

Deeper Look in Professionals' Happiness and Its Relation to Ethics

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Abstract

Looking back at one year after the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), we all realize there are many issues and sectors left open to be developed, especially in Indonesia. One of the most important is people and their jobs. As there is a tendency for people to view the establishment as a competitive ground, we suggest seeing it as a learning platform for inspection and improvement. To change how people take and view their jobs or prospects is as important as hiring the right people. A way that psychology can contribute to this is through the study of professions happiness—what makes people happy doing their job. The focus of the study is ethics, as it is viewed as a moral compass in each profession's responsibilities. The result of the interview of eight professions (insurance agent, teacher, journalist, nurse, developer, pastor, lawyer, and horticulturist) showed that indeed, money and status is not the top contributors in determining what makes people happy doing their jobs. It is the chance of contributions to society, or at least another person, have power over what to do, without violating ethics, and able to learn and improve. This result suggests that, there is a need for a focus shift from seeing a profession as competitive ground, to a platform of improvement, and contribution to society-within one's own accord.

Keywords: Profession; Professional; Ethics; Psychology of happiness

Introduction

Looking back at one year after the establishment of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), a realization unfolds upon many sectors possess the idea to be improved to optimized the cooperation among the 11 countries. In this era of dynamic economy fluctuation, people's lives and well-being is at stake, especially in developing countries. In Indonesia, this establishment is often seen as a platform of competition, to push its people to be ready in competing for jobs against neighboring countries. Instead of seeing this establishment as a competition, we suggest looking inward and paying more attention to what makes a job right, rather than answering the question of what is the right jobs in the era of AEC. To develop hastily in fear of 'losing' is much not preferred, and might blind people from looking at the real issue in the longer term.

Psychology could provide a solution to this. As a scientific discipline, psychology could put into practice what is found from theoretical investigation upon the phenomenon. One of them is by looking deeper into what makes people happy doing their job, or better put, what factors contribute to happiness in professions. The important of this is, as we realize, professions drive people to thrive in life. To optimize that, happiness is an irreplaceable element as it maximizes potentials, inducing creativity, and in general increasing productivities, which is good not only for the organizations, but also on a personal level.

Two things immediately come to mind when they think about what makes a job happy. Perhaps we would give an answer of having no bosses to tell yell at us around (more freedom), or something related to financial security (more money). On a certain level, there is no wrong answer, but when we talk about real happiness across the profession, actually there is a lot more into that. Speaking about freedom, consider the study by Okulicz-Kozaryn et al. [1] that perhaps solved the age old paradox of who's happier in their countries—the liberals or the conservatives with more boundaries. The result was quite interesting. They found out individuals in liberal countries rate themselves as happier than their conservative's counterpart, and vice versa. This suggests that living with rules or less freedom does not necessarily means less happiness.

On a smaller scale, we could ask the same question regarding professionals and their professions. Like countries, professions have rules that guide them to do or not to carry out activities and interact with the others-work ethics. The result of Okulicz-Kozaryn et al. [1] study showed us that it is not wise to look at the relationship between boundaries and happiness like there's a definite answer to who's happier. Instead, we will be looking at how ethics play a part in profession's happiness.

A Gallup-Healthways Well-Being survey poll of 101,000 workers [2] found out the highest scoring profession (happiest) is a business owner (72.5), followed by professionals (71.5), managerial/executive (70.9), forestry, (69.8), and sales (67.7). In a similar poll done by Forbes magazine [3], recruiters ranked the highest on the list, followed by stack developer, research assistant, Java developer, and Android developer, while the unhappiest jobs are the sales account manager, followed by security guard, merchandiser, cashier, and driver. A few things can be inferred from the poll. First of all, money is certainly not the main contributors of the happiness, due to the varying degree of the salary obtained among those professions. The most obvious examples would be security guards are less unhappy than sales account managers. Another example, business owners really only mean the person who owns a business, which is not necessarily make more money than the rest of the professions on the list, but they are the happiest. Second, we could see the happier professions are the one that in a way create something, or benefit others. Business owners create entrepreneurs, recruiters create job opportunities, and developers create programs that help the world moving.

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Finally, the happier jobs are those without the burden and with meaning, while the less happy jobs are those with many burdens and lesser meaning. Business owners are responsible for their own business. There is nobody to tell them how to do things (they ought to figure out themselves) for the business to work, while developer sometimes needs to match clients' expectations, but their works are based on their expertise and control. On the other hands, cashier, merchandiser, and security guards do "menial" jobs that move according to routines. If anything goes wrong, a lot of pressures are being put on them (wrong accounting, or failed to guard something). Sales account managers report to not only bosses, but also their clients, while cooperating with the operations, the finance, the productions, and sometimes the legal departments—and they are often blamed if the customers do not like the work.

The conclusion is, money and position do not determine happiness. Instead, how a profession provides a sense of ownership, control, and meaning is the main factor. As Warr [4] mentioned, among many there is two antecedent of happy professions: the one that gives a sense of control, and the one that lets the professional unleash their potential, and ultimately learn. This is something that must be achieved by all professionals, and it is not easy. This is because it relates to the attitude, how a professional understands and act upon their job—something that is guided by professional ethics which not everybody follows.

Ethics are more than the just rule, as they are situational-dependent [5]. Organization policies technically guide how members behave, but it does not guide more abstract aspect of a job, like the moral. Ethic, on the other hand, functions like a moral compass, is more intrinsic, and is required from end-to-end in every activity. James [6] found out those individuals that hold on to their ethical principles are happier and more satisfied than people who do not. They feel no tension and carry out their activities more relatedly. As a theory of cognitive dissonance put it, if a person's behavior and cognitive do not align, it creates a dissonance that might change either their perspective or behavior to reduce it [7]. To ease the discomfort created by the dissonance, people might resort to accept any believes or norms imposed upon him, and follow them, either with public compliance and/or private acceptance [8]. Professionals are happier when they think, feel and do in line with ethics [9]. To provide more explanations onto this relationship, this study asks a question: "How does ethic play a role in propelling professionals onto a higher plane of happiness?" by looking deeper at eight distinct professions regarding how they impose ethics on daily practices.

Meaning of "Professions" and "Professionals"

Profession means something we do to provide, by counting on skills and expertise we have [10]. Having only skills does not count, as implementing it—making sure those skills are useful for the others—is what matters in a profession. Committing in the implementations is also a part of the definition [11].

A profession incorporates three basic knowledge, namely theoretical, practical, and technical [12]. Theoretical information is acquired from an academic institution. That information, paired with real world practical use, turns into modified version of practical knowledge. Those know-hows, paired with ethic, becomes a technique a professional use in their daily activities.

A professional, on the other hand, is someone who practices a set of skills in certain conditions through certain activities, which is not for fun or hobbies [10]. Professionals are people who commit to their

career and contribute to society [13]. They are different from amateurs and ordinary kind of workers, and they do to the training required, knowledge and know-hows, organizational activities involvement, and a certain degree of pride and authority on what they do [13].

Ethics

Clark et al. [14] defined ethics as the science explaining moral duties and responsibilities of ideal characters. There are two kinds of ethics [11], general and specific. General ethics revolves around norms and moral values, basic conditions to act ethically in general, while specific ethics account those aspects on a more exclusive life context. Both could be defined widely and varyingly. Specific ethics are divided into three categories, individual, social and living environment ethics. Individual ethics are related to responsibilities and attitude toward self. Social ethics are those duties and actions upon interacting with each other, and finally, living environment ethics are broader, accounts for all actions and responsibilities among humans and worldly surroundings. Profession ethics are mainly categorized, but not limited to social ethics, due to its heavy emphasis on human-to-human interactions, expertise applications, and societal contributions.

Happiness

Defining happiness is not easy, as there are many approaches in making sense of it. It is also very relative to each individual. However, philosophically speaking, there are still a few general characteristic that we could all agree upon on, as put by Bentam, as cited in [15]; they are: (1) definable as a whole; (2) measurable and comparable; (3) maintainable; (4) improvable; (5) positively influences, and (6) result of something good. Mardayeti [16] added that happiness is the presence of emotional and behavioral positivity, with affect such as joy and tranquility surrounding a person. According to Seligman and Ryzmen [17], there are three internal factors that contribute to happiness. They are the satisfaction of the past, optimism for the future, and fulfillment in the present. Although not necessarily felt together, the three factors may coincide and depend on how they perceive them, the answer may vary universally but also specifically for every profession.

Method

This study took a qualitative approach by interviewing professionals among eight professions that play important roles in the society, namely: insurance agent, teacher, journalist, nurse, developer, pastor, lawyer, and horticulturist. All participants were professionals with strong expertise and had five years minimum experience in their respective sectors. These professions were picked because of the following reasons: (1) they are the professions that serves the public, (2) they have motives to serve, and were trained in their jobs, and (3) they fit the criteria of professions, professionals, and ethics mentioned above.

Results and Discussions

Happiness of an insurance agent

The best thing about being an insurance agent is knowing that someday, the insurance polices would be useful to clients. Helping clients in securing their uncertain future certainly brings joy and pride to the core of insuring job. When the clients are not happy, an agent could not feel happiness. This suggests that happiness does not always come from within self, but also from others. How agents make people happy then, is the key to their own happiness. The one thing that an agent must do is to earn and respect the trust of the clients. It is seen as the most prioritized ethical conduct of an insurance agent.

Another source of happiness is through the optimal implementation of their skills. Stating and fully disclosing everything a client need to know and making sure every cent of their investment is worthwhile is by default the utmost representation of ethics in the world of insurance agents. Although it possible that some agents are in the business for the financial catch, nonmaterialistic motivations should be the most important thing, especially in jobs that help others.

Happiness of a teacher

When asked the reason why he teaches, the participant stated that influencing individuals to prepare them for the future is what he obtain happiness from. It is an opportunity that he gets from educating individuals, especially since they're still young and full of potential and hope. In educating, it is important not only to account a child's cognitive abilities, but also social factors, mainly the family background of his pupils. One experience he had was some children that come from broken families were very hard to calm and rebellious. Seeing the display of negative behavior and attitude is one of the main motivations for him to push them into a better future.

What he regretted the most is the lack of understanding by some of the educators and fellow teachers, that set the bar too high for everybody, did not look deep and beyond the problem, causing immediate punishment that might affect the child's future. For example, some traditionalists might few children's rebellious act as something that is not acceptable and must be reprimanded by giving a low score, or even worse-verbal and physical abuse are often carried out. He views that these practices are not ethical, and violates the essence of being an educator itself.

Being a good teacher essentially needs a strong commitment to ethic. To understand and educate students further into a better future is the real embodiment of teacher's ethics itself. The ideal result is ultimately the successful future of their students, and achieving happiness out of it is the proof that ethics, in the professions of the teacher, creates happiness.

Happiness of a journalist

After ten years diving into journalism since the age of eighteen, the participant explained that being a journalist means serving the readers and uncovering what the powerful are doing to the public. He felt that journalism was the way to learn many things and meet many people in many ways, thus provide many opportunities to experience the real world. When asked about his happiness, he mentioned that it's a full score, ten out of ten. This is due to the confidence he feels in his skillset, and is able to put them into good uses.

Being a journalist made him acquainted a lot of people from the struggling nobody to the boss of Fortune 500's company. "If someone's brave enough, they can use this information and put onto their project", he stated as he felt that control on what he loves to do is one of his main source of happiness. According to him, a real journalist means learning without yearning, to keep going despite mistakes. A journalist will always ask "what's next?" and keep looking at the future.

The answers provided are one of the examples of ethics-freedom combinations of happiness source. Doing coverage with the focus on the truth, is doing the job ethically. Doing it in a unique way, without constraints, and be able to put in full efforts and ideas into pieces of the story, is doing the job freely. This is one of a kind source of happiness, as not many people out there in the similar professions are able to do the same. It confirms once again that ethics, and the freedom to express

abilities are possible to have and essential to one's happiness, at least as a journalist.

Happiness of a nurse

There are times when nurses are 'trapped' in some emergency, life staking situations. Their speed and expertise are crucial in patient's survival. With a burden that big, it is hard to commit and willing to try again in giving their best services in helping people, after tiring and cornering experience now and then. However, the participant claimed that this is what nurses do. Although most situations are not happy inducing, and sometimes coercing, only through wholeheartedly immerse themselves in the job, one can feel a genuine happiness.

How can them not, if their daily job is helping out others directly, from how to regain physical abilities, to self-esteem and joy. "This is not something people do out of financial motivation, as nurses do not earn as much", the participant said. "Compared to doctors, nurses can help much more due to the time of interactions are significantly longer than doctors", said the another participant. Positive experiences are gained from each interaction, as one of the best rewards is seeing the patient, who are recovering went out of their rooms to thank them personally for their service. Another answer that confirms helping others and creating something-let it be physical or emotional object-provide happiness. The only way to do that is through commitment to ethics. When patients went out of their way to personally thank them for their services, we could infer that the profession was done with a full commitment to ethics.

Happiness of a developer

He fell in love with the program developing world since the age of 20. Twenty years went by and his passion for developing persists. He claimed that his main source of happiness comes from making something that did not exist a while back, exist and functions well. Of course, its not easy, mistakes are made and lessons are learned. "That's the fun things, you learn many things over the years, everyday," he stated. Technologies are ever-growing, which provides him with new things to learn every single day, which in turn keep his flame of passion burning. On the top of that, being a developer allows him to learn and experience how business work, and how people like to think.

Personally, he is the type to do the thing he loves. Due to this reason, he often felt maximum happiness when he develops something out of scratch for people. Many developers do not understand what it means to develop, as they only follow instruction blindly, making them unhappy. Only through a deep understanding of what we do really mean, we can achieve happiness from it. Even sometimes when ideas do not go as well with the client, its his job to explain to clients the purpose of his work, and what would happen if things change (consequences), as he felt like its something right to do. Challenges are what he craves, as mindless repetitive activities bore him as a developer and a person.

The main source of a developer could be seen from his passion for things he loves. Understanding the purpose of developing something, to keep learning everyday and make the most out of ever-changing world provides him with the sense of joy. It shows the dynamic of human life, creating things for other, and take responsibilities for it. This suggests that ethics are not a mere object to commit to, but also a form of attitude that guide understanding and how we run our duties.

Happiness of a pastor

The respondent mentioned that there is no such a thing as a 'pastorship'. There is only a full dedication towards the One God.

To him, who positioned himself as the servant of the God, happiness does not come from his profession as a father of the church. Rather, it comes from a special right that he has to be able to serve God and His followers. According to him, being a pastor could be seen as a profession, as he put his expertise—that is, theological knowledge and framework—into practice when he teaches others about the way of pastorship in academic institutions. The professionalism is measured upon how much he can make the congregation devote to God.

Although he receives fund from the church's followers, financial need should not be a priority in any circumstances, as the true motivation should come only from the realization to devote, serve, and ultimately being aware of God's one of a kind love. Pastors could only be happy if they understand the way and practices it ethically, without using the name of religion to fulfill materialistic desires, making his professions, one of the noblest.

Ideally, due to the nature and the absolute demand of morality of the profession, pastors could only obtain happiness by not violating their moral compass, as the actions they carry out daily on their jobs are directly related to morality judgment and decision making. Experiencing joy from helping people by introducing what they think is beneficial and peaceful, without any materialistic desire is a definite showcase of happiness that is resulted from ethical conducts.

Happiness of a lawyer

Faced with various problems regarding unfairness and unjust, the participant mentioned that one of the things he regretted about the country is the lack of law enforcements. Her main source of happiness come from the service she gave towards the individual that seeks her helps. Sometimes a lot, sometimes only a little, she would always try to give the best advice possible for the clients to escape from the unfairness of the law practice. To her, seeing a nation and its people working together is the best way for the just law to take full effect on every level of society. However, there are many serious problems regarding the understanding of the laws, and clearing confusions, providing explanations to help people getting help from the law is her duties at hand since the beginning of her career.

Another participant provided an interesting emphasize on the relationship between his career and ethics. He mentioned that ethics are not something to be seen as a limitation that could potentially hinder what we want to do. It should be what we need to do, as without applying ethics in carrying out duties, rules, policies, and code of conducts are meaningless. "When we provide a righteous service, we don't have to be afraid," he stated. Giving his best and as much quality services as he can is the main source of his happiness.

The main source of happiness of lawyer lies on the ethical service. The fact that their professions are crucial in determining who's right and whose wrong, the moral compass is the only tool that points towards a guilt-free, happy career. As they mentioned, providing a quality service, and lift people up from the despair of the unjust law are the factors that make the attorney a meaningful and enjoyable profession.

Happiness of a horticulturist

The response provided by a horticulturist gave a unique insights on happiness. The participant stated his happiness came from two sources: the opportunities to implement his knowledge and expertise, and the chance to protect and take care of nature. He mentioned that, humans neglect and ignore nature more than we think; in spite that nature

possesses just as many problems as humans do. Working with nature has since enabled him to stand closer and understand deeper about nature, as he was given the chance to look deeper, longer and more thoroughly the surroundings that he is working with. As a nature lover, his profession does really provide him with full enjoyment.

All activities that he carries out provide a sense of fulfilment. From as simple-yet difficult-task as planting seeds, to nurturing them. From moving them to pots, watering them, fertilizing them, and distribute them to the market. Each product are the result of sweats and blood from time to time, as they are all precious treasures to a horticulturist. He described that it is a form of mutual relationship, which he provides and then receives the benefits of his efforts. He added, this is a result of interdependencies among human and nature, which is inseparable.

Plants and vegetables that they grow with efforts are a sign of the heavy commitments and compassion that each horticulturist has. Ethics play an important role in this profession's happiness, as nurturing and protecting their surroundings, nature, is a way to show their compassion and pride in what their jobs.

Conclusion

We should first remember although all professions felt a certain degree of happiness, their happiness are not the same kind. Some of them were obtained from justification, some from motivation; some of them come from the role of educating, and some other protecting. However, they all do have one thing in common, that is creating something that they should. By providing something beneficial to other people, let it be individual or the public, all of the professions contribute and make differences that are mandated by their respective professional ethics. Those are all attitude and actions that represent virtue ethics in each profession, which according to Han [18] provide eudaimonic happiness, not a mere happiness that could be obtained through materialistic pursue. It is something much, much more rare and hard to obtain, as acting ethically are not easy in the daily practice itself [19]. We could all say that because of committing through righteous and moral ethics, that they are happy. The actions that are taken to create and help others are merely the byproduct of commitment to ethics.

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