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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Identifying the Meaning of Work Factors among Lecturer Profession

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Abstract: Lecturers as the central position of educators have noble duties. In reality, regulations related to lecturer careers management, clarity of the lecturer profession, are starting to erode the essence of an educator in the lecturer profession. This research using a qualitative approach with systematic analysis that aims to identify the value of meaning of work for lecturers in the onslaught of workload, regulations and ambiguity experienced by lecturers today. Based on interviews and data analysis, the three values of meaningful work among lecturers are internalization of the profession, lifelong learning, and personal integrity. This research is expected to be a consideration for policy makers in formulating regulations for the teaching profession.

Keywords: lecturer, meaning of work

1. Introduction

As a way to meet daily needs, working has become a daily activity for individuals. As this process continue for a lifetime, individuals in their work need encouragement to avoid counterproductive behavior (boredom, stagnation) at work. Reflecting Maslow's theory (A. Maslow, 1954), most individual behavior is driven by fulfilling basic needs (clothing, food, shelter). Gradually, individual needs will increase as basic needs are met. In the context of work, when individuals start working, individuals will tend to be less selective because working is only driven by fulfilling basic needs. As time goes by, the individual will develop other needs in which expanding from physical needs to non-physical, such as job facilities, workload, things that become passions in the work, happiness, and meaningfulness. If these needs are not met, a prevalence of counterproductive behavior can emerge. Therefore, in this article, the meaningfulness of work is something that will be studied further. Searching for meaning of work can be done by all jobs, including lecturers.

In general, educating other people is an invaluable activity, align with the phrase from Bahasa Indonesia "*guru adalah pahlawan tanpa tanda jasa*". Lecturers as teachers in higher education have a centric position in providing education. This educational role is not limited to students, but to the community (through community service) and general public (through research publications) as well. Problems in the teaching profession arise when regulations related to career management are applied to lecturers. To achieve the highest career, a lecturer is required to write in a reputable international journal as the ideal of the Indonesian mission, in which winning the Nobel Prize and internationalize higher education (Napitupulu, 2023). The implementation of these regulations triggered some conflict, which means lecturers' time is co-opted with the technical order of performance reporting. The bureaucratization of lecturers' work is starting to slowly undermine the university's central role as a forum for knowledge development. The way how research conducted in the past was emphasized more on social service so that it was able to produce the original, beneficial knowledge (Rohanawati & Fathana, 2023) which is very contrast to this present conditions due to the latest regulations. Lecturers are starting to lose their motivation or even their "soul" while working



on their profession which actually requires originality, freedom of thought, and the embodiment of noble moral values rather than the technical work.

Furthermore, the issue of lecturer welfare has also become a highlight in this profession. Apart from salary levels varying between universities, salary levels are also unclear (Dzulfikar, 2022). This condition has become difficult for several lecturers who are experiencing financial challenges. Reflecting on Maslow's motivation theory (A. Maslow, 1954), humans will try to fulfill needs starting with basic needs. The financial challenges of a lecturer with uncertain salary will encourage lecturers to seek additional income outside their profession (Dzulfikar, 2022), creating a lack of focus on the professionalism of the lecturer to the point of losing the essence of being an educator.

Various problems in the teaching profession encourage us to research further into the “spirit” that exists in the work of lecturers, even though conditions are full of challenges in this profession. In the following research, “spirit” is operationalized as the meaning of work, namely the harmony of an individual’s perception with the actual conditions of the work they are involved in (Pignault & Houssemand, 2021). It is hoped that this research will be a consideration for policy makers in formulating regulations for the teaching profession.

2. Literature Review

Meaning of work is the synergy between an individual’s perception of their work and actual conditions (Pignault & Houssemand, 2021). In simple terms, individuals will feel happy and comfortable if the reality that occurs is in accordance with expectations. The meaning of work makes individuals have more positive feelings (M. F. Steger et al., 2013), a more harmonious household (Torrey & Duffy, 2012), and avoid work stress and depression (Steger, 2012). The sources of meaning of work are divided into several aspects (Rosso et al., 2010), namely:

2.1. Authenticity

Authenticity can be defined as a sense of coherence or alignment between an individual’s behavior and perception of the “true” self. Authenticity is often described as an underlying central self-motive that helps individuals maintain a sense of meaning and order in life. Authenticity consists of self-concordance, namely the extent to which individuals believe that they behave consistently with their interests and values.

2.2. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in their strengths and abilities to produce a desired effect or to make a difference (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy shows that the experience of self-efficacy in or as a consequence of work contributes to meaningfulness because it allows individuals to feel they have the ability and competence to make changes or exercise control in the environment.

2.3. Self-esteem

Self-esteem is a persistent individual trait as well as a state that can be formed through personal or collective experiences and achievements. Research using self-esteem as a mechanism of meaningfulness suggests that feelings of accomplishment or affirmation resulting from work experiences help to fulfill individuals’ motivation to believe that they are valuable and worthy individuals (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002).

2.4. Goals

Purpose is defined as a sense of direction and intentionality in life. Scholars and philosophers alike have long argued that pursuing a goal gives life meaning. A sense of purpose has been believed to have an important role in the construction of meaning and meaningfulness of work through its ability to connect current events with anticipated future events and circumstances (e.g., happiness, love, safety) (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002).



2.5. Sense of belonging

A sense of belonging is defined as a pervasive drive to form and maintain at least persistent, positive, and significant interpersonal relationships. A sense of belonging plays a role in constructing meaningfulness in most of the literature on the meaning of work. Overall, this research suggests that memberships and feeling connected to a social group through work can provide individuals with meaningfulness by helping them experience positive feelings of shared identity, fate, or humanity with others (Homans, 1958).

2.6. Transcendence

Transcendence refers to connecting or replacing the ego with an entity greater than the self or beyond the material world (Maslow, 1971). In contrast to previous mechanisms that explain how work becomes meaningful, the transcendence mechanism suggests the opposite: work is meaningful when individuals can subordinate themselves to groups, experiences, or entities that transcend the self. One way to approach the meaning of work that uses a transcendence mechanism is related to the meaningfulness that results from connecting something outside or bigger than oneself with oneself.

2.7. Understanding of culture and interpersonal

Cultural and interpersonal mechanisms of understanding are very different from the previous six mechanisms because they mostly involve the production of meaning rather than meaningfulness. Other mechanisms tend to focus on how meaningful work is as a result of its alignment with characteristics of the self or others, whereas cultural and interpersonal mechanisms of understanding focus on understanding how different types of work meaning are constructed. Thus, the notions of culture and interpersonal include sociocultural forces that shape the meaning that individuals make from various aspects of work.

3. Research Method

This research is conducted using a qualitative approach, a phenomenological study. This approach is intended to find out a person's foundation or motives according to their life experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2007), in this case the process of lecturers interpreting their work. The respondents in this research were lecturers with different backgrounds. Respondent A has worked as a lecturer since he first started working, respondent B is a practitioner who decided to become a lecturer/teacher, and respondent C is a practitioner who decided to carry out the teaching profession while maintaining another professional job outside the university. This research uses a semi-structured interview approach which can direct researchers without limiting the things that can be explored by respondents. Data is processed using a systematic approach starting from narrow units of analysis to broader units (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). Researchers highlight respondents' statements that giving a picture of the topic (meaning of work) and grouping them based on similar features to produce several meanings. This process produced themes that became the findings of this research.

4. Results and Discussion

Based on interviews conducted with three respondents, several themes were found that could explain the elements of meaning of work for lecturers. Researchers found several themes, namely the internalization of the profession, lifelong learning, and personal integrity.

4.1. The Internalization of the Profession

Being a lecturer is interpreted as a job that is not only orient to tangible income, but goes further to intangible one. Furthermore, there was internalization in the three respondents in carrying out their work as lecturers which was not only related to fulfilling daily needs through materials, but also fulfilling the psychological side that comes from the lecturer profession. The first respondent believed that there was no other job that she believed was right for her other than as a lecturer. For second respondents, being an educator (in this case a lecturer) is

a personal calling. The third respondent who was actively working found something different about the lecturer profession when compared to the activities she was involved in outside the university. These findings can be seen in the following interview excerpt.

“This job (lecturer) is kinda new for me, as starting at 2017. Along the way, I actually applied for another job once, because I felt like my path wasn’t here, in my thought I’m more suited to just being in front of a laptop, the one who works, not the one who meets people. But apparently after doing it for several months to year, I was able to find the rhythm. Now, I don't think I have any other reason to work anywhere else.” A, S1, 10-12

“Almost all of us know that being a civil servant is a job that is known for being permanent and stable. I myself have been serving as a civil servant for a long time, I have tried various division, in other words I have tried various fields of work. But I think I really found something interesting about teaching other people, coaching other people. That’s why, even though I’m still a civil servant, I decided to be a widyaiswara lecturer for civil servant in training and development program) instead (because I feel this is my calling.” B, S2, 11-13

“In my opinion, even though I have worked all over the place, but it seems like I am always stumbled upon a way to be a teacher, to be a lecturer. Is this a sign or something? Well yes maybe, that’s what I thought. Finally, I tried to take this opportunity and it turned out to be different, in a good way. Turns out this (job) gave me something different in my heart.” C, S3, 14-15

4.2. Lifelong learning

The second theme found in this research is lifelong learning. Becoming a lecturer requires the three respondents to continuously update their knowledge and follow relevant information and trends in the field they teach. This lifelong learning process is interpreted in different ways by each respondent. For the first respondent, she found that meeting students kept her mind busy and open and made her want to continue learning. The second respondent embodied this learning process by pursuing education up to doctoral level at a relatively young age. The third respondent, who was said to have been very active since she was young, also had her own challenges in starting the lifelong learning process she started. These findings can be seen in the following interview excerpt.

“I like meeting students the most (than other extra work related to lecturer profession). Meeting students feels like you have friends, you feel young again, and then it feels like this is how you open your mind to something new. So it’s exciting, you can learn more and keep learning.” A, S1, 13-14

“So, before I became a civil servant, I tried everything that could make money. Back then, typing skill (on the typewriter or computer) was still relatively rare, there were still many people who weren’t very good at it, so I learned that (skill). I opened a typing course when I was young. It turns out my enthusiasm for learning continues increasing. After become the civil servant and getting the opportunity to continue my study, I continued my Masters in Jogja using an office scholarship and continue to enrolled the doctoral program in Surabaya. It’s like I always want to learning. In line with my ultimate goal in this profession.” B, S2, 13-16

“I’ve always been an active person. Those who know me definitely know that I’m really a total person in everything. If it’s not total, it’s definitely not me. When I was an undergraduate in the old days, I had three or four variables for my thesis. So, when I was in Masters, the challenges were more exciting, I was still raising two small children. But what about it, I really like (learning). Plus, now that I’m a lecturer, I’m even more enthusiastic about updating the knowledge for my students.” C, S3, 16-19

4.3. *Personal integrity*

The final theme that emerged in the meaning of work as a lecturer was personal integrity, namely the process of respondents needing to maintain ethical values as lecturers, including having integrity with themselves. Lecturers' work in researching, educating and serving is the type of work that requires exploration and thinking. Each lecturer will have their own rhythm and style in carrying out these three obligations. This is in line with the technical reporting of lecturers' work which is not in the form of a superior-subordinate report, but rather a confirmatory report. Therefore, integrity with oneself becomes a value that is interpreted by lecturers. This process emerged for the three respondents with various dynamics. For the first respondent, the personal integrity she held was reflected in the research, while for the second respondent it appeared more in the objectivity of giving grades to the students he taught. The integrity of the third respondent is reflected in the implementation of teaching which she needed to be focus in between her busy schedule as a professional practitioner. These findings can be seen in the following interview excerpt.

“The first time I tried research, it turned out to be fun. In the beginning, I didn't really understand what to do, I had to learn to write (academically) again. But I'm still doing it, just taking it slow. If you want to bypass it, you can, but why'd you have to do that? You're still young, there's still a lot of time to learn.” A, S1, 15-18

“There is indeed an art to being a teacher for civil servants. Sometimes there are entrustments from relatives, entrustments from leaders, things like that. But I keep trying to uphold my principles firmly. I'm sure learning is not difficult. So I still give grades as they are, in the sense that I still encourage every student I teach to be able to achieve maximum grades, so that the good grades I give are indeed their hard work.” B, S2, 17-19

“It's really busy (my daily activities). But yeah, basically I can't keep quiet and very active. Well, maybe I'll ask an assistant to help me input the mid-term scores, but I'll still be the one who giving grades, I'll still read the students' work because I'm still the one who knows how to assess correctly. The same thing also works when I give community service. I'll totally giving my best. The more people asking me question, the happier I am.” C, S3, 20-22

Based on interviews and data analysis, there are three themes that determine the meaning of work for lecturers. The first theme, namely internalization of the profession, talks about the meaning of the teaching profession for each respondent. This process occurs when the profession has become an immersive part of the self. A concept that is in line with professional internalization is job identification which is defined as the degree to which an individual internalizes their work identity as a valid part of themselves (Ashcraft, 2017). Professional identification also appeared different between countries so that there will be differences in the antecedents of identification by individuals in that profession from each country (Kragt & Day, 2015). The teaching profession in Finland, which is a prestigious profession (Agarwal, 2023), will be different from the internalization process experienced by individuals with the same profession in other countries, such as Indonesia. In this research, the internalization occurs in to non-material aspects and focus on psychological aspects, such as soul calling and work comfort. This is an element that is inherent in the meaning of work as a lecturer.

The second theme found was lifelong learning. The three respondents have in common of openness to innovation and the drive to continue to increase their knowledge and insight. This is in line with the concept of lifelong learning which is defined as a supportive process that continuously stimulates and empowers individuals to acquire all the knowledge, values, skills and understanding needed throughout life and apply them with confidence (Bryce et al., 2000). Lifelong learning involves all strategies implemented to create opportunities for individuals to learn throughout life. Therefore, this becomes a conscious and continuous

learning process carried out throughout life and directed towards meeting the relevant needs of individuals and communities (Laal & Salamati, 2012). This is beneficial not only for developing individuals who are responsible for their social environment, but also for understanding and being actively involved at all levels of society (Abukari, 2005). In this research, the concept of lifelong learning occurred in all three respondents. The learning process which is carried out without limiting the age is used to develop levels of society in education, research and service carried out in the lecturer profession.

The third theme in this research is personal integrity. The three respondents showed a close connection between work as a lecturer and maintaining personal integrity which is required for this profession. Integrity is the quality of behavior that is appropriate or in harmony with relevant moral values, norms and rules (Huberts, 2018). Moreover, integrity is closely related to things that are considered important and valuable for individuals, namely the individual's encouragement to produce behavior that is in line with valuable things while avoiding behavior that is contrary to these things (Frankfurt, 2019). In line with this, the three respondents described the meaning of the teaching profession as something that was considered important and valuable for each respondent. This encouraged the three respondents to demonstrate integrity behavior at work - doing things that are recommended and avoiding things that are inappropriate.

5. Conclusion

This research found three factors that build the meaning of work among lecturers, which are the internalization of profession, lifelong learning, and personal integrity. The internalization of profession talks about psychological aspects as an important element in the teaching profession. The second value is lifelong learning, which means a learning process without age limits that is carried out to provide benefits to the teaching profession. The value of personal integrity talks about productive and ethical behavior carried out by lecturers due to the meaning of the profession as something that is considered important and valuable.

This research can be used as suggestions and considerations for policy makers to synthesize strategies for the lecturer profession that are in line with the meaning of individuals who work as lecturers. This research can also be a basis for universities in designing career development for lecturers under their auspices. Furthermore, this research can also be developed further to find out more about the dynamics that occur between the themes found in this research.

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