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‘Enhancing Quality of Life through Community Integrity and Cultural Diversity:
Promoting Indigenous, Social and Cultural Psychology’
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Coping Style of Non-tenured Lecturers

Coping Style of Non-tenured Lecturers

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Abstract

The changing status of public university in Indonesia has allowed public universities to recruit new lecturers independently. These new lecturers are called non-tenured contract employees and are sometimes treated differently. This research aims at exploring the coping styles of non-tenured lecturers in public universities in Indonesia. Qualitative approach was used to investigate the psychodynamics of the coping mechanisms of new lecturers. There were four participants in this study. Interview and observation were used to collect data from the four respondents. All data were then analyzed using theoretical coding method, which consisted of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Data verification was based on four criteria, i.e. credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Results showed two coping styles of non-tenured lecturers, i.e. problem-focused coping and emotional-focused coping. Problem focused coping consisted of exercised caution, instrumental action, and negotiation. Emotional-focused coping only consisted of minimization, and escapism. Results also showed one specific coping style that could not be categorized as either problem-focused coping or emotional focused coping. This coping style, also termed in this study as 'nerimo' was reinforced by social supports, which gave the non-tenured lecturers the strength to stay in their job. The kind of social supports they received included academic involvement and career opportunity.

Keywords: coping style, social support, academic involvement, career opportunity

A. INTRODUCTION

The constant change of today's world forces organizations to abandon their old managerial methods and make adjustments in order to continue to grow and not become a victim of change. Educational institutions are one such organization that is constantly changing and needing to adapt to this rapid change. One of these educational institutions are public universities.

Over the past ten years, some public universities in Indonesia are changing their institutional status to Badan Hukum Milik Negara or BHMN (State-Owned Legal Entity), which has implications on their staffing, contract and management of employment policies (Nurulparik, in Eriyanti, 2005). The authorization to recruit new employees without the formal recruitment procedures dictated by the Kementerian Pendayagunaan Aparatur Negara Ministry or the Ministry of PAN (Ministry for the Empowerment of State Apparatus) allows BHMN to recruit non-tenured lecturers. BHMN no longer needs to wait for open

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recruitment periods scheduled by the Ministry. Furthermore, the right to recruit new lecturers are given at departmental level, so each department is allowed to appoint non-tenured lecturers according to the department’s need. In 1999, Indonesia piloted four universities to be BHMN Universitas Indonesia (UI), Institut Teknologi Bandung (ITB), Institut Pertanian Bogor (IPB), and Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM). In 2004, BHMN membership added two more universities, (i.e. Universitas Sumatera Utara (USU) and Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia (UPI). In fact, the national government has set the goal that in 2010 there will be 20 public universities converted to BHMN status. This status change has prompted the Directorate General of Higher Education to increase public university’s efficiency (Gatra, 2004). As a result of this policy, many public university’s management methods are no longer suitable to manage BHMN.

Preliminary research on the impact on BHMN status and recruitment procedures on non-tenured lecturers’ has documented that lecturers faced many uncertainties. The main problem expressed by respondents was the uncertainty of contract-based recruitment. Some respondents were recruited on departmental level, while others on university level. The contract was only valid during the leadership of the dean or the rector who signed the contract. The contract could be annulled as the dean or the rector was replaced by his/her successor. On the other hand, there were non-tenured lecturers who managed to stay employed by the department or university despite the changing leadership. They did not get contract dismissal, but unfortunately also did not get a contract extension. They continued to teach and give lectures without having a clear contract. Some lecturers continued to work based only on the verbal request of the dean.

This uncertainty also translated itself in several other aspects such as the lecturers’ salary. Although these lecturers might have the same background level of education as their tenured counterparts, their salary base was different, depending on the financial capabilities of each department. Furthermore, these lecturers also faced uncertainty in their career development path as their institution did not provide clear platform for their development. Opportunities for career development were often constrained by the status of one’s tenureship (i.e. more opportunities were available for tenure-track lecturers.) Non-tenured lecturers also did not know if their research and publication could be used as performance appraisal item because there were no clear rules on its procedures for these lecturers. Finally, they face uncertainty in terms of their contract renewal in that they could not ascertain whether or not their contract would be extended once their initial contract has expired. Together, these factors influenced non-tenured lecturers’ career uncertainty.

Page (2008) defines uncertainty as the lack of information on some variables that are considered relevant. Henisz and Delios (2004) argue that uncertainty arises because of lack of information in specific environment. Uncertainty also occurs in the event of change.
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Baxter and Montgomery (1996) suggest that uncertainty is the degree to which the situation cannot be predicted or cannot be adequately understood. Brashers (2001) further argues that uncertainty will arise when the details of situations are ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, or full of possibilities. Uncertainty also occur when required information is not available or is not consistent, and when individuals feel insecure with their knowledge or knowledge of general conditions.

Based on the experts opinions above, it can be concluded that uncertainty is a condition which occurs in the absence of information that are considered relevant, because details of the information required is not available, ambiguous, complex, unpredictable, and individuals feel insecure with their knowledge. This definition of uncertainty will be used in this research.

Many experts have examined the impact of uncertainty on individuals in different research settings. Maurier and Northcott (2000) in their study of hospital nurses found that employment uncertainty made them suffer from high-level stress. This result is consistent with other research results which found that work uncertainty as associated with higher stress level of employees, reduced job satisfaction and commitment, and increasing desire to leave organization (Matteson & Ivancevich, 1990; Pollard, 2001; Terry & Jimnieson, 2003).

Uncertainty of career development path, contract extension or dismissal, are among those significant threat faced by non-tenured lecturers. These certainly will affect their psychological condition and stimulate coping. Coping is effort by individuals to master, reduce, or eliminate the pressures they experienced (Parry, 1992). Coping is effort by individuals, visible or invisible, to deal with threatening or stressful situations (Billing & Moos, 1984; Stone & Neale, 1984; Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, DeLongins, & Gruen, 1986). Coping is also a collection of thoughts and behaviors of individual in the face of stressful situations. Lindsay and Powell (1994) argue that coping is individual ability to conduct a set of reactions to face and overcome stress or problem.

Based on the above arguments, coping can be defined as the process of cognitive activity which is accompanied by behavioral activity in adjusting to stressful situation in life. This definition of coping will be used in this research.

Lazarus and Folkman (Inawati, 1998) classify coping into approach coping and avoidance coping. Approach coping, which is also called problem-focused coping (abbreviated as PFC), is characterized by logical analytics, seeking information, and trying to solve problem with a positive adjustment. Avoidance coping, which is also called emotional-focused coping (abbreviated as EFC), is characterized by repression, projection, denial, and various other ways to minimize threats (Hollahan &Moos, 1987).
Aldwin and Revenson (1987) classify PFC into three types, (a) exercised caution, (b), instrumental action, and (c) negotiation. Exercised caution is when one thinks, reviews, and considers some available alternative solutions, Exercised caution also includes careful decision making, with holding action which may cause more harm than good, and evaluation of strategies that have been done before. Instrumental action consists of human effort and action that lead to direct problem solving, and to develop action plans and implementations. People who use instrumental action as a coping strategy often know what to do, so they increase their efforts to make things work. Negotiation is efforts done by individuals that is devoted to other people and related to the problem, in hope that the problem can be resolved. Using this strategy, the person attempts to change someone's mind or opinion, to make an offer, to negotiate, or to compromise in order to get something positive out of the situation.

On the other hand, Aldwin and Revenson (1987) categorize EFC into four types: (a) escapism, (b) minimization, (c) self-blame, and (d) seeking meaning. Escapism is characterized by avoiding the problem. Individuals might daydream or imagine being in a better situation or time, or sleep more than usual, drink alcohol or use drugs, and reject other people. Minimization characterized by refusing to think about the problem and assuming as if the problem does not exist. Self-blame is characterized by blaming and punishing his/herself, regretting what had happened, and promising that it will be different or better at a later time. This strategy is passive and introspective directed inward. Finally seeking meaning is characterized by searching for the meaning of experience, and trying to see other things that are important in life.

The psychological dynamics of non-tenured lecturers facing career and work uncertainties is worth investigating because it can be used by the institution to build better system management. One way to examine these complex psychological dynamics is through their coping style. Therefore, this research foregrounds the coping styles of the four non-tenured lecturers as its focus.

Indigenous psychological approach was used in this research. Kim and Berry (1993) mention that indigenous psychology is 'the scientific study of human behavior or mind that is native, that is not transported from other regions, and that is designed for its people'. This approach is chosen because an understanding of coping style of non-tenured lecturers in Indonesian higher education contexts needs to be placed on its emerging context. This context-bounding will lead to an understanding of coping style does not deviate from respondents' own understanding of their cultural contexts. This interpretive bounding also makes this research different from prior research. Prior research such as Aldwin and Revenson (1987) might be accurate for subjects from western culture, but might not be
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inappropriate for subjects from eastern culture because of these cultural context differences.

Based on literature and problem mentioned above, researcher propose a research question: What kind coping style used by non-tenured lecturers in the face of uncertainties?

B. METHOD

This research used case study design. Yin (1994) states that case study design is used when researchers have question ‘how’ or ‘why’ of contemporary events in which they only have little or none control.

This research had four respondents. Respondents were selected using purposive sampling. As Payne (2007) suggests, in purposive sampling a researcher selects respondents based on the belief that they could be believed and give contribution or information relevant to the research topic.

The researcher selected four non-tenured lecturers as the research respondents. The researcher established four sampling criteria of respondents:

1. Non-tenured lecturer whose primary job was teaching or giving lectures;
2. Willing to be a research respondent;
3. Have never been trained as a civil servant4.

Respondents were recruited using snowball sampling. Creswell (2012) mentions that in snowball sampling, a researcher asks his/her respondent to identify others who could become another research respondent. The researcher met with the first respondent in an event in a university. He agreed to become the respondent and was asked to identify other non-tenured lecturers who would be willing to participate in the research. Using this sampling method, the researcher obtained four respondents. Half of them were non-tenured lecturers from the same department, while others came from social sciences departments. Only one respondent was female, while the other three were males. All of them were below thirty five years old, and had been working in their departments for two years. Before interviewing them, the researcher introduced the research title and purpose, and asked them to sign an informed consent if they agreed to participate in the research.

Researcher use two methods to collect data: semi-structured interview and observation. Smith and Eatough (2007) suggest that semi-structured interview is an

4 In Indonesian public university system, tenured-track lecturers are required to take a national training (Latihan Prahobatan) before their formal contract as tenured lecturers is issued by the Ministry of PAN (Ministry for the Empowerment of State Apparatus). Once they pass the national training, they will be recorded as national government employees (civil servants).
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interview which is guided by questions. These questions were compiled by the researcher. Smith and Eatough also suggest that semi-structured interview allows the researcher to follow up important and interesting issues which emerge during the interview. Each respondents were interviewed two to four times. The researcher asked six questions to the respondents:

1. What did the recruitment process look like based on your experienced?
2. How do you see your current status as non-tenured lecturer?
3. How does your department manage non-tenured lecturers?
4. How do you see uncertainty of contract extension?
5. What is your experience as non-tenured lecturer?
6. How did you cope with the uncertainty of being a non-tenured lecturer?

Banister, Burman, Parker, Taylor, and Tindall (1994) argue that observation is an activity which consist of accurate watching action, recording phenomena which arise, and considering relationship between aspects of phenomena. In this research, observation conducted along with interview. This will make a researcher understand the context of the phenomena or the words of the respondents (Yin, 1994).

Qualitative research have standards to test the research results. Moleong (2002) suggests that examination of data in a qualitative study are based on four criteria, i.e. credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. The researcher accomplished these criteria through the following procedures: Credibility was established by attaching all interview verbatim, signed informed consent of the respondents, and observation records. Transferability was established by clearly describing the research design, the data collection methods, the respondents, and the data analysis methods. Furthermore, the researcher established dependability by consulting every research step to his supervisor. The researcher also kept records of each step of the data collection and analysis, including the transformation of interview verbatim to coding and categories, and the development of relationships between emerging categories. Finally, the last criteria is confirmability. The researcher established this criteria by doing member checking to all respondents after collecting data. The researcher’s supervisor was involved during the data analysis to check inter subjectivity or linkages between aspects that emerged from the data. The researcher then used theoretical coding method to analyze data. Theoretical coding consists of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. These coding are different steps to analyze data, in which —if necessary—the researcher can move backward and forward in the analysis process (Flick, 2002).
C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Non-tenured lecturers faced many threats in their work environments. They only got a small amount of salary, where one respondent even said that she did not receive salary every month. Due to their status, they faced uncertainty every year. They did not know if their contract would be extended or terminated. Their status also made their career path unclear. They did not know if their research could be used in performance appraisal, because career development procedures and program did not exist for non-tenured lecturers. They were told from the beginning that becoming non-tenured lecturers does not guarantee their tenureship. They also faced negative treatment from senior lecturers or co-workers. They were treated differently, and sometimes not allowed to participate in department activities. These threats made them feel uncomfortable, worried, and insecure.

Non-tenured lecturers overcame these threats by taking various coping styles, both PFC and EFC. PFC consisted of exercised caution, instrumental action, and negotiation. Exercised caution was actuated by maintaining good attitude and behavior in their social relationships among lecturers. They always tried to abide by the rules, and not to make any mistake. Instrumental action was done by focusing on their job, and did not pay attention to negative comments. They always tried to give their best effort. Instrumental action also done by trying to find a side job to get an additional income. Negotiation was done by asking their department leaders to clearly define the rules and regulations or to treat them fairly. These coping styles were conducted by all respondents.

Unlike PFC, only two EFC emerged from the data, and they were minimization and escapism. Minimization was done by comparing their condition with other non-tenured lecturers. By doing so, they came to the realization that that their condition was better than that of other people. They also reasoned that the department need them to maintain the number of its academic staff when retiring senior lecturers are retiring. Another form of minimization was not thinking about the uncertainty. These copings could decrease their anxiety level. Escapism conducted by withdrawing from co-workers who discriminated them. This action was done to avoid conflict and reduce anxiety.

Results also found one specific coping style that could be categorized as PFC or EFC. This coping style was labeled here as 'nerimo'. This coping style was different from seeking meaning coping style. In seeking meaning, individuals are searching for the meaning of an experience, and trying to see other things that are important in life (Aldwin & Revensen, 1987). But in nerimo, individuals just accept their condition as part of life's choices. They were aware that becoming non-tenured lecturers was their choice, so they would accept every consequence (W.R.IV.02, 379-380). As a respondent commented,
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‘But what else [can you do], it is what it is... Well, what else can you do, right? Still accepting it? Yes...I must. That’s the consequence. There it is,...there’s no other choice’ (W.R.III.04, 172-175).

Another respondent said,

‘So if ... yeah if you can say I accept it, because there was nothing else I could do to change that status, because I could not come to the university then ask for tenureship promotion, that’s not possible’ (W.R.I.02, 69-72).

These copings style was reinforced by social support, which gave these lecturers the strength to stay in their job. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define social support as a psychological resource that defines an individual’s perceptions with regard to the quality of their social relationships. The kind of social supports they received were academic involvement and career opportunity. Academic involvement was provided by involving them in all faculty activities alongside with tenure-track lecturers (W.R.I.02, 117, 119). They were involved in meetings, trainings, workshops, seminars, and various committees (W.R.I.02, 222-224). The departments also gave them research fundings (W.R.I.02, 100-102). Career opportunity was provided by acquainting non-tenured lecturers to lecturers from around the world, as well as helping them to find dissertation supervisor and scholarship (W.R.II.01, 272-275; W.R.II.02, 43-45). These social supports made the lecturers feel committed to the department. They trusted the department (W.R.I.01, 367; 02, 90), and did not try to apply as tenure-track lecturers in another university (W.R.I.02, 194-199, 253-256). They made the decision to come back and serve the department after completing their master’s degree (W.R.III.03, 2-3) and chose to for the current department for the rest of their lives (W.R.II.02, 115-116).

Based on these research findings, the researcher suggests that nerimo be theoretically included as an indigenous coping style, which is relevant in Indonesian cultural context. Practically, this coping style can used for anyone who has chosen the job that he/she loved but face many uncertainties or threats in their work. One limitation of this research is that it does not use respondents who represent department’s leader or manager. These kinds of respondents can give additional information about non-tenured lecturer policy and verify the accuracy of information given by the respondents. Future research should include these respondents to get more comprehensive information.

D. CONCLUSION

Non-tenured lecturers in BHMN face many threats. They do various copings to overcome these threats, such as problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and nerimo. This coping style is reinforced by social supports, which give them the reinforcement to remain in their current job. The kind of social supports include academic involvement and career opportunity.
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