Dark Side of the Career: Reflections from an Online Discussion Platform[*],[**]

Zeynep GÖRGÜLÜ[***] 🆔
Hasan BOZGEYİKLİ[****] 🆔

ABSTRACT

Career counseling research has neglected how workplace experiences affect employees' careers. Therefore, this study aimed to understand the employees' feelings and thoughts regarding their working life. Accordingly, this study adopted a qualitative approach and investigated 1928 posts by using Thematic Analysis from an online discussion platform. The research data were the entries of the platform under the title of "working life" from 2000 to 2022. These entries were analyzed by using MAXQDA software. Results showed three clusters: The naïve cluster comprised expectations and skills from the beginning of working life. In naïve cluster, users expressed how different their expectations in working life from reality. The black box cluster included workplace deviance and poor working conditions. In this cluster, users especially expressed problems about interpersonal relationships in the working environment. Finally, the cost cluster comprised physical, emotional, behavioral, and spiritual outputs of working life. In these outputs, users revealed their burnout, insecurity, and unhappiness. The findings were discussed from the psychology of working theory perspective, and related literature.

Keywords: Workplace, Career Development, Employee, Working Life, Decent Work.

Kariyerin Karanlık Yüzü: Çevrimiçi Bir Platformdan Yansımalar

ÖZ

Kariyer danışmanlığı alanında, çalışanların işyeri deneyimlerinin kariyerlerini nasıl etkilediğini ihmal edilen bir araştırma alanıdır. Bu nedenle bu araştırma çalışanların çalışma hayatlarına ilişkin duygu ve düşüncelerini anlamayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu doğrultuda, nitel bir yaklaşım benimsenmiş ve bir çevrimiçi tartışma platformundaki 1928 gönderi tematik analiz ile incelenmiştir. Araştırma verileri platformun "iş yaşamı" başlığı altındaki 2000 yılından 2022 yılına kadar olan gönderilerdir. Bu gönderiler MAXQDA programı yardımıyla analiz edilmiştir. Araştırma sonucunda elde edilen kodlar üç kümede birleştirilmiştir: acemilik olarak adlandırılan küme çalışma hayatının başlangıcındaki beklentiler ile becerileri içermektedir. Bu kümede kullanıcılar çalışma hayatındaki beklentilerinin gerçekte olandan ne kadar farklı olduğunu ifade etmiştir. Kara kutu olarak adlandırılan küme, işyerindeki olumsuz davranışları ve kötü çalışma koşullarını içermektedir. Bu kümede kullanıcılar özellikle çalışma ortamındaki kişilerarası ilişkilerle ilgili sorularını ifade etmiştir. Son olarak, çıktı olarak adlandırılan küme ise çalışma hayatının fiziksel, duygusal, davranışsal ve ruhsal sonuçlarından oluşmuştur. Bu çıktılarda kullanıcılar tükenmişliklerini, güvensizliklerini, mutsuzluklarını ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular, Çalışma Psikolojisi Kuramı perspektifinden ve ilgili literatürle birlikte tartışılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İşyeri, Kariyer Gelişimi, Çalışan, Çalışma Hayatı, İnsana Yakışır İş.

1. Introduction

Working life is an essential part of one's life because it accounts for most of the average life span. Erikson (1994) contended that the development task of adulthood is productivity, and working life is an eligible source of production. Satisfaction from working life is related to overall life satisfaction and well-being (Hagmaier et al., 2018). However, negative experiences in the workplace, such as incivility, poor working conditions, and violence lead to job burnout (Han et al., 2021), health issues (Qi et al., 2020; Sime et al., 2022), low satisfaction (Chevalier et al., 2018; Hasan et al., 2021), decreased well-being (Han et al.,

2021; Lee et al., 2014), and so forth. Moreover, these negative workplace experiences are more common than we think (American Psychology Association (APA), 2022). This dark side has generally been examined in the organization and management field by focusing on the organization's benefit. However, working experiences are highly related to individuals' well-being as a considerable part of their life. Therefore, we aimed to understand negative working life experiences and dynamics through a qualitative study.

There are some signals indicating severe problems in working life. A worldwide study conducted after the pandemic reported that 40% of employees participating in the study wanted to change their current job (Microsoft, 2022). Further, establishing a work-life balance and well-being were predominant reasons for leaving their job. Another study reported that individuals faced serious challenging and negative experiences such as mobbing in their workplace (APA, 2022). Accordingly, we suggest that working life may not provide employees with satisfaction and well-being as expected. Therefore, workplace challenges should be a focus of research in the field of career counseling, which aims to provide the necessary support and facilitation for individuals in their career choices and overall career processes (Duffy et al., 2016; Yeşilyaprak, 2019). There is a need for a person-benefit perspective regarding challenges from working life in career counseling research. Although one of the purposes of career development research is to develop well-being and empower individuals (Akkermans & Kubasch, 2017; Blustein et al., 2019), it can be limited to investigating working life issues.

Moreover, traditional career counseling theories can be limited to addressing issues that individuals face after getting a job and entering working life. The classical paradigm (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984), based on matching a job and personal characteristics, argues that satisfaction is related to job-person harmony. However, this may not solely bring happiness to individuals. Workplaces include more than one person and are formed with systems including employees and employers, and the interactions with them. Although subsequent post-modern theories have shifted their focus from job-person fit to the individuals (Maree, 2010), contextual factors around the employees are neglected. In this regard, Akkermans and Kubasch (2017) questioned whether individuals experience well-being in their careers when they have the desired characteristics, such as being employable, proactive, competent, adaptable, and motivated. Contrarily, they stated that individuals with the desired characteristics could lose their jobs since contextual factors of workplaces. However, pertaining to entering working life and coping with the abusive workplace environment, the career development field needs more research to help clients sustain working life effectively. In this way, career counseling can aid in this by developing coping mechanisms, offering guidance on workplace rights, and facilitating access to professional support networks.

1.1. Psychology of Working Theory

Recently, increasing research has been conducted to apply career counseling principles to working life. Psychology of working theory (PWT; Duffy et al., 2016) has the most potential in this regard. One of the basic principles of PWT is that career services are for both job seekers and employees (Blustein et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2016). Thus, PWT focuses on the contextual drawbacks on attaining decent work and provides a social justice perspective to career counseling. Research on PWT included the concept of working and working life to career counseling theories for the first time. Decent work, defined by the International Labor Organization (2013), is central to the PTW. Decent work is defined as work that ensures employees' physical and psychological health. Decent work incorporates physically and socially suitable working conditions, private life-sensitive working hours, matching organizational values and employee values, adequate rewards, and adequate access to health services (Buyukgoze-Kavas & Autin, 2019) (Duffy et al., 2016; Keser & Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2022). As a result of attaining decent work, employees increase their well-being and motivation due to meeting their needs for survival, social contribution, and self-determination (Blustein et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2021).

PWT addresses inequalities in access to decent work for marginalized groups (Blustein et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2016). One of the ways to cope with the inequalities may be to make all work decent. Therefore, it is essential to understand the dynamics of working life. When individuals enter the

workplace, they bring their characteristics, personality traits, and expectations to this new environment. However, the workplace has a unique identity and may force the individual to relinquish their characteristics to adapt to the workplace climate (Bertolotti et al., 2021). In a study using the PWT, workplace climate was a significant predictor of decent work (England et al., 2020). Research can be conducted to create a workplace climate that respects human rights by understanding the dynamics of abusive conditions in the workplace.

Additionally, economic conditions have a moderating role in determining decent work in PTW (Blustein et al., 2019), as does a county's economic and political conditions. Consequently, people who are marginalized or have financial constraints, as well as a significant part of the population, may be unable to attain decent work. On the surface, a job may appear respectable and proper, but it may have an abusive and challenging environment that harms employees. Therefore, a broader perspective considering the general employee population may be beneficial to explore abusive workplace dynamics.

1.2. Context: Employment in Turkey

Turkey exhibits one of the highest unemployment rates among OECD countries (OECD, 2023), with a reported rate of 10.3% in December 2022. As well as the psychological burden of unemployment, Turkish citizens are concerned about working a job below their competencies and education. Underemployment is a noticeable problem in reaching employment. A research report pointed out the perceived discordance between employees and their jobs. Accordingly, 38.7% of the employees stated that their work does not match the level of education they have (Özaydın et al., 2019). Despite the abundance of graduates (23% of the total population in 2021; TURKSTAT, 2022), the shortage of jobs that require a university degree is one of the explanations for underemployment (Yalçıntaş & Akkaya, 2019). As a result, some Turkish people are obliged to work for low wages in unsuitable conditions.

In Turkey, there is a nationwide university entrance examination to attend a bachelor's degree program. The majority of universities are publicly funded, thus ensuring free access to education for eligible students. Exam scores play a significant role in making decision which majors students pursue and which universities they attend (Görgülü & Bozgeyikli, 2022; OWEN et al., 2012; Ulas-Kilic et al., 2020). On the other hand, the availability of career counseling services remains restricted to the K–12 school system in Turkey (Yeşilyaprak, 2019). In most sectors, employees do not typically access to career counseling (i.e., health; Sevinç & Sabuncu, 2018). Public or private sectors usually do not employ career counselors. Human resources departments provide the employees with career management training rather than counseling (i.e., banking; Vural & Sağlam, 2019).

1.3. Ekşi Sözlük and Online Platforms

With the widespread use of social media platforms, individuals can feel free to share their thoughts and feelings while hiding their identities. Individuals may be prone to issues such as mobbing, abuse, and exploitation. Thus, individuals can have difficulty expressing their hurtful experiences. Social media provides an appealing platform for individuals to express their difficult experiences because of anonymity. Similarly, sensitive issues such as infertility (Hanna & Gough, 2017), gender issues (Jacobs et al., 2020), and suicide attempts (Mason et al., 2021) were investigated through social media comments in previous studies without the risk of harm to participants. Thus, using social media to explore negative experiences in working life may be beneficial to develop a comprehensive understanding due to rich data. In Turkey, Ekşi Sözlük is a suitable online discussion platform.

Ekşi Sözlük, established in 1999, is a similar community-driven platform to Reddit. As of 2019, there are more than 36 million entries on Ekşi Sözlük, which has more than 115,852 authors. The majority of the authors are from Turkey, and all entries are Turkish. According to the head of Ekşi Sözlük, it is visited by 35 million different people per month (Pena, 2019). Ekşi Sözlük users utilize their selected nicknames and share their entries about various issues, from politics to entertainment. Users can open titles from any subject without limitation and express their opinions, thoughts, and feelings in the titles opened. Compared to Twitter, Ekşi Sözlük provides more opportunities for its users to explain their own lives and ideas with its structure, which is similar to online blogs. With a history spanning more than twenty years,

including users from different generations, an extensive user database, no limits in terms of users' self-expression, and users therefore being able to share more freely than in real life, Ekşi Sözlük provides rich content (Dogu et al., 2009). Therefore, Ekşi Sözlük is the most popular online discussion platform in Turkey.

1.4. The Present Study

The present study proposes to explore the abusive experiences of individuals in working life through an online discussion forum. For this reason, we conducted a content analysis on the online data. Due to the sensitive nature of abusive behaviors such as bullying and mobbing that individuals are exposed to, it can be challenging to address them in research. We believe an anonymous platform may make accessing actual experiences and thoughts easier. Therefore, we hope this research could guide career practitioners and researchers regarding employee counseling by revealing workplace experiences.

2. Material and Methods
2.1. Data Selection and Collection

Ekşi Sözlük is one of the popular online discussion platforms in Turkey. Users of Ekşi Sözlük can form topics on various subjects and share their thoughts and feelings anonymously without being restricted by word limits. A post in Ekşi Sözlük is called an "entry." Thus, we used the term "entry" in our study. The present study's data comprised all entries from the "working life" topic in Ekşi Sözlük. We chose the "working life" topic because it contains both negative and positive entries about working. Analyzing both negative and positive issues may help to reduce possible biases. Further, a neutral topic can allow users to express their thoughts and emotions without external direction. Accordingly, 2046 entries shared by 1550 users were scraped in April 2022 using a data scraper extension. The oldest entry was written in June 2000, and the newest entry was shared in April 2022. Figure 1 shows the distribution of entries by year. Before the analysis, we read, reviewed, and cleaned all entries one by one, as shown in Figure 2. As a result of data cleaning, 1928 entries were included for further analysis.
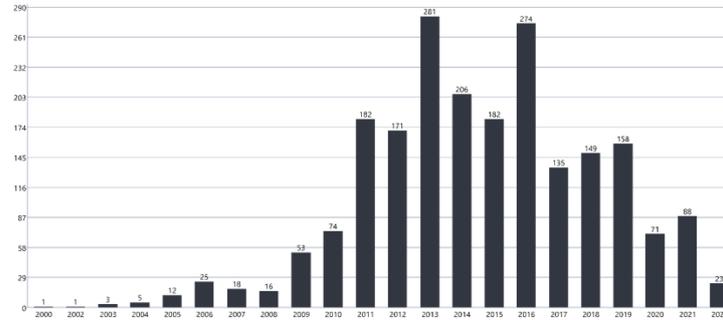

Figure 1. Distribution of entries by years

2.2. Data Analysis

Under the qualitative nature of this research, we coded all entries using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006), which was applied inductively from codes to categories. Owing to extensive data, we followed a method similar to previous studies (Cavazos-Rehg et al., 2016; Mason et al., 2021), which recommends analyzing a small part of the data and then forming a codebook guided to further analyze the remaining data. Figure 2 presents the stages of coding. Although both researchers were involved in the coding process, a researcher reviewed all the codes and checked their suitability.
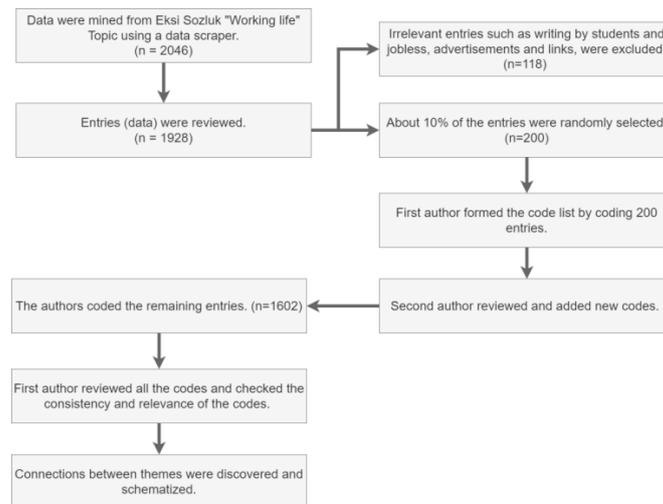
Figure 2. Flowchart of the Procedure the Data Cleaning and Analysis

We followed thematic analysis stages to form codes and categories in level 1 coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Firstly, we read over and over the 200 entries selected randomly. Then, first author coded them several times until reaching the most congruent ones. With combining codes based on similarity, categories were occurred. For instance, conflict was formed by combining codes to signal problematic relationships that were disharmony among co-workers, narcissistic manager, unskilled/incompetent co-workers. Workplace deviance consisted of codes of gossip, lying, faking, mobbing and so on. However, its dimensions were formed by combining these codes according to the workplace deviance typology suggesting by Robinson and Bennett (1995). After second author review and revisions of them, first and second author coded the rest of entries according to this coding system. Then, level 1 coding was completed, and level 2 coding was started by searching pattern from whole data. Obtaining clusters, we applied pattern and axial coding to categories not codes (Saldaña, 2021). Some categories were about to workplace environment (i.e., conflict, deviances), while others were more focused employees' individual features (i.e., mismatch, emotional responses, physical responses). Some of the individual-focused categories appeared to be antecedents (i.e., skill gap), while others were regarding outcomes of working life (i.e., stress, exhausting). Thus, clusters and inter-cluster relations were formed. The pattern detected between the codes and the clusters were named the "vicious circle of darkness".

2.3. Ethical Considerations and Credibility

The present study was reviewed and appropriated by the ethics committee of Selçuk University Faculty of Education (Date: 02.08.2022, no: E.330973). As Ekşi Sözlük users hide their identity by using a nickname, participants' approval for the study could not be received. This is a limitation and risk of online forum research (Norman Adams, 2022) . To decrease ethical concerns and protect privacy, we strictly anonymized the data. Consistent with a previous study recommendation(Bhandari & Sun, 2023), we also paraphrased all the quoted entries in this study.

Credibility may be limited in online discussion analysis. Therefore, we adapted Creswell and Miller's(2000)recommendations for qualitative research in this study. We provided the codes and categories with their opposites to strengthen the findings by analyzing the neutral topic. In this way, entries regarding happiness in working life emerged to cluster similar to the dark side of a career. The opposite of the dark side codes was the happiness in working life codes. In addition, we presented this research at a congress and obtained the opinions of experts in the field of psychological counseling. Thusly, expert triangulation was provided (Creswell & Báez, 2020; Creswell & Miller, 2000).

3. Results

This research had a comprehensive data set. Therefore, an abundance of codes, subcategories, and categories emerged. Only 7.5% of the entries had positive contents related to working life. Positive entries were comprised of optimism and excitement about starting a new job or the happiness of self-employment. The working environment was described as having favorable conditions and positive relationships. A positive working environment produced positive and meaningful emotions. Table 1 includes codes and categories for positive entries.

Table 1. Themes, Categories, and Codes of Positive Entries

Happiness from working Codes		ƒ	Example
INPUT	Self-Employment	7	*"When you start your own business, that's when you have a real life ... You go to your work with enthusiasm." (1337, 2016)*
	Optimistic startup	14	
	Positive relationships	49	
PROCESS	Development opportunity	21	*"If the social setting is good, you will really like it"(1685, 2019)*
	Fair working conditions	12	*"You decide your own working hours, and so there is no happier working life than this." (1031, 2014)*
	Fair earnings	21	
	Value of labor	3	
OUTPUT	Sense of achievement	12	*"But in the evening, when you go home, you think about what you produced that day, and a small smile appears on your face. Forget about the rest." (815, 2013)*
	Love the job	45	
	Meaningfulness	28	
	Working is the part of the life	5	

Entries containing negative thoughts about working life were also coded similarly to positive ones. Obtained these codes and categories were divided into three clusters following a process model. We named the first of these "naïve" to represent entering the working life. The second cluster, which describes the experiences individuals encounter in working life, was the "black box." Finally, we defined the outputs of working life as "cost." Table 2 shows the codes and categories by providing examples and frequencies.

Table 2. Themes, categories, and codes of negative entries

Naïve Cluster Codes			f	Example
	Like a fish out of water		4	*"You can only use a quarter, or, at most, half of the information learned at university."(558, 2012)*
	Underemployment		27	*"I motivate myself as though I am a scientist. But, sometimes, I feel like I am a coffee shop around the corner when I arrive at work."(1924, 2022)*
	Job-person mismatch		19	*"A life story resulting from the wrong choice of university" (1465, 2017).*
	Optimistic startup but vain hope		46	*"Was it for these 18 years of training I've had?"(1890, 2021)*
	Personal presentation		17	*"You learned much later that having skills such as marketing yourself and selling anyone out easily at the right time is necessary."(64, 2007)*
Skills gap	Interpersonal relationship		50	

Black Box Cluster Codes			f	Example
Forcing a certain lifestyle			55	*"There is always a restriction in business life ..." (54, 2007)*
	Property	Illegal behavior	3	*"Breaking the law if necessary ..." (1688, 2019)*
		Wildlife	18	
		Kakistocracy	35	
		Nepotism	32	*"You are there at your most fake. You act as though you like people you do not like, as though you laugh at things you do not laugh at, as though you care about company goals that you do not care about..." (40, 2006)*
Workplace Deviance	Political	Lie	20	
		Faking	130	
		Incivility	15	
		Flattery	48	
		Distrust	146	
		Gossip	54	

		Code	f	Example
	Production	Drag one's feet	3	"Because I work while cursing, most of it is half-baked." (1281, 2016)
		Low performance	14	
		Organizational charlatan	16	
		Devaluation of effort	44	
		Evade responsibility	42	
		Arrogance	34	
		Gender discrimination	15	
	Personal	Mobbing	29	"But a supervisor, a manager, whatever they are, comes and messes with you a little bit, they make you mentally depressed and cause you to resign or be fired. And all your efforts go away." (1572, 2018)
		Belittle	23	
		Excluding / Labelling	19	
		Making feel worthless	12	
		Hypercriticism	17	
		Harassment	6	
Conflict		Brutal competition	89	
		Injustice	71	
		Disharmony among co-workers	22	
		Narcissistic manager	48	"Five days a week, you have to put up with people with whom you are annoyed to be in the same place." (483, 2012)
		Unskilled/incompetent co-workers	60	
		Hated co-workers	169	
		To be exploited	24	
		Presenteeism	15	
		Limited promotion	11	
		Low wage	41	"At the end of all these, when the raise month comes, you get nothing while waiting for a whopping increase." (146, 2010)
		Job insecurity	40	
Poor work conditions		Lack of social security	3	
		Poor physical conditions	16	
		Excessive workload	45	
		Longer hours working	98	
	Managerial issues	Autocratic leadership	72	"Managers are generally ignorant. How can they employ their slaves with anger, stress, and haste? Yes, this is what they understand about business and working."(1882, 2021)
		Managerial incompetence	48	
		Untrustworthy management	12	
		Modern slavery	75	"I am not against working, but these days we do not work. We are clearly and obviously enslaved." (1138, 2015)
Occupation of life		Feeling in a cage/jail	25	
		Sell your life	39	

Cost Cluster Codes			f	Example
Behavioral		A diverse self	88	"Mate, weren't you going to be a singer? Weren't you starting your own company? When did we accept a thousand lira and when did we start? Okay, we said yes, but when did we become so alike? Working life is something like that. You are getting ordinary, bro... In the end, you have no intellectual passion left." (906, 2014)
		Compulsory commitment	130	
		Don't want to get up in mornings	24	
		Turnover intentions	71	
		Silence	74	
		Finding alternatives	18	
		Developing coping strategies	21	
Spiritual		Meaninglessness	60	"Why does everyone have to be in it? Why do you have to spend at least 5/7 of your life on this? What's the point? Why does everyone have to love? …"(1137, 2015)
		Negative meaning	90	
		Job orientation	136	
		Value conflict	16	
Physical		Health problems	45	"It consumed me. At the age of 25, I have become a person who smokes a pack of cigarettes a day and cries every night. I cannot escape because I would go crazy. But I think I am slowly going crazy by doing this." (793, 2013)
		Stress	55	
		Fatigue	59	
Emotional		Self-alienation	58	"This thing aroused hatred in my body again today. From time to time, this feeling increases and comes to a breaking point. From there, it causes people to either resign or deteriorate working relations." (1019, 2014)
		Low job satisfaction	65	
		Hatred to working life	159	
		Exhaustion	88	
		Despair	22	
		Yearning	77	
		Miserableness	122	
		Feeling of monotony	86	

3.1. Naïve Cluster

The naïve cluster included users' emotions, thoughts, expectations, and readiness when entering a new job. We chose the term "naïve," meaning unaware, inexperienced person, to describe the input at the beginning of the process. The naïve cluster comprised unfulfilled dreams and expectations, underemployment, skills gap, feeling like a fish out of water, and job-person mismatch. Numerous users agreed on the feeling of excitement and hope when they entered their first or a new job. Then, they began to feel disappointed. As one user stated:

"After some thought, I realized two things never change, you know? - First, that excitement when starting a new job. The feeling that this time it will be different… Secondly, the feeling of [swear] due to this workplace, I wish I could find another job and get rid of [swear] this place."(1341, 2016)

Other users wrote: "*Despite having different dreams, you're doing different things.*" (93, 2009). Although working life differed greatly from their expectations, some users stated that they had not lost their early enthusiasm. In contrast with other negative comments, they attributed their happiness to their inexperience: "*Oh, these are perhaps the clumsy words of a one-year-old employee, let's see what else we will see.*" (369, 2011). Another expressed the pleasure from their inexperience: "*When I started my career, I thought that every new lesson I learned with my inexperienced passions was a plus. It gave me much pleasure*" (1881, 2021).

Users have started their working life with different features from each other. One of the codes that emerged from the analysis was job mismatch. Users attributed their job mismatch to university entrance exams in Turkey, which may force some young people to choose according to their exam scores rather than their interests and values. One user expressed this: "*Because of the choice I made for ÖSS [University Entrance Exam] scores, I was pushed into an institution from hell.*" (912, 2014). However, the problem for some users was that they could not do the job for which they had trained. An underemployed user, defined as working below their education level, described their working life as follows: "*Employing a trilingual employee in accounting.*" (1419, 2016). Accordingly, sentences that began with "*if your occupation trained for is not your job*" (28, 2006) ended unfavorably.

Some entries presented the skills necessary to survive in working life. The skills mentioned frequently were self-presentation and interpersonal skills. In particular, relationships with colleagues were essential for well-being and career. According to the entries, effective communication and manipulating people to do what they want is essential for working life. One user stated: "*The basis of working life is about getting other people to answer yes.*" (1560, 2018). In addition, leadership, teamwork, "*managing a billion kinds of people,*" (1158, 2015) and acting logically in relationships were among the prominent skills. As one user stated, "*frequency issue with the manager, balance issue with the team.*" (1770, 2019). Another frequently cited skill was self-presentation, which, according to many users, precedes the quality of the work done: "*The life that the one is showing yourself and saying that I do it best rather than actually doing a good job.*" (38, 2006). There were feelings of injustice and reproach in the entries: "*You try to work where worthless people behave preciously.*" (464, 2012).

Finally, several entries expressed concerns regarding the inadequacy of university education in working life. Those who could not use their training in working life were like a fish out of water when they get a job. One user stated: "*Then you go into working life. All the accumulation, efforts, and acquisitions you have made until that day are reset.*" (93, 2009). Another user stated: "*The life which used only a quarter or maximum half of the information from training.*" (558, 2012).

3.2. Black Box Cluster

When entering working life, individuals interact with the work environment. It can be a process that results in outputs. To define this process, we used the black box concept, which is the term for the predictors behind behavior in radical behaviorism. Black box comprises the work environment, working conditions, interpersonal relations, and behaviors in the workplace. Thus, this cluster included how working life was portrayed in the entries.

According to the entries, working life imposes a particular lifestyle on individuals, such as waking up at a specific time, wearing formal clothes, and working for most of the day. Adapting to these rules was challenging for some users. The category of "forcing a certain lifestyle" reflected feelings of boredom, restriction, despair, and lacking control. One user wrote: "*This is really to restrict and end one's free will for ten or*

twelve hours." (72, 2008). Another user compared this restriction to a prison: "*It is to dream of freedom by looking at the sky from the office window. If you have time to look.*" (492, 2012). This was like "*playing by others' rules.*" (52, 2007).

Working for long hours have limited employees' private life and having sufficient time for rest and family. Users frequently complained about not having enough time for their family, social relationships, and themselves due to their work:

"*For example, I simply want to read a book, drink my tea after dinner and watch useless trivia on TV. But instead, I work at night. When I am not working, my only pleasure is to stare at the wall.*" (1844, 2020)

Occupying life by working was described as "*modern slavery,*" "*selling own life,*" and "*feeling like a cage/prison.*" There was a vicious cycle. Some users stated that they work to have financial resources for their hobbies, but ultimately, they had no time for hobbies due to working. These entries reflected feelings of sadness, anger, and helplessness. One user expressed anger as follows:

"*It is not a life. It is proper to say it is a global order of torture. You have the right to live on this planet for 60–70 years, and you spend 3/4 of your life in an [swearing] office or plaza, selling your time to get this natural right.*" (420, 2012)

Displeasure in working life did not only arise from working itself, but also from the workplace conditions and environment, including workplace deviance, conflict, and poor working conditions. Workplace deviances are formed sets of attitudes and behaviors that usually occur in interpersonal relationships and lead to concerns regarding well-being. Users frequently expressed experiences regarding personal and political deviances. Political deviances included behaviors such as lying, nepotism, gossip, distrust, faking, flattery, kakistocracy, and incivility. Accordingly, some users described workplaces as "*wildlife*" where they must trust nobody to survive: "*Working life is for us what the plains of Africa are to gazelles. Always on the alert, always stressed.*" (769, 2013). Some users compared working life to a theatre where everybody wears a mask and plays a role. Another user also described clearly:

"*Working life is shifty, greedy, and disingenuous. It is a medium where your neighbor is waiting to cheat you. One day, your best friend, with whom you work until the morning and share your meal, will sell you without hesitation.*" (118, 2009)

Personal deviances covered severe behavior: mobbing, gender discrimination, harassment, brutal competition, hypercriticism, injustice, belittling, evading responsibility, arrogance, devaluation of effort, and making others feel worthless. There was a direct attack against one's well-being and self-esteem. A user indicated that, "*[workplaces] are arenas where it is difficult for people to maintain their mental health.*" (1902, 2021). Another user added hopelessness: "*Everybody complains about mobbing. However, I wonder within the borders of this country, whether there is a business where mobbing does not exist.*" (1221, 2015). Further, resisting mobbing and despotism can result in being excluded from the group. A user said, "*I am not liked much, but I cannot behave any other way. I begin to take anti-depressants so that maybe I would keep my mouth quiet about the injustices and flattery.*"(1599, 2018).

Conflict in work relationships emerged in most of the entries, and included feelings such as hatred and disharmony and attributes such as narcissism and incompetence. If there is no harmony or fair relationships among employees, faking can be formed among those who must work with others they prefer not to. One stated: "*You hang out with people you would not ordinarily say hello to in bro mode.*" (824, 2013). When interactions among employees contain too much hate, it can harm their well-being. One user described this as "*a test of spiritual defense against mentally ill patients.*" (437, 2012).

Poor working conditions represented the limitations of a job, which were longer working hours, excessive workload, poor physical conditions, low wages, job insecurity, lack of social security, presenteeism, and managerial issues. Long working hours was the most frequently mentioned problem among users. One stated this sarcastically: "*why will I go home; instead, I will sleep in the office.*" (241, 2011). Some users called it exploitation: "*First, they will get run off your feet under the guise of a trainee or a junior. They will say this is the industry. They will say they worked day and night without even getting a meal.*" (1538, 2017).

Conversely, users defined a healthy workplace environment as one that provides suitable working conditions and establishes positive interpersonal relationships. Users expressed their feeling of value in this environment. In this regard, rewarding hard work can be a powerful reinforcer. A user wrote: "*two*

days later... I got a raise, life is good. Such birds, flies etc." (402, 2012). Positive relationships among employees also played an important role:

"Working life is good, in fact. If you have a job that you love and have a good environment. If you can stand up to the difficulties you will experience in the company, you will see the years have passed." (731, 2013)

3.3. Cost Cluster

We used the "cost" term to explain the emotional, behavioral, physical, and spiritual problems arising from working life. A cost of working was emotional distress in working life: hatred, self-alienation, low job satisfaction, exhaustion, despair, yearning, miserableness, and monotony. The most intense feeling was hatred towards working. One user rationalized this: *"If working were a good thing, nobody would pay a fee for it."* (1509, 2017). Another asked: *"How does everybody do hate?"* (601, 2013). Some users identified it as a *"nightmare,"* and some described it as *"hell."*

After hatred, the most intense emotions were miserableness and exhaustion. In addition, there was an intense yearning for school life and holidays. Another emotion was boredom in the face of the monotony of working life. In some entries, the feeling of self-alienation emerged. One user briefly expressed it: *"[working life is to] playing the role you were given, and then losing yourself." (950, 2014).* Some users explained self-alienation with the metaphors of *"mechanization"* and *"dehumanization."*

When viewed spiritually, it was apparent that the personal meaning of work and career was lost, or a negative connotation was attributed in most entries. Regarding spiritual cost, users complained about losing the meaning of work and career for themselves or attributed negative meaning to work. A user asked: *"Why am I here? Why do I come here every day and sit in this seat? Do I really have to?"* (119, 2009). This showed that they considered their job worthless. One cynically wrote, *"You think you are saving the world in the same chair every day …"* (617, 2013). Meanwhile, the thought of *"working so that someone can make more money"* (1504, 2017) contributed to the negative meaning of working. Some users expressed it as *"make the boss rich."* Most users glorified being self-employed compared to working with a boss.

Most users reduced the meaning of work to earning money. In other words, they adopted job orientation. One user stated: *"It has no meaning other than the money."* (131, 2009). At this point, *"making a career"* no longer made sense:

"There is a lot to say, in short, it is like [swearing]. If you have some money, it is a place to stay away forever. [swearing] to those who impose to ideas of making career and standing on their own feet."(780, 2013)

Behavioral reactions to work life were silence, searching for alternatives, turnover intentions, compulsory commitment, developing different coping strategies, developing a diverse self.. Some users intended to quit their job as soon as possible. A user described it humorously: *"It is the most important selling weapon of gambling."* (603, 2013). One user wrote: *"If I were not struggling financially, I would resign without thinking for a minute."* (1539, 2017). Those who cannot resign have to work, and some must remain silent against the injustices they experience. A user expressed this as follows:

"If there is hell, mine will definitely have office decor. A wonderful place where I can pay for my sins. It is a pit where I will struggle for 11 hours a day, 6 days a week, 50 weeks a year nonstop, because I want to watch the snowfall from a window in the evening. It is a cost to pay for not starving, not being homeless, being with my loved ones." (188, 2010)

Some developed their own defense toward working life, such as fighting for their rights when necessary or using tactics related to communication and manipulation.

Physical cost comprised health problems, stress, and fatigue. Some entries were simply, *"fatigue."* A user wrote: *"I am so tired that I want to sleep for days."* (1702, 2019). Extreme stress was another cost. Working life was described as a source of stress. Some users also pointed out their psychological health problems, such as anxiety, or physical issues like hernia and sleep problems.

Positive outcomes opposed the cost by reflecting positive feelings and meaningfulness. The feeling from a healthy working life was happiness, a sense of achievement, and a loving job. The meaning of working life was described as *"feeling useful,"* *"finding meaning,"* *"gaining freedom,"* and *"benefiting."* Accordingly, those who loved their job *"are unaware of how the working time passes."* We noticed that loving one's job was most related to meaningfulness.

3.4. The Vicious Cycle

According to togetherness among codes, categories, and themes, we contend that there can be cyclical relationships. In Level 2 coding, we found a pattern and coded it as "The vicious cycle". Working life is a system formed by employees. Therefore, the cycle of abusive behaviors can be perpetuated due to employees. According to the entries, there was a system where individuals entered, adjusted, and finally became an employee like the others. We considered that there was a connection between the Naïve and Black Box clusters. For example, the "optimistic start up but vain hope" code may attach these clusters. These entries describe how the hopes at the beginning of the new job have changed to negative emotions. Following were the statements of a disappointed user whose efforts were unrequited in working life.

"Taking a lot of exams and stress since elementary school... also all of the after-school courses that become you bad... After university, going abroad to get a master's degree... internship in a foreign company etc. Having high hopes... Then coming to Turkey and start working life under a boss who is a secondary school graduate. Not being satisfied neither materially nor spiritually despite getting success." (712, 2013)

Black box and cost clusters also seem to be related. The users mentioned the emotional, behavioral, spiritual, and physical wounds caused by both the difficulties in working relationships and the indecent working conditions. Thus, some entries include both of these clusters simultaneously. For example, a user feeling sadness and hopelessness at work expressed it as follows:

"What would happen if I worked hard but also was respected if I had rights, if I had a manager who overcame their ego and who sometimes remembered that I am a human if I went home from work stress-free and happy even though for a one day, and if I saw justice done with my own eyes?" (613, 2013)

Some entries expressed how the working environment and its costs have transformed the employees. The relatedness between the divergent self in the behavioral cost and the self-alienation in the emotional cost presents the change within the individual. Many users emphasized the pressure from others to "*be like them*" to survive working life:

"Even if you are disgusted with yourself every other day, you should not leave the game. Do not break your concentration. To earn money, you do not offer your labor but the soul you sold as a result of the deal with the devil. Finally, you are one of them." (1810, 2020)

Another defined this as a process that "*hardens people and quiets the voice of their inner child day by day.*"(348, 2011). Moreover, "being like them" was not the solution; eventually, the individuals feel that their well-being begins to decline: "*The result is a life in which we cannot realize that our hearts and minds are being empty.*" (467, 2012). As a result, the "be like them" code points to the reconnection from the cost cluster to the black box cluster. Employees being like them may feed the workplace described in the black box. This process has been applied to every newcomer from old "newcomers". Figure 3 depicts this vicious cycle.
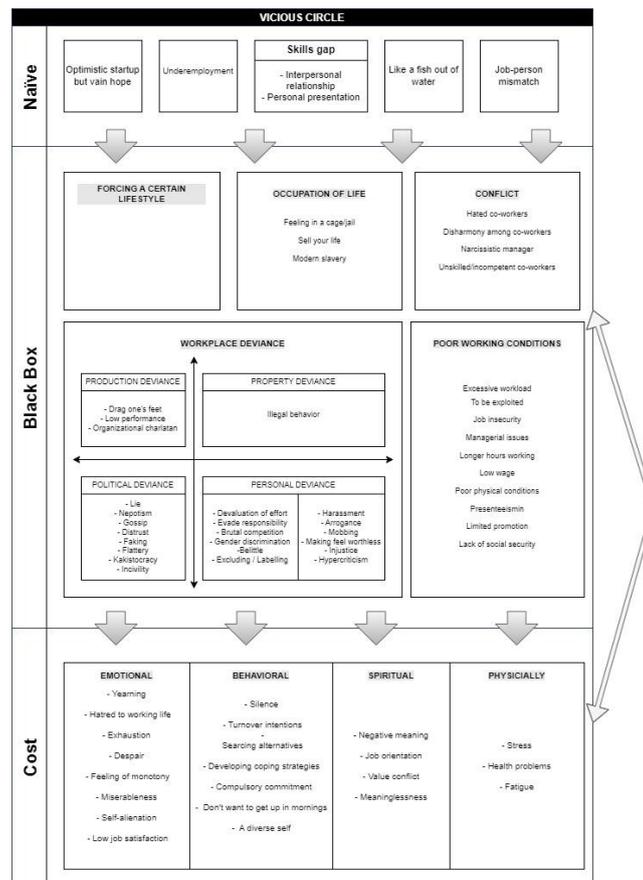
Figure 3. Conceptual Framework That Emerged With the Relationships Among Codes and Categories.

4. Discussion

The current study presents a personal view of working life. Most of the entries consisted of negative content about working. The rate of negative entries being high despite dealing with the "neutral" topic of working life can indicate the employees' need for services including psychosocial interventions such as career and employee counseling. In Turkey, however, career counseling services for employees are quite limited. Few career interventions are implemented by human resources departments focusing on career management skills (Kahraman & Afacan Findikli, 2018; Vural & Sağlam, 2019) rather than employee counseling.

Figure 3 shows that naïve users at the beginning of their career encounter and interact with the environment in the black box cluster. As a result of this interaction, the outputs in the cost cluster emerged. Accordingly, describing the naïve users was the first finding. Although the content in this cluster was limited compared to the other clusters, users' unreadiness for working life seems evident. It supports the discussions about higher educational institutions' functionality for preparing students for working life (Heydenberk & Heydenberk, 2022; Omilion-Hodges et al., 2022). These studies claim a problem in acquiring soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, and group work, which are necessary for working life. Skill gaps and fish-out-of-water codes in our study support these claims. Further, this research suggests that individuals may also have trouble perceiving working life. Excessive positive attribution about working life and career in education or family may lead to unrealistic expectations. Therefore, they may experience disappointment when they enter working life.

One of the prominent patterns in the entries was the dissatisfaction with the profession owned. While some users complained about their wrong choices, others stated that the profession did not match their expectations. Turkish people may not receive adequate career support during their school years. The inadequacy of the number of professionals and their qualifications in career counseling services both in

K12 and at the university can be related to the problems (Yeşilyaprak, 2019). In addition, career choice according to exam score (Görgülü & Bozgeyikli, 2022; OWEN et al., 2012; Ulas-Kilic et al., 2020) may also contribute to feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction regarding the profession.

Describing the work environment in the black box cluster was the second finding. Abusive behavior and workplace conditions resemble the term "decent work" (Buyukgoze-Kavas & Autin, 2019; Duffy et al., 2016; Keser & Büyükgöze-Kavas, 2022) defined in PWT. Duffy et al. (2016) specified decent work to have relational and physically safe working conditions, access to health services, adequate rewards, harmony between values of person and organization, and fair rest time. Our study presents the term indecent work, where employees bully and mob each other; managers are authoritarian or lack leadership skills; and jobs have unsuitable working conditions, provide inadequate social security and rewards, and occupy most of the employees' life. In particular, relational working conditions can be important because it is a field in which career professionals and practitioners can intervene.

Our findings may form the dark side of the PWT model. According to the PWT, attaining decent work leads to well-being and work fulfillment by meeting psychological and physical needs (Duffy et al., 2016; Duffy et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2021). On the dark side of this model are unhealthy behaviors and the hatred of work. Findings indicate that abusive work environments can threaten both physical and psychological health. In the entries, there was a distinct and strong hatred towards work. Thus, employees in indecent work may only meet the need for survival. The codes about meaninglessness supports this because users cannot find any meaning at work other than economic ones. Moreover, when the salary was insufficient, users experienced the feeling of being exploited by their boss. Users cannot satisfy the social connection and self-determination needs mentioned by the PWT through working on this research. Abusive working conditions and environment may hinder the need for satisfaction. Survival needs may be insufficient. The findings that employees try to buy a life to satisfy their needs align with these interpretations.

The findings show many negative behavioral patterns in the description of indecent work. Most were clustered under the term workplace deviance. Research on workplace deviance focuses on personality factors (Götz et al., 2019; Kim & Cohen, 2015). However, we contend that social factors formed a vicious circle in which deviances are learned and maintained among the employees. To survive workplace deviance, new employees may exhibit behaviors that do not fit their personalities and selves. Therefore, examining workplace deviance may be beneficial to include not only individual factors, but also social factors within a network of interpersonal relationships. Consistent with this, Götz et al. (2019) also discussed and emphasized group norms and dynamics rather than individual characteristics.

The findings revealed a transformation. Accordingly, users may not only be the victims that are exposed to indecent work, but also create the conditions of indecent work themselves. It is similar to the process in a study (Bertolotti et al., 2021) demonstrating how employees leave their own identity and adopt that of the workplace. Bertolotti et al. (2021) argued that individuals acquire the workplace identity when they cannot reveal their own identity. This argument supports the self-alienation and mask-wearing that emerged in our research. Accordingly, employees can pretend to be like others, namely, wear a mask, because they have the opportunity to behave like themselves. Eventually, they alienate themselves.

5. Limitations and Future Research

This research has some limitations. First, this research has limitations regarding its cross-sectional nature. All implied relationships in this study need to be investigated by longitudinal studies. Second, there may be a risk of bias because we obtained the data from the online environment. Although anonymous platforms allow individuals to express their feelings and thoughts freely, it can also lead to transferring all anger and negative emotions on social media. Our data may be biased regarding excessive or manipulated negative emotions, although a neutral topic was analyzed. Third, online data mining is still a new technique. Therefore, issues about standards of reliability and validity must be considered. We thus recommend that this study obtains more support from future research using qualitative and quantitative data.

PWT has provided an exciting theoretical perspective by incorporating working life into career counseling. Our study also argues that career theories should include working life more. More research is needed to achieve decent work in PWT for everyone. Therefore, future research should focus on how employees cope with abusive working conditions and how they can cope more effectively. On the other hand, it implied a limitation regarding studies focusing on individual factors. How an abusive working environment is formed and maintained should be examined from a systematic perspective. The long-term effects of these environments on employees need to be investigated with longitudinal studies. This study offers the researchers several hypothetical relationships. Therefore, suggested relationships between naïve, black box and cost clusters can be examined in future research. In conclusion, career counseling researchers may be more involved in working life.

6. Implications

The present study has several implications. First, the practical and theoretical basis of career counseling needs to focus on preparing individuals for and supporting them in working life and coping indecent work conditions. Therefore, more attention should be paid to soft skills and functional coping. Second, employees may increasingly require career counseling especially in Turkey where career services are quite limited. As the work environment contains intense interpersonal relationships, group and individual counseling practices can be beneficial for making relationships healthier. Moreover, career counseling practices can be benefited from social psychology research in terms of including group dynamics. Third, organizational interventions may be required to break the negative patterns in the vicious circle identified by the present study. Although organizations may aim to make employees more productive, they may also inevitably contribute to the negative cycle. Policies that prioritize the individual rather than workplace productivity are necessary. In this regard, it is important to increase qualified career counselors in Turkey and to make employee counseling accessible to every employee.

7. Conclusions

Working accounts for a large portion of life. Thus, individuals need career counseling services at every stage of their working life rather than only before entering working life or making vocational decisions. In this study, we discussed the relatively neglected field of working life in career counseling practices. This research provides a broad perspective on working life using rich data from an online forum. Results suggest that employees encountered many abusive, challenging, and negative situations in their working life. Under these conditions, career and career development can lose their meaning for employees, and survival needs can dominate. The results were discussed from the PWT perspectives, and suggestions were provided for career counseling practices.

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