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The Role of Perceiving Calling in Career as a Mediator in the Relationship between Personal Growth Initiative and Career Commitment among Millennials

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Abstract

As the generation dominating the workforce, millennials are reported to have low work engagement and frequent changes in jobs. Since millennials regard that career is not only limited to organization and prefer to seek purpose and self-development at work, career commitment is one of the interesting topics to investigate. The present study aims to examine whether perceiving calling in career can serve as a mediator to explain the link between personal growth initiative and career commitment among millennials. Participants were 109 millennials aged 18-32 years. Data collection is carried out through online surveys. The result shows that perceiving calling in career fully mediates the relationship between personal growth initiative and career commitment.

Keywords: *career commitment, perceiving calling in career, personal growth initiative, millennials*

Peran Persepsi Panggilan Karir sebagai Mediator dalam Hubungan antara Personal Growth Initiative dan Komitmen Karir pada Milenial

Abstrak

Sebagai generasi yang mendominasi tenaga kerja, milenial dilaporkan memiliki keterlibatan kerja yang rendah dan sering berganti pekerjaan. Cara pandang millennials tentang karir yang tidak lagi dibatasi oleh organisasi dan minat mereka mencari tujuan serta pengembangan diri dalam pekerjaan menjadikan komitmen karir adalah salah satu penelitian menarik pada generasi milenial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui apakah panggilan karir mampu memediasi hubungan *personal growth initiative* dengan komitmen karir pada milenial. Partisipan penelitian ini adalah 109 milenial yang berusia 18-32 tahun. Pengambilan data dilakukan melalui survei online. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa persepsi panggilan dalam karir memediasi secara penuh hubungan antara *personal growth initiative* terhadap komitmen karir.

Kata kunci: komitmen karir, persepsi panggilan dalam karir, *personal growth initiative*, milenial

1. Introduction

Nowadays, industries are facing millennials who soon will take over the workforce replacing baby boomers (Smola & Sutton, 2002; Twenge & Campbell, 2008). According to Pew Research Center (2018), millennials are expected to be a majority of the workforce. In Indonesia, millennials, described as those who were born between 1980-2000, contributes to 50.36% of productive age population (in *Profil Generasi Milenial Indonesia*, 2018). Despite their desire for purpose and development at work, millennials are also reported to lack work engagement and change their jobs frequently (Gallup, 2016). Hence, companies have to prepare strategies to attract and maintain millennials' loyalty (Perry & Buckwalter, 2010). Since their unique characteristics and career preferences are different with the previous generations (Smola & Sutton, 2002), millennials' perspective on career is interesting to be explored (Irhamahayati, Hubeis, Hermawan, & Djohar, 2019; Levenson, 2010; Lyons, Ng, & Schweitzer, 2018).

The recent career trend emphasizes individual autonomy to create their success criteria (Baruch, 2006; Hall, 2004; Savickas et al., 2009). Millennials' preferences in career makes traditional perspective about career--where career path is seen as linear with the increase of status, responsibility, and salary (Baruch, 2004), is no longer popular compared to the concept of protean career--career emerges from personal value and serves the whole purpose of individual, family, and life (Hall, 2004). The implication from this trend leads to research and studies that explore more about how aligned value and career achievement are important factor for career selection (Boyd, 2010; Lee, Hung, & Ling, 2012; Weeks & Schaffert, 2017) and how subjective success criteria, such as identity and satisfaction, correlate with objective success criteria, e.g. salary (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Lyons, Ng, & Schweitzer, 2018).

Dries, Pepermans, and De Kerpel (2008) explained that millennials accept non-upward career moves, in which a career does not need to follow linear way within one track or one organization. A research among nurses working in a mental hospital found that those who perceived calling in their career were more likely to stay despite uncomfortable and unsupportive working situation than their counterparts without career calling (Puspita, 2012). Another research from Priatama, Supenawinata, and Hidayat (2019) also documented millennials who felt comfortable and happy to live their career as an artist though the decreased interest in art makes this profession unpopular in Indonesia. Moreover, these millennials also described that they enjoyed their career by helping others, sharing knowledge, and doing what they love. These findings assert that millennials value their career journey as an important domain that affects their life.

Previous studies found that millennials expectation on their career, like salary and career development (de Hauw & de Vos, 2010; Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010) could be achieved if one committed to their career (e.g. Ballout, 2009; Ellemers, de Gilder, Van Den Heuvel, 1998; Fu, 2011; Walumba et al., 2011). Another findings also showed positive relations between career commitment and low turnover intention (e.g. Bedeian, Kemery, & Pizzolatto., 1991; Chang, 1999; Kidd & Green, 2006). Career commitment is described as how motivating one's motivation to work on particular vocation (Hall, 1971). This commitment make individuals to exert every effort to achieve achievement and skills that are valuable for their career (Forret & Dougherty, 2004; Bhagat & London, 1999). In addition to the benefit for organizations, having career commitment also enhances one's well-being (Dik, Duffy, & Steger, 2011). Individuals with higher career commitment are more likely to develop their personal ability and knowledge (Ayee et al., 2011; Fu, 2011; Colarelli & Bishop, 1990).

Personal growth initiative (PGI) was found as a positive predictor of career commitment (Weigold, Porfeli, & Weigold, 2013). Coined by Robitschek (1998), personal growth initiative represents active intention and involvement in self-development activities that leads to self-actualization (Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014; Robitschek & Cook, 1999). Robitschek and Cook (1999) found that PGI significantly predicted vocational identity through career exploration and career crystallization. Individuals with PGI were able to encourage themselves to collect information related to the future career so they become certain with career they want to persevere (Robitschek & Cook, 1999).

Though the positive effect of personal growth initiative on career domain has been revealed in previous findings, few studies have been conducted to investigate in what ways an initiative for personal growth helps one to show commitment in a career. Since one's initiative to personal development can embrace various life domains (Robitschek & Keyes, 2009;

Shorey, Little, Snyder, Kluck, & Robitschek 2007), a specific psychological construct about how people perceive their work is worth considering as a possible mediator.

Initially rooted from religious teaching (Hardy, 1990), calling then proposed as one way of how people perceive their work (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997). Furthermore, career calling is defined as “transcendent summons, experienced as originating beyond the self, to approach a particular life role in a manner oriented toward demonstrating or deriving a sense of purpose or meaningfulness and that holds other-oriented values and goals as primary sources of motivation” (Dik & Duffy, 2009, p. 427). Perceiving calling in career either from God or from social needs provides meaning and sense of purpose in one’s work (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007; Hall & Chandler, 2005). Therefore, individuals perceiving calling in career tend to feel career as part of personal growth and pathway to succeed in career (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Poon, 2004). Duffy, Bott, Allan, Torrey, and Dik (2012) also documented that perceiving calling in career was positively associated with career commitment. It is hypothesized that perceiving calling in career can serve as a mediator of the link between personal growth initiative and career commitment.

Most studies have focused on organizational commitment in Indonesia (e.g. Putri & Martono, 2015; Rizki & Lubis, 2013) but only a few studies examine career commitment. To face bonus demographic (Maryati, 2015) and changing career perspective among millennials, understanding millennials’ motivation to commit to a career is an important key for companies and educational institutions. Extending from the prior studies that have assessed internal source of career commitment (e.g. Ballout, 2009; Chesnut & Burley, 2015; Lin, 2017), the present study aims to assess the role of perceiving calling in career in mediating PGI and career commitment.

2. Methods

Participants. One hundred and nine Indonesian participants aged from 18 to 32 years old were recruited in the current study. They had a career or specific role in certain jobs such as working an employee, an entrepreneur, a volunteer, or a *freelancer*. Aligned with millennials age range, the average age limit for job application in public and private companies is around 35. Based on the data from Deloitte (2019) and Badan Pusat Statistik (2018), millennials tend to change their employment within two years. Therefore, participants with maximum age of 32 were in career evaluation before they reach the upper age limit for job entry. Including millennials with career experience as participants is important since they are able to evaluate whether their career is suitable or not and they could become aware of which career they should commit to (Cherniss, 1991). In the current study, 62.4% of the respondents were male. There were 48.6% of the participants who were 23-27 years old, 35.8% are 18-22 years old and the rest of them aged between 28 and 32.

Measures. Personal growth initiative (PGI) was measured using *Personal Growth Initiative Scale-II* (PGIS-II) with four components: readiness for change, planfulness, using resource, and intentional behavior (Robitschek, 2012). This scale comprises 16 items. All subscales showed good internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for readiness for change was 0.744, planfulness was 0.811, using resource was 0.745, and intentional behavior was 0.773. Participants responded to each item using a five-point Likert scale (0=Disagree strongly to 5=Agree strongly). The items of PGIS-II include “I set realistic goals for what I want to change about myself” and “I actively work to improve myself”. The higher the total score from four subscales is, the greater individual shows an initiative for personal growth.

Perceiving calling in career was measured using Dik et al. (20012) *Calling and Vocation Questionnaire (CVQ)-Presence* that has already been translated into Bahasa Indonesia by Yuliawati (2018). CVQ-Presence consists of 12 items and has three dimensions, namely transcendence summon, purposeful work, and prosocial orientation. After validity analysis using SPSS, it was found that one item valued less than 0.300 and then excluded from the data analysis. Reliability analysis showed that all the subscales had good internal consistency with Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for transcendence summon was 0.765, purposeful work was 0.789, and prosocial behavior was 0.720. Participants responded to each item using a five-point Likert scale (1=Not at all true of me to 4=Absolutely true of me). Sample items include “My work helps me live out my life’s purpose” and “I believe that I have been called to my current line of work.” The higher the total score is, the higher the degree of individual perceives their career as a calling.

Career commitment in this study was measured using *Career Commitment Measure (CCM)* from Carson and Bedeian (1994). This instrument consists of 15 items and has three dimensions, namely career identity, career planning, and career resilience. After the validity analysis, two items were found valued less than 0.300 and were excluded from the data analysis. Participants were asked to rate each item, such as “My line of work/ career field is an important part of who I am” and “The discomfort associated with my line of work/ career field sometimes seems too great” using a five-point Likert scale (1=Not at all true of me to 5=Absolutely true of me). Cronbach’s alpha consistency for career identity was 0.707, career planning was 0.808, and career resilience was 0.735. The higher the total score from this instrument is, the higher the degree of individuals is committed to their career.

Procedures. The researchers performed forward translation for both PGIS-II and CCM. All the instruments were reviewed by 30 examiners to clarify the translation and structure of each sentence in Bahasa Indonesia. The researchers revised the scales based on the examiners’ feedbacks. The revised version of the instrument was distributed through online survey using Google Form.

To recruit participants, researchers shared the invitation through groups and personal mailing list. Researchers asked participants’ consent to be part of this study through social media or in person before sharing the survey link to them. Once the participants completed the online survey, the researchers asked their willingness to share the survey link to their qualified channels.

Data analyses. Data was analyzed using IBM SPSS statistical software version 22. Based on Barron and Kenny (1986), in the first step, the correlation between PGI and career commitment was investigated using simple linear regression. Second, the link between PGI to perceiving calling in career (as the mediator) was examined using simple linear regression. Furthermore, PGI and perceiving calling in career were added as predictors of career commitment in a multiple regression model. The indirect effect of PGI on career commitment through perceiving calling in career was tested using Sobel test (Preacher & Leonardelli, 2019).

3. Result

Our data was normally distributed. Using Pearson’s correlation, there was a positive link between PGI and career commitment ($r=.303, p=.001$). PGI was positively correlated with perceiving calling in career ($r=.564, p<.001$). A positive association between perceiving calling in career and career commitment was also found ($r=.347, p<.001$).

As shown in Figure 1, in the unmediated model, personal growth initiative positively predicted career commitment, $B=.269, \beta=.303, p=.001$. In the next step, the effect of personal growth initiative on perceiving calling in career was observed, $B=.484, \beta=.564, p<.001$. In the mediation analysis, perceiving calling in calling was positively associated with career commitment, $B=.266, \beta=.258, p=.02$. It turned out that when perceiving calling in career as the mediator was added into the model, personal growth initiative did not serve as the significant predictor of career commitment, $B=.140, \beta=.157, p=.153$. The indirect effect (ab) from Sobel test was significant, $z=2.18, p=0.028$. Our data indicated that perceiving calling in career fully mediates the link between personal growth initiative and career commitment.

Figure 1. Hypothesized model of perceiving calling in career as a mediator of the effect of personal growth initiative on career commitment.

PGI = Personal Growth Initiative

β_a = standardized regression coefficient of PGI on perceiving career calling
 β_b = standardized regression coefficient of perceiving career calling on career commitment
 β_c = standardized regression coefficient of PGI on career commitment in the unmediated model (direct effect)
 β_c = standardized regression coefficient of PGI on career commitment mediated by perceiving career calling

4. Discussion

In the midst of diverse career opportunities, changing job characteristics, and the current trends that career is not only limited to the path provided by organization, understanding how millennials have career commitment is essentially needed. The present study sought to extend the literature by examining the mediating role of perceiving calling in career in the relation between personal growth initiative and career commitment.

In accordance with the finding from Weigold et al., (2013) who involved undergraduate samples, the positive association between personal growth initiative and career commitment was also found in the unmediated model among millennials who were made up of college students, fresh graduates, job seekers, employees, and entrepreneurs. Several studies have documented personal growth initiative as a positive correlate of career exploration (e.g. Luyckx & Robitschek, 2014; Robitschek, 2003; Whittaker & Robitschek, 2001). This asserts that career is one's important life domain in which personal growth can be attained. Though prior studies have shown the contribution of personal growth initiative to career commitment, it is the first study to clarify how those variables can be linked among millennials.

Interestingly, personal growth initiative is no longer a significant predictor of career commitment when individuals perceiving their career as a calling. In other words, millennials with personal growth initiative are more likely to perceive their career calling which in turn fosters career commitment.

There are several possible explanations about this result. First, when individuals perceive their career as calling, their commitment to a career is based on both fulfilment of one's growth and contribution to others. Individuals with strong intention for personal growth may attempt to find ways to grow as a person in specific life domain. Perceiving career as a calling, which encompasses one's sense of purpose at work, helps millennials to perceive work as means for one's growth. Moreover, by perceiving calling in career, individuals do not merely consider about their own personal growth, but also evaluate how individuals' personal growth can provide positive contribution for others. Perceiving career calling through positive impact for others gives individuals beyond-the-self purpose (Dik & Duffy, 2009; Duffy & Autin, 2013; Duffy, England, Douglass, Autin, & Allan, 2017; Afsar, Umrani, Khan, 2018). Another study also reported that serving as volunteers was a positive predictor of career commitment over a three-month period because volunteering could establish helpful and trustworthy relation, develop career efficacy, and accentuate the value of work (Cheung & Liu, 2017). Perceiving career calling with contribution for a greater good as its feature is an attractive choice for millennials (Boyd, 2010; Ng & Johnson, 2015; Weeks & Schaffert, 2017) and Indonesian millennials are no exception (Irhamahayati et al., 2019).

Second, perceiving career calling helps individuals to commit to their career by strengthening millennials' self-clarity (Duffy & Sedlacek, 2007). These researchers argue that self-clarity derived from career calling aids individuals to feel assured of their career choice. Even though millennials might think that they can be fit to any career, the career they feel called to can reassure them that it reflects their identity best. Savickas et al. (2009) proposed that calling plays a central role in making meaning into one's life and work. Accordingly, individuals discerning their career as a calling tend to commit to their career since career is deemed as part of self-constructing and life-designing process (Savickas et al., 2009).

Third, individuals with calling in career also could feel purposeful at work that stimulates goal clarity (Hall, 2004). Goal clarity is beneficial for expanding career horizons, for attaining that goal (London, 1983), for having a sense of confidence, for deepening the appreciation of their career as something invaluable (Galles & Lenz, 2013; Hall, 2004). Having a purpose from career calling also brings determination to achieve that goal (Hill, Burrow, & Bronk, 2014). Taken together, those benefits of goal clarity from career calling may guide individuals to commit to their career.

The findings may have some implications for millennials, educational institutions, and organizations. To deal with various career options, millennials may start to foster growth initiative by developing their personal strengths (Meyers, van Woerkom, de Reuver, Bakk, & Oberski, 2015), then they can continue to discern their calling in career before making a commitment to that career. Additionally, educational institutions might also facilitate millennials to have a better information about career choice, allow them to openly share their career aspirations so that they can thrive in their career. Either from daily lessons or career counseling, the role of calling in career as a way to achieve meaningful life can be introduced. Career development program in college can stimulate individuals with initiative to grow as a person, not only to see from mere business opportunity or trend, but also from what career one's feel called. For industries and organizations, result from this study shows the role of calling in career as one factor that can increase their career commitment despite unsupportive conditions they might encounter. Therefore, industries or organizations might design career path in which millennials are able to experience a meaningful life through their career.

Notwithstanding the implications of this study, some limitations need to be acknowledged. In this present study, all of the measures were translated to Bahasa Indonesia. Unfortunately, some words might not be clearly translated with specific meaning from the original instruments. For example, the word "work" "job", "vocation", "occupation" were translated as "pekerjaan". The translation of "transcendence summon" was also perceived as a bit confusing by some reviewers. This may influence how participants responded to the item and requested additional explanations for some items. It is suggested that further work conduct forward and backward translation.

The mediating role of perceiving career calling in the link between personal growth initiative and career commitment warrants further investigation using longitudinal design to evaluate whether these variables work in similar ways across time. To develop a full picture, living out one's calling in career might be taken into account, owing to the fact that it has been revealed as a better predictor of well-being than perceiving calling in career (Duffy et al., 2012) and as the outcome of career commitment (Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, & Velez, 2018). Personal growth initiative, calling, and career commitment are all subjective experiences so future studies are needed to explore what kind of external supports that can encourage millennials to see their career as calling. For instance, the role of culture and gender in predicting career commitment (i.e. Leal-Muniz & Constantine, 2005; Yi, Ribbens, Fu, & Cheng, 2015) and organizational work culture might be considered to complement the internal factors of career commitment.

5. Conclusions

As the first study to provide evidence about career commitment among Indonesian millennials, the findings portray millennials in the colleges and workplaces. The present study aims to gain a better understanding of the ways in which personal growth initiative relates to career commitment. It is found that perceiving calling in career fully mediates the predictive role of personal growth initiative on career commitment. This showed us how millennials with personal growth initiative can be committed to their career due to beyond-the-self purpose, self-clarity, and goal clarity from their career calling.

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