

Concentrating on Overt and Very Intense Disruption (COVID) of Livelihood: A Phenomenological Study of Career Changers During the Pandemic

Abstract: The tremendous aftermath brought about by the severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic had change the economic landscape of the country. With certain establishments coming to a halt and people losing jobs, poverty alleviation, more than ever, takes center stage. This study used phenomenological approach in exploring the life and lived experiences of career changes in Calbayog City. Nineteen (19) individuals participated in the study. Participants met the description of a career changer: 1) a person who is currently unemployed or underemployed as a result of the ongoing pandemic; 2) a resident of Calbayog city; and 3) willing to participate in the study. From the data analyses, three major themes emerged: (1) challenges and obstacles; (2) optimistic vision; and (3) identifying drudgery. It suggested that career changes are those who felt the fatal blow of pandemic recession yet they hold an undying positivity of overcoming such adversities and finding new ways of earning a living. This study showed that these individuals experienced a difficult yet an honest and fulfilling life that can be a source of empowerment and inspiration for others. To fully fathom career changers' experiences, an intensive interview with their family, their friends, and community members is recommended. Further studies and a more in-depth investigation of the lived experiences of career changers is recommended.

Keywords: underemployment, unemployment, experience, aspiration, obstacles

I. Introduction

The severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) pandemic had recently changed the demographic, educational and health landscapes of any country (Fauci et al., 2020; Sohrabi et al., 2020; Wu et al., 2020). Recent studies on the deadly disease focused on trends (Kannan et al., 2020), antiviral researches (Touret & de Lamballerie, 2020), patient characteristics (COVID-19 Surveillance Group, 2020), origin,

transmission and characteristics (Chen et al., 2020; Shereen et al., 2020; Sun et al., 2020; Yuki et al., 2020).

A study dwell on the immediate psychological responses and associated factors of those who were stricken and at the initial stage of the disease (Wang et al., 2020). But that is how close a certain study can get in terms of dealing with the disease on a personal level, let alone a study that can dwell into how COVID-19 affect their way of living and their source of incomes.

Certain industries have crumbled to and bite the dust inadvertently letting off their employees in the process (Restubog et al., 2020; Spurk & Straub, 2020). The transition to a new normal was such a direct hit to career changers that they were forced to look for alternatives in sustaining their needs (Akbulaev et al., 2020; ILO, 2020). For a pandemic of such magnitude to change what once were considered as normal, it can have ripple effects to different aspects of living and withstanding (Ryan et al., 2020).

With all the information given, it bounces back to the question, what was their initial reaction after being let go? Do they have contingency plan for such situation? Are they fully aware of the extent of the pandemic? Have they fully grasped the magnitude of their situation?

The questions presented motivated the researcher to delve on the grounds of career changers during the pandemic. There is a need to look closely into the experiences of such individuals with respect to their knowledge of the situation by assessing their perceptions and grasp of the possible potential of their second careers or work, hence the conduct of this study.

II. Objectives

With its main objective of exploring the lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges of career changes during pandemic, this study would like to answer the following questions;

1. What are experiences of the participants;
2. What is their perception about changing careers during pandemic; and
3. What are their aspirations.

III. Methodology

a. Research Design

This qualitative study utilized phenomenological approach that aimed to investigate the experience of career changers - how it is have a neophyte for a new career track and a provider at the same time. A qualitative research study aimed to examine a phenomenon that impact on the lived reality of individuals or groups in a particular cultural or social context (Mills & Birks, 2014). A qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem (Creswell, 1998). The researcher builds a complex and holistic picture, analyze words, report detailed views of informants, and conduct the study in a natural setting. Phenomenology aimed to accurately describe the phenomenon without a pre-existing knowledge to a framework, but remaining truth to the facts (Groenewald, 2004). More so, using a qualitative research, the researcher would able to connect with their participants and to see the world from their viewpoints (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The researcher found this method most suitable to the inquiry in order to provide a comprehensive analysis on the lived experiences of career changers.

b. Participants and Sampling

The participants of the study were identified using purposive sampling. Using purposive sampling, the researcher can choose their participants that will be fit for the study (Devers & Frankel, 2000). Simply put, the researcher decides what needs to be known and sets out to find people who can and are willing to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience (Tongco, 2007). Nineteen (19) individuals participated in the study. Participants met the description

of a career changer: 1) a person who is currently unemployed or underemployed as a result of the ongoing pandemic; 2) a resident of Calbayog city; and 3) willing to participate in the study.

c. Data Collection

In gathering the appropriate data for the study, semi structured interview was used. Semi-structured interview is a type of interview that has become the most familiar strategy in collecting qualitative data (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry that merges a predetermined set of open questions with the privilege for the researchers to explore particular responses further; used to understand how interventions work and how they could be enhanced. It also allows to asked follow-up question for clarification. The content of the interview guide was validated by two professionals who were expert in the field of Psychology. The researcher also provided an agreement that included obtaining informed consent, ensured confidentiality, time and place commitments, permission to record, delineating the ethical principles of research. As to data storing methods, the researcher used note taking and dialogic form interview to each deeper response of the respondents.

d. Data Analysis

The following steps represent Colaizzi process for phenomenological data analysis (Speziale, Streubert, & Carpenter, 2010). (1) Each transcript should be read and re-read in order to obtain a general sense about the whole content. (2) For each transcript, significant statements that pertain to the phenomenon under study should be extracted. These statements must be recorded on a separate sheet noting their pages and line numbers. (3) Meaning should be formulated

from these significant statements. (4) The formulated meanings should be sorted in categories, cluster of themes, and subthemes. (5) The findings of the study should be integrated into an exhaustive description of the phenomenon under study. (6) The fundamental structure of the phenomenon should be described. (7) Finally, validation of the findings should be sought from the research participants to compare the researcher's descriptive results with their experiences.

e. Research Reflexivity

In the study, the researcher's approach is different in terms of other researchers' perspectives. As a person who knows the struggles of career changers and their aspiration, the researcher understands his stand that might lead to a different development and an equally valid understanding of the particular situation under study.

The study has a preconception with a tone of positivity of eventually creating meaning during the entire process. The position and the background of the researcher will affect the choices made in the investigation, from an angle, with the methods that best judged the sole purpose of the study, framing, coming up with themes and the overall conclusion of it. With the intent of sharing the results to the participants of the study. Furthermore, preconception is not equated in any form of bias unless the researcher fails to mention them (Malterud, 2012).

f. Ethical Considerations

The study focused on the lived experiences of career changers during the pandemic, their self-regard and aspirations. Therefore, the ethical considerations centered

around the situations depicted solely from participants' experiences, interactions and actions observed. The issues of theoretical, theological, situational, critical and covenantal situational approach to research ethics were irrelevant to the overall study (Tisdale, 2004). If literal transcriptions and summary were used in the narratives.

IV. Results and Discussion

Significant information on the current experience of career changers were generated on the premise of finding new job opportunities during the pandemic. Current knowledge on pandemic scenarios, potential of exploring other lines of work and aspiration for career expansion were noted. The generated information can help in establishing not only springboard for subsequent research but also a platform for the career changers to be heard and show the cacophony of their experiences.

From the data analyses, three themes emerged: (1) challenges and obstacle; (2) optimistic vision; and (3) identifying drudgery. The three themes that emerged suggested that career changes are those who felt the fatal blow of pandemic recession yet they hold an undying positivity of overcoming such adversities and finding new ways of earning a living.

a. Challenges and Obstacles

Episodes of unwanted events were reflected in the first theme. Career changers admitted that they were taken aback with the decision made by their former employers adding confusion to the mix brought about by the pandemic. Despite such initial reaction, they are willing to take another chance in life, explore the what the pandemic has to offer and see things as an inspiration to evolve (Shalev & Shapiro, 2020).

Subtheme 1. Bump in the Road

Most of the participants have a hard time accepting the fact that not only do they have to adjust to the new normal, but they to face the harsh reality of not being able to work anymore on places they consider as their second home. When one is confronted with a life changing decision, they tend to develop a new perception of the situation and like any switch, it can turn to something positive or negative (Audet & Lefebvre, 2017; Kashdan & Rottenberg, 2010). It is illustrated in the following participants' statements:

- [1] "Ka unfair sa kinabuhi, d ak antigo kun ano pa akon mabuhay sa ak sitwasyon" (Life is unfair, I really don't know what to with my situation)
- [2] "Baga kadali man la sa ira na tanggalon ak, maiha baya ako nagparatrabaho sa ira" (It seems easy for them to let go of me though I've worked for them for quite some time now)
- [3] "Makuri na an kinabuhi sa may COVID na, mas makuri pa sini yana na waray na ak trabaho" (Life was hard already with COVID, it is way harder now that I don't have a job anymore)

Subtheme 2. Intersection and Choices

In like manner, most of the participants expressed that they were placed in a crossroad of whether to look for something old or start something new. To go back to a daily routine from a different place or carve a new path of living. Making choices in an unknown situation is a form of reestablishing a new reality and slowly sinking in the reality of the situation (Dekker,

2015; Hetschko, 2016; Young, 2012). It is illustrated in the following participants' statements:

- [1] "Di ko na kakaragan akon oras magpinuruko, makuri pero kailangan mabuhi" (I will not waste my time, sitting idly, it is hard but I need to live)
- [2] "Wa na ako mahihimo, di man siguro ighahatag an problema kun diri kaya" (I cannot do much, I feel that problems are presented because one can overcome it)
- [3] "Makuri an sitwasyon pero antigo na ak na may rason sini na problema" (The situation is hard, yet I know that there is a reason for this problem)

b. Optimistic Vision

Moments of glee and finding the silver lining in almost anything proves the resiliency of Filipino which were reflected in the second theme. Career changers were positive that these problems shall pass and is a way for them to explore other aspects of their life. Introduction of new ideas can spark curiosity to individual which could lead to voluntary learning and discover somethings that they already have but failed to recognized at the start (Mashavave et al., 2011). The learning process increases if ignorance is remedied same as to changing perspective from seeing the problem as an opportunity for something new (Livin, 2018). It is illustrated in the following participants' statements:

- [1] "Mayda pa mas maupay na maabot, trabaho la ito, makakabiling gihap ak" (Something better is expected in the horizon, it is only work, I can still look for one)

- [2] "Diri natatabos an kinabuhi kung waray ka na trabaho, oportunidad ito para mamiling ka mas maupay" (Life does not end after you lose your job, it is an opportunity for something better)
- [3] "Trabaho la an nawara diri an kinabuhi, fight la" (It is only work, not life, that was lost, keep fighting)
- [4] "An trabaho mura ug yagid, mawala la pero di maubusan" (Work is like a boyfriend/girlfriend, you may lose one but you will not run out of it)
- [5] "Mas importante na buhi, bahala waray trabaho, makakbiling la ak siton" (What is important is that I am alive, regardless of not having any work, I can still look for one)

c. Identifying Drudgery

With their journey coming full circle, the desire among career changers to get back on the game and start earning burns their desire to give themselves a chance and enter the workforce once more. Landing a new job is quite hard especially with the looming effect of the pandemic but they still persevere to do what is must to outlive the challenges presented by the virus outbreak. Trying to land a job is hard for someone who was just let go from work, but it is their first step of affirming their new identity as a worker and see situation as a constant array of learning and improving (Cherney & Fitzgerald, 2016; Fujita & Moscarini, 2017; Hoyer & Saks, 2008). It is illustrated in the following participants' statements:

- [1] "Mas daku pa akon kita san online selling, kunta sadto pa ak nakahibaro sini" (I earn more in

- online selling, wished I've known this sooner)
- [2] "Maupay lugod akon bag.o na trabaho, mas nagagamit ko an ak gin.adaman sa college" (My new job is better since I can use what I've learned in college)
- [3] "Waa k nakit.an na malik un mag trabaho ako san waray nakun gn eskwelahan, importante na masustentar ak panginahanglan" (I don't see anything wrong doing a job I didn't study for, what is important is that I can sustain my needs)
- [4] "Matira matibay na yana, di ko mauyam sa akon gnpili na bag.o na trabaho, nakita man ako" (Survival of the fittest, I don't get mad of my new job, I am earning)
- [5] "Maski ano pa na trabaho, okay la sa akon, basta marangal kay ano kadiri?" (Whatever the job is, it is fine with me, as long as it is decent, why not?)

5. Conclusion and Recommendation

Three themes emerged: (1) challenges and obstacle; (2) optimistic vision; and (3) identifying drudgery.

This study provides a description of the lived experiences of career changers during the pandemic. It suggested that career changes are those who felt the unforgiving scenario of a global pandemic in the form of a huge recession. Yet they hold an undying positivity of overcoming such adversities and finding new ways of earning a living that proves their resiliency is off the charts and their courage in facing challenges shines through.

Concerned agencies must be extensive with in terms of scope, thus

involving varied contingency plans for such scenarios. The study could be comprehensive by combining with quantitative research methodology, extensive literature reviews and broader reach. To fully fathom career changers' experiences, an intensive interview with their family, their friends, and community members is recommended. Further studies and a more in-depth investigation of the lived experiences of career changers is recommended.

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