

Institute of International Management  
College of Management  
National Cheng Kung University

**QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS**

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**THE MEANING OF WORK: IDENTIFYING THE  
CAUSES OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES  
AMONG FILIPINO BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS**

**A RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE REPORT**

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## THE MEANING OF WORK: IDENTIFYING THE CAUSES OF DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES AMONG FILIPINO BLUE-COLLAR WORKERS

### A RESEARCH PROJECT UPDATE

#### I. Research Question

Specifically for the target respondents' point of view (in this case Filipino blue-collar workers' perspective), the following research questions are:

- Why does work mean such strikingly different things to different people?
- What is work?
- What are the elements that constitute work?

No, I don't think you are setting out to answer this question!

This one feels like a sub-question

Yes - but this doesn't link with your research questions!

#### Strategy to Conduct the Research Work

As previously mentioned in the research project proposal, the focus of this research is on understanding the individual's perceptions on the meaning of work. Specifically, this research work focuses further on the social and cultural factors, which have received little scholarly attention (Rosso, et al., 2010). It is important to consider these insights since these can also be at the forefront of cultural changes and dissemination of new values (Harpaz, et al., 2002).

check expression here - what are you wanting to say?

Meaning can be constructed individually (Rosso, et al., 2010; Wrzesniewski, et al., 2003) from one's own perceptions and norms (Pratt and Ashford, 2003), either reflected by world views and value systems (Geertz, 1973; Kluckhohn, 1951; Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck, 1961; Mead, 1934; Rosso, et al. 2010), and/or influenced by environmental or social context (Wrzesniewski, et al., 2003). Meaning is also based on having made sense of something (Pratt and Ashford, 2003). This is based on the individual's behaviors, attitudes, beliefs (Bandura, 1989; Harpaz, et al., 2002; Maslow, 1968; Rogers, 1961), values, and/or motivations (Brief and Nord, 1990b; Cartwright and Holmes, 2006; Collins and Porras, 1994; Miller and Skidmore, 2004; Thomas, 1990; Oldham, 1976). This therefore implies that there is a need to compare the influences of different facets and conceptualizations involved in constructing this meaning individually.

lighten the citation!

Delving further in the aspect of culture, deriving meanings of work can be deeply rooted in the perspectives of broad social and cultural forces exerting powerful influences (Brief and Nord, 1990a; Harpaz, et al., 2002). This reflects broader social and cultural trends and changes (Harpaz, et al., 2002; Rosso, et al., 2010). But, even though meanings of work are largely socialized by individuals' cultural environments (Hulin and Blood, 1968; Whitely, et al., 1992),

there can be more variance in work meanings within cultures rather than between cultures (Rosso, et al., 2010).

This is not helping the argument!

Therefore, this research work shall probe deeper into the context of a particular culture – the Filipino blue-collar workers working overseas – to acquire some more insights regarding this academic and practical issue of the meaning of work. Filipinos in particular are a mix of Eastern and Western influences (Hechanova, et al., 2006). Although Filipinos have been described as a collectivist society exhibiting a high power distance (Hofstede, 1991), Westernized management and industry psychologies are the basis as to how Filipinos actually work (Jocano, 1999).

tighten, tighten, tighten to the topic!

### III. Interview Question Guidelines

Individual perceptions and attitudes towards the meaning of work are based on the actions undertaken in response to the given work situation (de Guzman, 1993; Hechanova, et al., 2006), which can be complex and contradicting at times (Tacoli, 1999). Therefore, based on the aforementioned discussion on the specifics of this research project, the questions for the interviews will involve probing at the following issues:

- 1) Patterns of the respondents' work life status
- 2) Descriptions on current work roles
  - a. What are the things that are stimulating and not stimulating with the current work?
  - b. What are the things that are more rewarding and less rewarding with the current work?
  - c. What are the things that are more frustrating and less frustrating with the current work?
- 3) Ideas and insights on their future plans
- 4) Ideas and insights on what is the ideal job
- 5) Reasons and motivations to be in their current situation
  - a. What are the reasons for leaving the home country?
  - b. What are the reasons for being in the current job?

useful flow

### IV. Approaches to Sampling and Data Collection

As previously mentioned, this research project shall focus on the Filipino blue-collar workers living and working in Tainan City, Taiwan. It is important to consider different behavior types to fully understand the changing views regarding work (Cummings, and Blumberg, 1987; Griffin, et al. 2007; Katz and Kahn, 1978; Murphy and Jackson, 1999).

why this group?  
pragmatic -  
accessible

Again, depending on time constraints, this research shall strive to conduct at least six in-depth interviews to learn about their insights regarding the definition of what work is and the phenomena that surrounds all of these changes regarding this issue.

Because the research work is a qualitative study, purposive sampling will be used. The research will be looking for Filipino workers who legally work in blue-collar jobs such as factory workers and domestic helpers. This is the main criterion to be considered. The study will disregard other factors and characteristics (e.g. how long they have been in Taiwan, marital status, age, educational background, etc.) pertinent to the blue-collar worker.

homogenous/  
heterogenous?

Tell the story.. why  
these locations?

In Tainan City, at least within the vicinity of National Cheng Kung University, gather to one of two Catholic churches every Sunday – one along Sheng Li Road and the other along Jhongsan Road. A significant number of them also go to the Filipino cafeteria, also during Sundays, at the old hotel building located at the corner of Chenggong Road. These will be the target areas where the research work will acquire its sample. Interviewees will be selected from these areas, preferably in small groups of two or three people if possible.

## V. Some Initial Data Gathering

Initial data gathering came from three sources: (1) review of responses from previous studies, (2) interviews with selected Filipino respondents, and (3) some casual observations from the Filipino community in Tainan. The second and third instances were conducted in the aforementioned locations.

?  
Confusion! What is  
this? I know about  
interviews....

### 1. Responses From Previous Studies

Prior research...?  
Belongs in lit.  
review

Qualitative and quantitative research projects have been conducted on overseas Filipino contract workers' general insights about

One prevailing factor that influences perceptions on work is the economic environment (Tacoli, 1999). Filipinos are willing to tolerate lower wages in a harsh work environment as long as they get higher wages and these wages are not delayed. Hence, they appreciate the fact that their jobs are temporary, and hereby want to maximize economic gains as much as possible (de Guzman, 1993). Other reasons include increasing social mobility and satisfying a desire for change, implying a general dissatisfaction with life in the Philippines (Tacoli, 1999). Interestingly, this also entails some changes in the perception of life in general: being more responsible and having broader horizons and higher ambitions (de Guzman, 1993). Furthermore, there is a general belief that if a parent migrates for employment, it should be the father since he is expected to be the family breadwinner (Uy-Tioco, 2007).

Casual observations... no. Give it more structure. Give it theoretical support and explanation. Sell it into the research - qualify it as *data* by making it credible. Draw on the approach as method not accident. Tell the story about how / why you did it too.

Useful materiall

Clearly, economics and the desire to give the family better lives are the drivers that push Filipinos to seek employment abroad. This reinforces earlier notions that income size is a chief influence on the meaning of work.

## 2. Interview Data Gathered

### A. Interview Sessions

Five Filipinos were interviewed using the questions as mentioned above. There were three sessions conducted (two Filipinos each in the first two sessions and one for the third session). The interviews lasted between thirty to forty minutes per session. In fact, there were actually three people involved in the first session and five people in the second session but only two each actually stood out and responded to the questions. The summary profiles of the respondents are as follows:

Session	Respondent	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Current Job	Length of stay in Taiwan	Length of interview (approx.)
1	“Rene”	Male	25	Single	Factory Machine Operator	One month	30 minutes
	“Joshua”	Male	25	Single	Factory Machine Operator	One month	30 minutes
2	“Freddy”	Male	25	Single	Factory Machine Operator	One month	35 minutes
	“Michael”	Male	26	Married (with two children)	Factory Machine Operator	Two years	35 minutes
3	“Ryan”	Male	30	Unmarried (with one child)	Factory Machine Operator	Six months	28 minutes

Any differences based on length of stay?

Analysis here....  
Other wise  
what is this?  
Data? Stories?

the data gathered in the interviews yielded a very simple and very common insight. A typical workday for them consisted of simply operating the machines that they were assigned to. Not much happens within the work day and at the end of the day, they simply spend their free time in their dormitory (which is owned by their employers) with their fellow workers (i.e. “Nagbubukas ng machine, nagchecheck at nag-iinspect ng mga parts at mga produkto. Ang shift usually nasa 8 hours pero kapag maraming ginagawa nagiging 12 hours (Turnover ng mga machines, checking and inspecting the machine parts and the products produced. Shift usually 8 hours but if there are many things to do it becomes 12 hours).”) There was little incidences that they considered as stimulating, rewarding, and/or frustrating or otherwise in their work. They cannot identify which of their experiences can actually be considered as stimulating,

Stick to one language - multiple languages don't add much here.

rewarding, and/or frustrating or otherwise (i.e. when asked, they replied, “*Wala naman (Nothing much)*” or “*Di ko masabi (I cannot say)*”).

As for their future plans on work, generally they mentioned that whatever future plans they have depends on what happens to them now during their work in Tainan (i.e. “*Wala pang plano. Depende kung ano pang mangyayari sa akin dito. Tatlong taon yun kontrata ko pero di mo rin masasabi kung aabot nga ako ng tatlong taon dito. Baka malay mo, mag-quit o naisipan nalang na umalis. Pagkatapos di ko rin alam kung gusto ko mangibang-bansa pa o babalik nalang ako ng Pilipinas. (No plans yet. Depends on what will happen to me here. My contract here is three years but you’ll never know if I would reach three years here. I may quit or just leave. I also don’t know if I would go to other countries to work or just go back to the Philippines.)*”). Here is where some differences were observed. One of them would like to go back home to the Philippines and start their own business (i.e. “*Kung ako sana, gusto ko sana magpatakbo nalang ako ng sarili kong business. Dati kasi gusto ko magtayo ng machine shop na magaayos ng mga parts ng mga machine o ng sasakyan. Para din magamit ko yun pinag-aralan ko (I would like to run my own business. Before, I wanted to open a machine repair shop so that I can use what I have learned in school.)*”). Another, who is working in Taiwan for a long time (six years), had no plans at all.

As for their reasons for coming to work in Tainan, all five respondents mentioned supporting the family as the reason (i.e. “*Syempre para sa pamilya na rin. Para sa tatay, nanay, kapatid (Of course for my family. For my father, mother, siblings)*” or “*Para na rin sa pamilya. Syempre yun unang bagay talaga na iisipin mo pag dating sa trabaho (For the family. Of course that’s the first thing that you will think of when it comes to working.)*”). One supporting reason is the higher pay that they get compared to the Philippines (i.e. “*Ok naman ang sweldo dito (The pay here is ok.)*”). They do this despite the fact that they acknowledge that the work is hard (i.e. “*Mahirap talaga ang trabaho pero yun nalang din yun (The work is really hard but I just let it be)*” or “*Mahirap ang trabaho kaya minsan kung ano nalang ang meron, yun nalang ang kukunin. Magtanong ka rin sa iba sigurado yun din ang sasabihin nila (The work is hard but sometimes whatever is available, that is the one I will get. If you ask others, for sure they will say the same thing.)*”).

#### B. Researcher’s Observations during the Interview Sessions

Despite attempts to be open and simple in the use of Filipino language, and being polite as much as possible, there are still instances of hesitation and awkwardness in answering the questions. Some were really not open to be interviewed and just pointed to other people who seemed like

their senior in the group or the spokesperson for the group. One thing of note is that they were hesitant to be recorded. Hence, the researcher chose not to record the interviews.

### 3. From Casual Observations

Some casual observations were made at the Filipino cafeteria to compensate for the hesitations observed from the respondents. The researcher was incidentally a regular patron at the said cafeteria, becoming quite familiar with the location. These observations were made three times and lasted for thirty minutes to one hour per visit. Assuming the role of a complete observer, the researcher simply went about the place as usual – ordering lunch and sitting at one table eating and pretending to mind his own business. But the researcher had to put extra effort to keenly observe the surroundings while pretending not to eavesdrop. The location, which was changed per visit, was chosen so as to be close enough to eavesdrop on some conversations and observe some behaviors.

Observations yielded that Filipinos usually go in groups and foster strong relation ties with each other, especially those who are working in the same company. Much of their lives revolved around the work – scheduling of activities in their life, deciding on what to do or what not to do, etc. Even their casual conversations over lunch had stretches where they talk about their work – specifically what happened in the workplace. This gave an initial impression that their work was deeply ingrained in their lives, since it dominated their conversations in the casual setting and the schedules after their usual activities of going to church and then having lunch afterwards.

Another instance was a little insight on some future plans. Some of them consider this as a short-term stint or a stepping stone to some higher dreams and goals. One example was the dream of going and working in Canada or in Europe after working and hopefully saving enough in Taiwan. This gave the impression that they are treating their stay in Taiwan as a temporary one and they have some longer term plans, which are contingent on how much money they can earn and save.

A third observation found is their fear of retribution when they bring up labor-related issues. One example is that some people mentioned about bringing up some issues to the management but they fear that they'll be fired and be deported back to the Philippines. This gave the impression that they do not have much control over what they can do in Taiwan. The company that they work for exerts a significant amount of control over them inside and outside the workplace.

These observations indicated that most of them also shared the same sentiments with the ones being actually interviewed.

## VI. Next Steps

More interviews and observations are necessary to further probe these issues encountered thus far. These data gathering methods would continue until such time that the final report has to be prepared and submitted. Aside from this, the next steps for this research project are as follows:

- 1) Conduct the data analysis and generate the results
- 2) Interpret the results to generate discussions and conclusions
- 3) Prepare the final full research project report

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## FEEDBACK ON YOUR PRESENTATION

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QUICK PRESENTATION FEEDBACK			
<b>GROUP:</b>	<b>ERIK</b>		
<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
Are ideas presented connected with the aim of the presentation?	Are the ideas presented clear supported with evidence and logical argument?	Is it easy to follow & to understand? (Are the slides clear and easy to follow e.g. use of new pictures, words, graphs)	Overall impression (is it a group presentation etc.?)
40%	30%	20%	10%

<p><b>Comments</b></p> <p>The start is working up the focus much better. The use of citation is helpful – e.g., showing the consistent importance of certain factors over time.</p> <p>What are the research questions? Important so I'd restate them as the focus of the work.</p> <p>Don't forget if they are questions they need '?'</p> <p>Sampling – purposive yes – but what are the criteria are you using. Locations important but these are just where you find the respondents that fit your criteria.</p> <p>Nice touch on group observation.</p> <p>Order is getting confused – seem to be talking about literature again – something about literature.</p> <p>Observation – good – but what is the purpose – tell us up-front to turn eavesdropping into the data collection (more explicitly). Eg. What is your role in observation? You have reported some observation – helpful – but don't forget to explain the process to give it credibility.</p> <p>Report times accurately (in minutes) – along with profile.</p> <p>Very sensitive; hesitant; (company name – yes extremely sensitive – why ask?). Ok, so this links to concerns about validity – see Humphrey's too. What strategies can be</p>			

## FEEDBACK ON YOUR PRESENTATION

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used to solve this issue?

### **Overall**

Overall comments.

Erik this has the potential to be quite an interesting work. See work by qualitative researchers, such as Belk, small focused pieces of work can yield very interesting results.

Here:

- Literature – tighten, tighten, focus, focus
- Qualify your sample some more. It feels loose e.g., you have all factory workers which makes for a more homogenous sample (fine). Does length of stay bring different responses? You could run queries on your data in Xsight to find this out. This will influence subsequent sampling decisions – tell us about that. Tell the story here about finding sample locations –think about the Tea Room book.
- Method interviews – a few more details are needed on the process e.g., how did this work with recording etc.
- Analysis – nothing here! So any results you present lack credibility. You need a process – think grounded analysis – to arrive at codes to explain the data. This later, can be compared to existing research findings (see the section you have added on Philippino MOW

Grade: 86%