, and work-family conflict with employee well-being. So far, there is little empirical evidence in the literature regarding this role in the context of well-being. For example, Singh and Nayak (2015) investigated how perceived job stress is linked to work-family conflict and well-being (operationalized as job satisfaction) among police officials in India, and had confirmed its mediating role. Similarly, there is a mediating role between work-family conflict and well-being when measured through life satisfaction (Erdogan et al., 2012). Adaptability is arguably thought to help employees deal with stressors that often lead to poor work-related well-being (Rudolph et al., 2017). In a similar vein, organizational response, through adopted and more efficient communication styles, reduces uncertainties among employees and alleviates their stress, thus contributing to better well-being. The levels of job stress that result from work-family conflict will ultimately reflect on well-being (Zhong & Pheng Low, 2009). Based on the above discussion, the following hypotheses are offered:

H4a: Perceived stress is negatively related to employee well-being.

H4b, H4c, and H4d: Perceived stress mediates the relationships between adaptability, work-family conflict, and organizational response and well-being.

## Methods

### Sample

This cross-sectional study is based on a sample of 184 respondents working in different industries in Malaysia. Data collection took place in June 2020, right after the complete lockdown was lifted and replaced by conditional movement restriction. Participants have conveniently completed

**Table 1.** Sample Characteristics.

Characteristics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	81	44%
	Female	103	56%
	Total	184	100%
Age	25 and below	55	29.9%
	26–35 years	81	44%
	36–45 years	40	21.7%
	46 and above	8	4.3%
	Total	184	100%
Work experience Mean = 4.27, SD = 4.38	<4 years	111	60.3%
	≥4 years	72	39.1%
	Total	184	100%
Nationality	Malaysians	155	84.2
	Non-Malaysians	29	15.8
	Total	184	100%
Educational level	Bachelor degree and below	99	53.8%
	Postgraduate	81	44%
	Professional degree/certificate	4	2.2
	Total	184	100%
Industries	Education	81	44%
	Others	103	56%
	Total	184	100%

an online English survey that was distributed through personal groups and social media platforms. Respondents were assured of the confidentiality of their responses and for this purpose, there were not asked to provide any identifying information. Thus, the anonymity of the respondents was achieved. The utilization of convenience sampling in this study was imposed by the COVID-19 movement restriction conditions that did not otherwise allow for optimized use of probability sampling methods. One key strength of probability sampling methods is the generalizability of the findings. However, convenience sampling—which is based on individuals who are most accessible to researchers—is generally inexpensive and easy to implement, whereas its limitations relate to providing results representative of the whole population, which is not a major claim in the current study. Support to these perspectives is indeed found in Kriska et al. (2013, p. 2833) argument denoting that “true random samples are rare and to some extent, all samples are convenience samples.” As presented in Table 1, the sample consisted of 81 males (44%) and 103 females (56%). About 81 respondents (44%) are aged between 26 and 33 years, with a mean work experience of 4.27 ( $SD=4.38$ ). Moreover, the sample was dominantly composed of Malaysian employees ( $M=155$  or 84.2%) compared to 29 (15.8%) non-Malaysians. As for the level of study, over half of respondents (99 or 53.8%) had up to a bachelor's degree while 81 respondents reported that

they had some form of postgraduate education (44%). Only four employees (2.2%) had a professional degree or certificate. About 81 participants (44%) are employed in educational institutions whereas the remaining 103 (56%) serve in other industries including manufacturing, finance and accounting, food and beverages, wholesale and retailing, real estate and construction, consultation, banking and insurance, energy and environment, telecommunication, transportation, healthcare, and public service.

### The Study Measures

Well-being was assessed by five items from the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12; Goldberg et al., 1997) on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 4 (much more than usual). A sample item reads: "During the past few weeks of COVID-19 lockdown, have you recently been feeling unhappy or depressed?" Perceived stress was measured by six items adopted from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS; Cohen & Williamson, 1988) on a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (never) to 5 (very often). A sample item reads: "During the past few weeks of COVID-19 lockdown, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?" The three independent variables (adaptability, work-family conflict, and organizational response) were rated using a 5-point Likert scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Adaptability was measured by four items from Matthews et al. (2010), work-family conflict by six items from Ployhart and Bliese (2006) and organizational response by five items from Adamu and Mohamad (2019). Sample items read: "I perform well in uncertain situations," "I have to miss family activities due to the amount of time I must spend on work responsibilities" and "I have been well informed by my organization during the COVID-19 crisis compared to a normal situation," respectively. These measures have been used and validated in previous research.

## Analysis and Results

### Assessment of the Measurement Model

**Reliability and validity tests.** The measurement model was performed to assess the reliability of the study's constructs. Values greater than .7 are considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2016). The obtained results have shown that this criterion was met since the composite reliability ranged from .700 (FW) to .948 (PS). The results also confirmed the absence of the multicollinearity issue since the values of VIF for all items were below the suggested threshold value of 5. The discriminant and convergent validities of the study constructs were also examined. Convergent validity was evaluated using the average variance extracted (AVE) in which values higher than .5 should be obtained (Salem & Alanadoly, 2020). The results of the measurements are shown in Table 2.

The heterotrait-monotrait ratio of correlations (HTMT) was conducted to measure the discriminant validity (Henseler et al., 2015) and values for all variables below the critical value of 1.0, establishing the discriminant validity (Table 3).

### Structural Model

The structural model presented in Figure 1 illustrates the total variance or  $R^2$  of the study model. The  $R^2$  value for well-being is .454, indicating that all predictors approximately explain 45% of well-being.

**Direct hypotheses testing.** The bootstrapping with a resampling of 5,000 procedures was performed to assess the significance of the hypothesized structural relationships (Figure 2). Additionally, the coefficient values were obtained using the PLS algorithm (Salem & Salem, 2021). Adaptability has demonstrated a relatively acceptable connection with well-being and perceived stress (CA → WB:  $\beta = .108$ ,  $t = 1.963$ ,  $p = .025$ ; CA → PS:  $\beta = -.132$ ,  $t = 1.693$ ,  $p = .045$ ), thus supporting H1a and H1b. Work-family conflict has shown a strong negative effect on well-being and a relatively strong positive effect on perceived stress (WFC → WB:  $\beta = -.299$ ,  $t = 5.125$ ,  $p = .000$ ; WFC → PS:  $\beta = .286$ ,  $t = 3.923$ ,  $p = .000$ ), thus supporting H2a and H2b. Although organizational response has not shown a significant association with well-being as hypothesized (H3a), it did exert a strong negative effect on perceived stress (H3b; OR → WB:  $\beta = .072$ ,  $t = 1.031$ ,  $p = .151$ ; OR → PS:  $\beta = -.252$ ,  $t = 3.530$ ,  $p = .000$ ). Finally, the findings show that perceived stress has the strongest negative effect on well-being (PS → WB:  $\beta = -.459$ ,  $t = 5.930$ ,  $p = .000$ ), hence, H4a is accepted. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 4.

**Indirect hypothesis testing.** Adaptability, work-family conflict, and organizational response have been hypothesized to impact well-being through perceived stress. Based on the mediation analysis results obtained from Smart PLS 3 output, perceived stress mediates two of these relationships: work-family conflict with well-being ( $\beta = .115$ ,  $t = 2.649$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and organizational response with well-being ( $\beta = -.131$ ,  $t = 3.553$ ,  $p = .003$ ), hence accepting H4c and H4d, but not H4b (adaptability:  $\beta = .06$ ,  $t = 1.666$ ,  $p = .053$ ).

The indirect effect parameter recorded 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI for organizational response and family-work conflict through perceived stress: [LL=0.006, UL=0.125], [LL=0.055, UL=0.198], and [LL=-0.197, UL=-0.076]. It did not straddle a 0 in between, indicating that there is a mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008). However, the indirect effect logged 95% bias-corrected bootstrap CI for career adaptability through perceived stress: [LL=-0.001, UL=0.121], straddling a 0 in between, indicating that there is no mediation. The results of mediation analysis are presented in Table 5.

**Table 2.** Construct Reliability and Validity.

Construct	Item	Loadings	AVE	VIF	Composite reliability
Career adaptability (CA)	CA1	0.827	.805	2.172	.943
	CA2	0.926		3.649	
	CA3	0.927		4.306	
	CA4	0.904		3.524	
Family-work conflict (FW)	FW1	0.832	.680	1.847	.700
	FW2	0.905		2.195	
	FW3	0.728		1.359	
Work-family conflict (WF)	WF1	0.748	.693	1.363	.871
	WF2	0.862		1.895	
	WF3	0.881		1.934	
Well-being (WB)	WB1	0.869	.645	3.21	.900
	WB2	0.828		2.776	
	WB3	0.700		1.568	
	WB4	0.742		1.7	
	WB5	0.864		2.306	
Organizational response (OR)	OR1	0.761	.694	1.716	.919
	OR2	0.766		1.932	
	OR3	0.83		2.197	
	OR4	0.894		2.776	
	OR5	0.905		3.221	
Perceived stress (PS)	PS1	0.821	.752	2.567	.948
	PS2	0.851		3.029	
	PS3	0.872		3.024	
	PS4	0.901		3.649	
	PS5	0.869		3.518	
	PS6	0.886		3.372	

**Table 3.** Discriminant Validity: Heterotrait-Monotrait Ratio.

Construct	CA	FW	WF	WB	OR	PS
CA	1					
FW	0.216	1				
WF	0.178	0.703	1			
WB	0.316	0.419	0.517	1		
OR	0.185	0.131	0.091	0.232	1	
PS	0.245	0.195	0.385	0.650	0.289	1

Source: Teo et al. (2008).

Note. CA=adaptability; FW=family-work conflict; WF=work-family conflict; WB=well-being; OR=organizational response; PS=perceived stress.

## Discussion

Employee well-being, work stress, and work-life balance are issues of interest for researchers, policymakers, managers, and organizations. Their impact is obvious during normal conditions and exacerbated during pandemics such as the COVID-19. The current study investigated employee well-being from multiple aspects: personal, family, and organization levels. While there are ample studies that address employee well-being, a combination of these important factors is largely missing in the literature. Our study has incorporated adaptability, work-family conflict, and organizational response that are believed to affect stress and well-being.

The Partial Least Square analysis indicates that more than 45% of variance has been explained by the study model and six out of seven direct hypotheses are supported. Perceived stress has the strongest (negative) effect on employee well-being. Working from home in full-time mode and for a prolonged period has an impact on employees' stress levels. Higher stress leads to lower well-being among employees. This finding concurs with previous studies (Bell et al., 2012; Fortes-Ferreira et al., 2006; Shani & Pizam, 2009; Tsaor & Tang, 2012; Wang et al., 2017).

Achieving work-life balance is further challenged during a pandemic since employees are required to work from their home environments. Consistent with previous studies

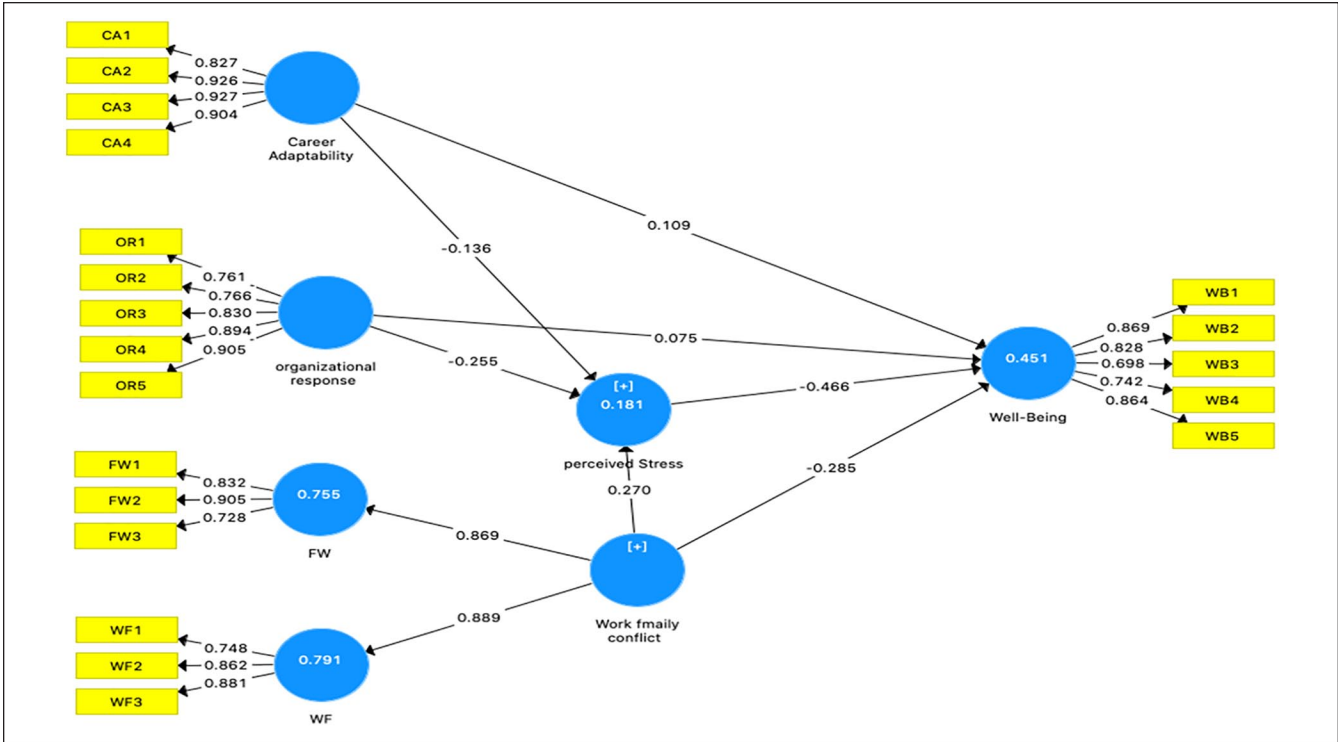


Figure 1. PLS algorithm path model.

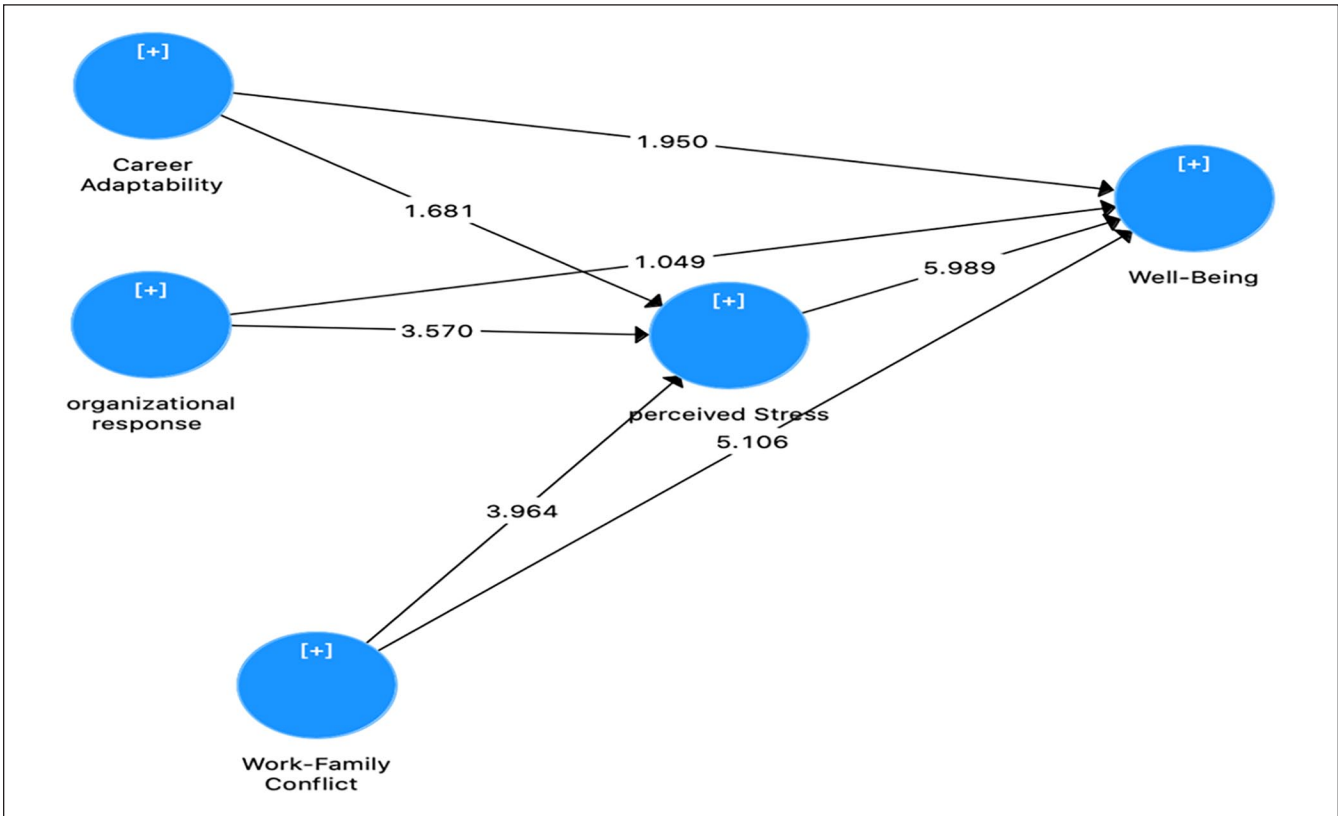


Figure 2. Bootstrapping results.



**Table 4.** Hypothesis Testing Summary.

Hypotheses		Path	Path coefficient ( $\beta$ )	T-statistics	p Values	Decision
H1	a	CA→WB	.108	1.963	.025	Supported
	b	CA→PS	-.132	1.693	.045	Supported
H2	a	WFC→WB	-.299	5.125	.000	Supported
	b	WFC→PS	.286	3.923	.000	Supported
H3	a	OR→WB	.072	1.031	.151	Not supported
	b	OR→PS	-.252	3.530	.000	Supported
H4	a	PS→WB	-.459	5.930	.000	Supported

Note. CA=adaptability; WFC=work-family conflict; OR=organizational response; PS=perceived stress ( $R^2=.189$ ); WB=well-being ( $R^2=.454$ ).

**Table 5.** Hypothesis Testing on Mediation.

Hypothesis	Path	Path coefficient ( $\beta$ )	T-Statistics	Confidence interval (BC)		Decision	
				LL	UL		
H4	b	CA→PS→WB	.06	1.666	-0.001	0.121	Not supported
	c	WFC→PS→WB	-.131	3.553	-0.197	-0.075	Supported
	d	OR→PS→WB	.115	2.649	0.055	0.198	Supported

(Brenning et al., 2020; Obrenovic et al., 2020; Panatik et al., 2011; Terry & Woo, 2020), the work-family conflict has a strong adverse effect on Malaysian employees' well-being and a strong positive effect on perceived stress. Thus, drawing a line between these blurred domains becomes almost impossible, particularly for families with school children where schools and day-care centers are closed for extended periods of time. During this mandatory lockdown, people must work until late nights and during weekends to fulfil job commitments.

Contrary to the a priori hypothesis set, the organizational response has no direct impact on Malaysian employees' well-being, possibly because of the effective communicative strategies and managerial support. Improved organizational communication is expected to help employees be more productive in performing daily tasks and routine jobs, which are crucial for reducing employees' perceived stress (Johansen et al., 2012). Reducing job-related stress, however, does not necessarily translate into better well-being since well-being tends to be experienced in continuous and long-term courses. The effect of organizational response on employee well-being, therefore, appears to be indirect through perceived stress.

Navigating ways of working and adapting to high uncertainty eventually impact employee well-being (Maggiori et al., 2013; Ng et al., 2020; Ocampo et al., 2018; Sony & Mekoth, 2016). Employees' adaptability to uncertainty is important for strengthening their well-being and reducing their perceived stress, however, it has a weak effect on well-being. Yet, adaptability to the new norms appears to help reduce stress among employees and promote well-being (Fiori et al., 2015; Johnston et al., 2013).

Perceived stress plays a mediating role in the relationship between work-family conflict and organizational response on the well-being of Malaysian employees, but not adaptability. The absence of the mediating role of perceived stress in adaptability and well-being may be attributed to the fact that adaptability relates to the management of thoughts, feelings and behaviors (Martin et al., 2012), which are believed to be directly aligned with well-being.

### *Implications, Limitations, and Future Directions*

The study has implications that are relevant to stress and well-being in the organizational setting during pandemics. First, the study revealed that the direction and magnitude of perceived stress and its effect on well-being are highly significant. Stressors that were experienced and reported during quarantine and lockdown include fear of infection, fear of financial loss, the inadequacy of information, frustration, and boredom (Brooks et al., 2020). Such stressful events can have a severe negative effect on well-being. The way that organizations react to such crises (by keeping communication channels open and employees well-informed) seems to be key in relieving stress among their staff. A recent guide published by the International Labour Organisation (2020b) has reported that interactions between employers and their employees significantly increased during COVID-19, where 88% of such increase was for communicating health and safety tips. Providing advice on working from home accounted for 84% while offering tips on remotely managing the workforce was 76%. The same guide provides organizations with some communication-focused recommendations to ensure communication effectiveness. Recommendations

include establishing communication norms, incorporating social aspects of work, using available communication options, ensuring clarity, and offering encouragement and support (see International Labour Organisation, 2020b). These types of responses are likely to reduce stress and enhance well-being.

Second, the findings show how work-family conflict increases stress and hinders the well-being of employees. To help employees reduce the conflict/interference between work and family domains, employers should probably keep workloads more manageable and set clear and realistic expectations regarding the results that are to be achieved. This could help employees stay more organized, taking charge of their tasks and time. Lastly, to cope with job stress, employees should be adaptive during times of uncertainty such as COVID-19. This will help them function well and remain psychologically sound.

This study is not without limitations. First, although the PLS bootstrapping procedures with 5,000 sample replications was used, the sample size remains relatively small (184 employees). The reality is that due to the pandemic itself, it was hard to acquire a larger sample. Despite the insights obtained in this study, this limitation along with the utilization of convenience sampling procedure hinder the generalizability of the findings. Thus, future research should increase the sample size and include other units of analysis (i.e., dyadic), perhaps involving the opinions of supervisors and spouses/partners. Incorporating the opinions of these categories of respondents will enrich results. Second, despite incorporating three levels of aspects, personal (adaptability), family (work-family conflict), and organization (organizational response), the current study only utilized one dimension of adaptability and treated work-family conflict as a higher order. Future research should consider including more dimensions of adaptability to capturing the full concept. Future researchers are also recommended to treat work-family conflict as a first-order construct to feature the effect of work on family interference and family on work interference. Finally, a longitudinal design is recommended in future studies to capture the essence of well-being during and post-crisis. Longitudinal studies on well-being could assess the determinants of well-being at different stages of COVID-19 or compare the findings during and after lockdowns.

## Conclusion

This study investigated the effect of adaptability, work-family conflict, and organizational response on Malaysian employees' well-being in the current COVID-19 crisis. This effect was examined in light of possible mediating roles of job stress and moderating impacts of gender, level of education, and types of employment. Based on a set of hypotheses established for this purpose, well-being was assumed to be positively affected by adaptability and organizational

response, and negatively affected by family-work conflict. These impacts were also assumed to be mediated by stress. The results of the study generally confirm the theoretical assumptions. Except for the missing effect of organizational response on well-being as well as the mediating effect of stress in the case of adaptability, the remaining relationships exhibit established effects.

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## Ethical Approval

As a voluntary survey, there were no ethical issues associated with this survey. The responses were fully anonymous.

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