

## **How young Malaysians, job recruiters are adapting to Covid-19 norms as country struggles with lockdowns**

IPOH (July 13): Ahmad Nazrin Yusoff is one of the many economic casualties of Malaysia's repeated Covid-19 lockdowns.

However, the 27-year-old who is based in Ipoh, Perak hasn't given up hope of finding new employment after losing his job earlier this year. Recently, he applied for the position of an assistant chef in Melaka and was told to attend an online interview.

It was his first time doing a video interview and he was a bundle of nerves, wondering how he would be assessed for the role virtually.

But the interview went smoother than he thought. He came away preferring this new norm as he felt the interviewers were less judgmental compared to when he was interviewed in person for his previous job.

"I personally believe that online interviews are the way to move forward. We can save time and also the travelling cost. It will be a win-win situation for both the interviewees and also the company.

"Furthermore, we can prepare all the necessary documents at home and there won't be a problem of forgetting to bring documents or certificates to the interview.

"If we missed out on anything, we are still able to get it, but it's not possible in physical interviews, especially if the interviews are held in different states or even places far from our home," he told Malay Mail.

With the Covid-19 pandemic showing no signs of slowing down, employers and job recruits have been forced to hold virtual interviews as physical movement has been restricted to curb the spread of the virus.

### **WFH**

While some companies have already adapted to work meetings and recruitment online even before the pandemic started, this new norm has been a challenge for those who graduated in the past one-and-a-half years.

Low Hwei Li got her present job as a software engineer with Vitrox Corporation Berhad after her first online interview on Google Meet.

The 23-year-old who graduated from Quest International University earlier this year, shared that she had never gone through an on-site interview and worried about how she might perform even though she had completed her internship with the same company in May.

She found the online experience less nerve-wracking than she initially thought.

“It’s like a normal meeting except that you’ll have to turn on your camera to show yourself (so that your interviewer can observe you) and carry on with the questions asked by the interviewer,” she said.

“Since I have done an internship with the same company, I don’t have a communication problem as I know who my colleagues are and all our meetings are carried out virtually through Google Meeting,” she said.

Now, she has adjusted to working from home (WFH) and enjoys the flexibility and comfort it accords, but only she has a quiet environment and the internet connection is stable.

### **Good internet and quiet home**

Low wasn’t the only one. Almost all the recently employed people interviewed by Malay Mail said that while they preferred WFH, the downside was that it was heavily reliant on good internet connectivity.

They also said they had experienced malfunctioning microphones and interruptions from their family members while working.

One exception was Amir Abdul Rahim, a banker from Ipoh, who recently attended an interview for a job promotion with the same firm.

“For me the interview went smooth. When you have good internet connection, there won’t be any problem.

“Plus, I have also informed my family about the interview and I did the interview in my room, so there wasn’t any disturbance,” he said.

### **Bonding with colleagues**

Like Ahmad, 23-year-old Kourtney Goh said she initially felt intimidated attending an online interview.

Goh, who graduated from Quest International University last November, also said later that doing it at home instead of a formal office setting was more comfortable.

She applied for the job one month before her graduation and was hired as an account executive with advertising firm Leo Burnett in Kuala Lumpur the following month.

The rookie said her biggest job challenge since then has been “bonding” with her work colleagues whom she has only met online.

“I’m from Kuala Lumpur and the company I’m working for is also from there. However, we need to work from home as movement is restricted to curb the spread of Covid-19.

“When meeting my colleagues and clients through virtual means, it took time for us to bond with each other, but it’s working out just fine now,” she told Malay Mail.

Aina Amalina Muhammad from Puncak Alam, Selangor said she found WFH a real challenge in her new job as a BIM modeller. Her work requires her to create a three-dimensional visual plan for architectural projects.

She said training sessions are provided online but has found it less effective compared to on-site training. Part of this is because she hasn’t really got to know her co-workers or them, her.

“Imagine, if you never visit your office physically and you don’t meet your colleagues in person. You will not know who to refer to if you have any doubt or problem about the work.

“There won’t be any seniors present to assist you in the job when we work from home. If fact, we wouldn’t know them unless there is an ice-breaking session held online. But I doubt companies will do that just for one new worker,” the 27-year-old said.

“Also there are more chances of misunderstanding when we communicate online. Sometimes the bosses or even our colleagues misunderstand the message that we really mean when sent online,” she added.

Aina, whose company is based in Kuala Lumpur, disclosed that she has applied for the same job with another company based in Johor.

“At the moment, I’m yet to receive any feedback from the company which interviewed me,” she said.

G. Vicanes Jay, 32, who recently attended an online interview for an accountant position, said he liked that it was convenient and comfortable but he still prefers face-to-face interviews.

“The reason is when you meet your employer in person, they know you’re real and there is more convincing power when you talk to someone in person.

“You would be able to build trust. I don’t think we can do that in an online interview,” he said.

Job hunters are not the only ones who have to adapt in to the new norms. Job recruiters too have had to pivot to video conferencing platforms to assess applicants.

## **Adaptability and stamina**

Jonathan Andrew Nonis, the executive director of Kuala Lumpur-based recruitment firm Alexis International told Malay Mail that video conferencing is the new normal as it is much more appropriate during the pandemic.

He added: "It has definitely impacted on the most important human factor where face-to-face is always important to have with the physical presence in an office environment.

"It's more of an evolution that we're seeing now where companies adopt tools to streamline their recruitment to adapt to the situation, which is a stop go or temporary measure until it's safer to revert towards methods where the setting is more preferred."

Talent acquisition consultant Mas Ziana Norhasran who works for recruitment firm SRG Asia Pacific Sdn Bhd has noticed a surge of applications from those who were retrenched. Most of them were from the aviation and hospitality sector due to the sharp drop in tourism.

"We have encountered quite a number of applicants that were retrenched, most used to be in the airline industry and hotel lines," she told Malay Mail.

She noted that a lot of applicants have made the most of the pandemic and the convenient way of job interview for a career switch or even look for better opportunities.

"At the same time, as the retail and outsourcing industry was on a mass-hiring spree, a lot of existing employees took advantage to change their career and look for better opportunities for a better salary.

"Also, with virtual interviews making a new trend in this pandemic, it made application for job interviews a lot easier," she told Malay Mail.

However, she added that while the quantity of applications has risen enormously, the quality of applicants failed to match as many were still struggling to adapt to new norms or changing to a different line.

Mas Ziana said that a number of applicants who managed to land the job would quit after two or three weeks.

"When I say quality applicants, it means that they will stay in the job for at least a year and can cope with the new environment or even industry," she explained.

Maureen Gomez, chief talent officer at advertising Publicis Groupe Malaysia, said that WFH also means longer working hours due to conference calls with clients, brainstorming sessions and working with internal and external teams.

New graduates who are entering the job market for the first time often find themselves at sea in such an environment.

“Our organisation members are more than willing to train fresh grads. But it also depends on the individual to be able to cope with the industry demands. Some fresh graduates are able to learn so much and there are some who are overwhelmed by the work. The industry is very fast paced which demands perseverance and determination as the key to success.

“Since the pandemic we have to work remotely, there are times that communication between new hires and seniors are delayed due to busy schedules,” she said.

The Department of Statistics Malaysia has disclosed that unemployment in January rose to 4.9 per cent compared to 4.8 per cent in December 2020.

Chief statistician Malaysia Datuk Seri Dr Mohd Uzir Mahidin said Malaysia’s labour market remains in a challenging situation following the rising number of Covid-19 cases. – Malay Mail

<https://www.theborneopost.com/2021/07/13/how-young-malaysians-job-recruiters-are-adapting-to-covid-19-norms-as-country-struggles-with-lockdowns/>