

# Life Experiences in the New Normal: Interpersonal Communication, Work Values and Job Commitment of Young Professionals

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## Abstract

*The pandemic has hit every single employee detrimentally, leaving each one feeling worried about how to make ends meet especially in this new normal. Using qualitative measures to probe the living experiences of the young professionals in the highly affected economic sectors of General Santos City - Philippines, eight-core themes were extracted using Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam phenomenological analysis. Results revealed that the economic uncertainty, as well as the psychological and personal consequences brought by the pandemic, have kept young professionals staying in their existing jobs; thus, allowing them to seek multiple employment. It was found out that young professionals developed a certain perspective towards employment, making job security a central aspect in staying committed to their jobs. More so, the participants manifested a dynamic communication style which became one of the essential aspects of expressing concern in the organization and they also regarded family values as a driving force in striving to live. Findings also revealed that it was not the nature of adversity, such as the threat brought by the pandemic, that was most important, but how individuals dealt with it. In this paper, when young professionals faced adversity or frustration in this new normal, protective factors of resilience, work values, commitment and communication helped them survive, recover, and even thrive in the face and wake of misfortunes.*

**Keywords—** lived experiences, interpersonal communication, work values, job commitment, employee experience, pandemic, COVID-19.

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is affecting several communities in unprecedented ways – this includes employment. In only a few months after the Wuhan Municipal Health Commission of China reported a cluster of cases of pneumonia in Wuhan, Hubei Province in December 2019, the coronavirus pandemic has upended the daily lives of people around the world (World Health Organization, 2020). The several restrictions on daily life due to Covid 19 have led to the closure of many companies and the laying-off of employees and staff-either permanently or temporarily.

In the United States of America (USA), with more than 30 million people filing for unemployment, the country is predicted to experience a coronavirus-induced recession through 2021 (Connley, Hess, & Lui, 2020). Moreover, the International Labor Organization (ILO), an agency of the

United Nations, reported that the outbreak is expected to wipe out 6.7% of working hours across the world.

Similarly, in the Philippines, the economy is anticipated to lose between P276.3 billion and P2.5 trillion, depending on how the coronavirus pandemic develops Olano, (2020), and estimated the high trajectory and magnitude of the outbreak in the country under various scenarios and that the global economy would fall into a recession (Philippine Institute for Development Studies - PIDS, 2020).

Locally, the city government of General Santos (Gensan) City has temporarily shut down the operations of various business industries such as the entertainment and recreation-related establishments as a control measure against the spread Covid 19 under the Executive Order (EO) No. 16 mandating the closure of business permits among resorts, recreational facilities, internet cafes, bowling lanes, online bingo, electronic games facilities, cockpits, cinemas, karaoke places, bars, arcade shops,

massage spa, salon, and similar establishments are temporarily suspended. This suspension of business in the city has resulted in the unemployment of roughly 28% of local workers (Estabillo & Gubalani, 2020).

In addition, according to the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) Field Office Head of General Santos City, the temporary suspension of some industries, the pandemic still has earnestly affected the city's workforce. The suspension of business has led to many employees jumping from one employment to another, while others deliberately lose their jobs.

In the city alone, the DOLE Gensan has identified the top 5 businesses which greatly affected by the pandemic which include the local manufacturing businesses in the city; service and retail sectors; health and wellness; construction supplies; and lastly, academic institutions. Adding to this, the DOLE Gensan has reported that most of the affected workers are young adults which have lesser years of work experience.

With this scenario, the researchers became motivated to research to explore and understand employee experiences from those economic sectors in the city. Other than that, this study is found to be timely and urgent since there have been few formal studies conducted on the effects of the pandemic among young employees in those economic sectors affected by the restrictions brought by Covid 19. This study was also guided by the premise that exploring employee experiences and understanding how young professionals from the identified industry sectors, used communication, values, and commitment to recover quickly from the pandemic, will redound to significant recommendations which is essential among the human resource and government agencies. It was along this line that the study will be undertaken.

### Statement of the Problem

This research aims to explore the workplace experiences of young professionals. This further investigated how communication, work values, and commitment were manifested in their respective employment during this time of the pandemic. Specifically, this sought answers to the grand tour question:

What are the lived experiences of young professionals in their workplace?

## II. METHODOLOGY

This research study made use of a Modified van Kaam Method of Thematic Analysis of phenomenological data as illustrated by Moustakas in 2000. As cited in the study of Salinas (2016), phenomenology as a methodological framework has evolved into a process that seeks reality in

individuals' narratives of their lived experiences (Cilesiz, 2009).

Moustakas Thematic Analysis in 1994, as cited in the study of Salinas (2016) includes identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns of relevant statements and revealing the core themes within the data. Hence, Thematic Content Analysis as paraphrased by Moustakas in 1994 includes the following procedures:

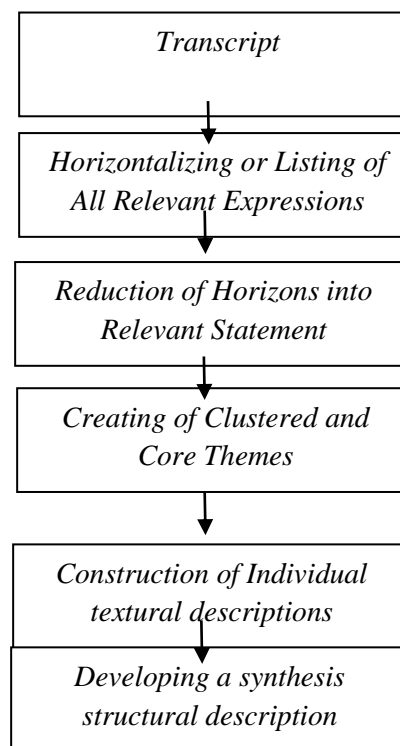


Fig.1. Moustakas Modified van Kaam Method of Thematic Analysis of Phenomenological Data

**Horizontalizing or listing all relevant expressions.** In this part of the data analysis, the researchers should look at all data as every statement has equal value. If some statements are irrelevant to the investigating phenomena and are repetitive or overlapping, the researcher should ignore these statements. In other words, researchers can create a list from the verbatim transcripts and delete all irrelevant expressions. After cleaning the data, the remaining parts of the data are called horizons.

**Reduction of horizons into relevant statements.** In this step, the researcher should cluster horizons into relevant statements. The translated data should be split into the meaning of units so that each of the horizons has only one meaning.

**Creating clustered core themes.** In this step, the researchers clustered and thematized the relevant

statements which became the “core themes of the experience” of the phenomenon

**Construction of individual textural descriptions.** The textural description is a narrative that explains participants’ perceptions of a phenomenon based on the generated core themes. Moreover, the researcher explains the meaning units in a narrative format to facilitate the understanding of participants’ experiences.

**Developing a synthesis structural description.** After the researcher writes the textual description, the researcher should incorporate the textual description into a structure explaining how the experience occurred. The researcher adds the structures at the end of each paragraph to create a structural description. This process helps researchers to understand experiences with the phenomena under investigation.

This study has made use of the Purposeful snowball strategy which involves the researcher selecting the participants purposively since they can understand the phenomenon. Thus, the researchers have decided whether the participants share significant experiences concerning the phenomenon under investigation. The participants of this study were the young professionals working in the five business industries in General Santos City, which were greatly affected by the current circumstance.

**Inclusion Criteria.** In this paper, these ten participants were qualified under the following criteria (regardless of their civil status, sexual orientation, and other demographic profile): should be at least 20years old to 35-year-old to be qualified as a young adult professional; should be an employee who transferred from one job to another; and should be working in the identified economic sectors in the city, as mentioned in this research. This also includes employees who hunted for new employment, since the community lockdown began, and had sought resumption of duties during the duration of the new normal.

Moreover, this research utilized an unstructured interviewing technique in phenomenology. Unstructured interviews (which were conducted primarily online) are the most popular interview method in phenomenological research (Vagle, 2014). Unstructured interviews are dialogic, conversational, and open. Like phenomenological theory, unstructured interviewing is in contrast to quantitative design, which relies on distance and control. A fundamental goal of in-depth interviewing is to understand the lived experiences of the subjects understudied.

The researchers have extracted and analyzed the responses of the participants from the interview using the lens of Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological analysis as cited in the study of Yuksel and Yildirim (2015).

| <i>Core Themes</i>  | <i>Clustered Themes</i>   |
|---|---|
| Convenience and Stability of Life Before the Pandemic         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stability of Income before the Pandemic</li> <li>• Convenient Access to Basic Needs</li> <li>• Boosts Employee Productivity</li> </ul>   |
| Socioeconomic, Emotional and Personal Effects of the Pandemic | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Economical Effect of the Pandemic</li> <li>• Emotional Distress brought by the Pandemic</li> <li>• Effects on Future Career Plans</li> </ul>   |
| Outlook towards New Employment                                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Seeking a constant job security</li> <li>• Personal Circumstances</li> <li>• Organizational Relationship</li> <li>• Extrinsic Motivations</li> </ul>   |
| Communication Dynamics in the Workplace                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use of Direct and Formal Communication</li> <li>• Hesitations to Communicate.</li> <li>• Fear to Share and Open Up</li> </ul>  |
| Value of Job Security in this Pandemic                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preserves job security</li> <li>• Importance of job security</li> </ul>  |
| Sense of Gratitude towards Employment                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gratitude toward Positive Administrative Support</li> <li>• Improved Work-Life Balance</li> <li>• The debt of gratitude towards the company</li> <li>• Just and Fair Compensation</li> </ul> |
| Alignment of Skills and Competencies to Work                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jobs that are within the capabilities</li> <li>• Avoiding Job Mismatch</li> </ul>  |
| Personal Circumstance   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sustain Family’s Needs</li> <li>• Values Learned in the workplace</li> <li>• Provide Self-Fulfillment</li> </ul>   |

Eight core themes had been formulated which reflected the lived experiences of informants. These themes were established from the relevant statements and through

### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### Lived Experiences of Young Professionals

Moustakas's (1994) phenomenological analysis as cited in the study of Yuksel and Yildirim (2015).

The first core theme was about the status of the informants' life before and after the pandemic. This recounted their experiences before the lockdown and when the community quarantine commences worldwide. The informants had compared their life before and after the lockdowns brought by the virus. They reported that life ahead of the community quarantine brings about convenience and stability in their source of income – however, the otherwise ensued when the community lockdowns started.

According to the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 2020, while considered necessary for reducing the risk of spreading COVID-19, the confinement measures are putting unprecedented pressure on local labor markets and economies. This means that since people are restricted to do their routine employment activities, many companies even small industries in the city have terminated their operations. With this, many city people's lives have changed severely – no more convenient life.

Another core theme formulated in this paper is the repercussion of the pandemic on the socioeconomic, psychological, and personal well-being of young professionals. The informants recounted how their socioeconomic status has been impacted by the pandemic. They described the difficulties they experienced after losing their jobs and how their family was affected by this circumstance. Some informants have also developed anxieties, worries, and a certain level of stress that greatly disturbed their mental and emotional health. On the other hand, some informants shared how the pandemic affects their well-being such as when it comes to their decision-making and their career plans.

A pandemic is not just a medical phenomenon (Javed, 2020); it affects individuals and society and causes disruption, anxiety, stress, and worst – death through suicide. According to Awad and Konn (2020), the Philippines has fallen into a deep recession as more than 3000 businesses closed, and more than 100 000 families were left without work because of the economic impacts of COVID-19. To survive this massive outbreak, the government allocated a budget as government assistance. In a report by the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) in 2019, the agency has rolled out cash assistance programs to cover those affected by government measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. Other than that, several private business sectors have also provided an "ayuda" or financial support among employees

Moreover, Work constitutes more than one-third of the working life for most human adults (Loscocco & Roschelle, 2009). Job security is the assurance that an employee will keep their job without the risk of becoming unemployed. This grows to be one of the formidable groundworks of work values. With this, one more theme found in this paper is the informants' attitude towards finding a new job. In this new normal, there have been several motivations why employees sought new employment. In this study, it was found that the employees ought to find a new job due to the issues on job security and compensation, and the type of organizational relationship they have had in their workplace. Some informants transferred to a new job because of inadequate compensation and the feeling that they are not valued as an employee.

The dynamics of how employees communicate their concerns with their immediate superiors is another core theme examined in this paper. There have been informants who became passive communicators which is demonstrated by hesitation and fear in expressing sentiments with their employer – however, some conveyed their feelings through direct communication. Based on the analysis, those informants who were hampered in expressing their worries to their employers were constituted by their feelings of inferiority and the unhealthy working environment they have.

According to Evanish (2020), employees who do not feel they can approach their managers due to fear and apprehension have almost no chance of being engaged at work. This scenario may be a ground for a tremendous organizational effect such as lost feedback, lost context, and insights and may affect the rate of employee retention, morale, and turnover. This is also supported by Wilkie (2017) that fear in communication may be detrimental to employees' morale and productivity.

In addition, another core theme that emerges in this paper is the value of job security. Job security is the probability that an individual will keep their job; a job with a high level of security is such that a person with the job would have a small chance of losing it.

The informants had stated that after jumping from one job to another, their current employment had made their lives meaningful as it preserves job security. It was revealed in this study that job security is one of the prime motivations why young professionals sought a new job. In this new normal, the informants revealed that having a stable job, without the fear of losing it, is essential for their families to survive.

According to Bortz (2021), companies who understand the definition of job security and the implications it has on



employees are vital to business success. Job security is not just beneficial for employees—it benefits employers, as well. Therefore, losing one's job is said to be a menace among young professionals who function as the breadwinner in their respective families.

Furthermore, some employees recounted that despite the current situation and although they attempted to jump to another employment just to survive the pandemic, some informants preferred and managed to return and sought resumption of their employment to their previous companies and industries because of the debt of gratitude. Hence, this became another core theme that was formulated in this paper. In this study, it was found that the sense of gratitude was primarily developed because of the positive administrative support and the assistance extended by various industries to their employees during the difficult times brought by the global pandemic.

To add more, it was also examined in this study whether the informants are willing to accept any kind of job. With this, it was found that young professionals value competencies, and they even consider that one's competency should be aligned with the job they will assume in the future. Therefore, another core theme explored in this paper is the alignment of skills and competencies to one's employment.

The informants believe that productivity and job efficiency rely on the competencies of the employees. It can be said that skills mismatch will lead to negative consequences for the organization's competitiveness.

Strietska (2020) explained the consequences of skills and competencies mismatch in the workplace. At the employees' level, such disparity affects both job and life satisfaction. Employees whose skills mismatch with the job assignment may not meet their full productivity potential. For business industries, skills mismatch has negative consequences for the company's productivity and competitiveness. Moreover, skills mismatch causes higher employee turnover and sub-optimal work organization. Eventually, skills mismatch leads to the loss of profits and markets (Strietska, 2020).

Lastly, the eighth core theme devised and investigated in the research is the personal reason expressed by the informants as to the importance of still having a job despite the pandemic. It was found out that the young professionals' reasons for still working would revolve around the value of the family, the relationship they have in their workplace, and the self-fulfillment they obtained from working amidst the employment challenges in this new normal.

With this theme, it can be said that in the Philippines, it is undeniably true that family value is considered an

important factor in one's career decisions. Families influence the employee's self-determination and empower every employee to endure the hardships in the workplace. More so, it was also revealed that the values learned in the workplace would help employees to persevere towards achieving the organization's goals. Lastly, it was also found that self-fulfillment can be a source of happiness – once employees feel deeply fulfilled at work, they become committed to their jobs.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

The pandemic has hit young professional employees hard, leaving them to feel worried about how to make ends meet. The analysis has shown the lived experiences of the young professionals during this time of the pandemic. After analyzing the statements of the informants and through the formulated core themes, the researchers came up with the following conclusions:

The lives of young professionals have significantly changed because of the pandemic. Before this global phenomenon, they relished the provision of a convenient and stable life where access to their basic needs is not at all restricted. As compared to the New Normal where threats in terms of employment and other sources of living grow to be discernable and constrained.

The pandemic has affected various aspects of the lives of young professionals. This includes the backlash of the pandemic on their socioeconomic, psychological, and personal well-being.

With the challenges experienced in this new normal, the young professionals opted to jump from one employment to another. They have developed different outlooks and various motivations in looking for new employment and have valued job security to be able to sustain the needs of their families.

Moreover, an unhealthy working environment, inadequate salary, and the needs of their respective families have been the personal reasons and motivations of the young professionals in seeking new employment.

There were some industries greatly affected by the pandemic which, despite the economic flak, have continuously supported their employees during the entire duration of community lockdowns and quarantine. With this, a sense of gratitude was exhibited by some young professionals who sought resumption of their previous position despite their efforts of seeking new employment.

In terms of young professionals' willingness to accept new jobs, they highly considered the alignment of skills and competencies to their job preferences.

In terms of communication, the young professionals have demonstrated a dynamic communication style. Others had utilized direct communication in a way that they formally and directly expressed their concerns to their immediate supervisor or superior. However, some young professionals are passive communicators who deliberately become hesitant and terrified of conveying their concerns in the organization.

Lastly, sustaining family's needs, preserving job security, and self-fulfillment are the driving forces of the young professionals to keep going and pursue employment amidst these difficult times.

On the other hand, the findings obtained in this research have also been found to be relevant to the theory in which this paper is anchored. According to the Employee Experience Approach, as coined by Abhari in 2019, employees deserve to feel like their company cares about them. This approach would simply explain that positive experiences of employees will deliberately lead to positive experiential needs. On contrary, negative experiences lead to negative experiential needs.

Based on the results, it can be concluded that employees' experiences have changed during the pandemic and led to downbeat and depressing experiential needs. For the informants in this research, work provides a sense of identity, as well as psychological benefits that come from being productive. However, the young professionals expressed that they feel at least somewhat pressured to stay in their existing job due to economic uncertainty and psychological and personal consequences brought by the pandemic.

Moreover, with the experiences of the young professionals, it was revealed that the protective factors (Garmezy, 1991) such as the family, community, and organization have helped them bounce back and continue with their lives amidst the pandemic. It can be generalized based on the findings of the study that it is, indeed, not the nature of adversity, such as the threat brought by pandemic, that is most important, but how individuals deal with it. Similarly in this paper, when young professionals face adversity, misfortune, or frustration in this new normal, resilience helps them bounce back. It helps them survive, recover, and even thrive in the face and wake of misfortune.

The responses of the informants reveal timely the much-needed perspectives among workers, the future initiatives that organizations should focus on, and how the current climate is shaping what employees are feeling.

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