

Flexible Work and Work Life Balance in the Embroidery Business in Lumban, Philippines

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Abstract

This study documents and examines flexible work arrangements (FWAs) and its implications in the work-life balance of independent workers in the embroidery business in Lumban, Laguna. It considers the nature and history of FWAs and how it evolved into the current work practice in the embroidery business. The study also dwells on the experiences of both embroidery shop owners and embroiderers to realize their exchange relationships in attaining a more or less suitable balance in the demands of work and family through varying work arrangements. Drawing on the social exchange theory (SET), it puts forward that trust, loyalty, commitment and mutual benefits affect their exchange relationships. The study explains how the factors affecting FWAs are perceived to achieve work-life balance among the embroiderers and create valuable utilization of available labor supply.

Keywords: flexible work arrangements in Lumban, work-life balance, exchange relationships, social exchange theory, trust, loyalty, commitment and mutual benefits

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Introduction

The town of Lumban, Laguna is known as the 'hand embroidery capital of the Philippines.' Tourists visit the place primarily for its embroidery industry. Written documents (Abulencia, 2003; Cruz, 1982; de la Torre, 1986) as well as discussions with stakeholders in Lumban ascribe the origins of the town's embroidery skills to beaterios (sanctorum) during the Spanish occupation around the 16th century where Franciscan missionaries established a facility to hone the skills of local women in knit work and embroidery. When the missionaries left town, the skills were handed down to younger generations without the benefit of formal training (Rodriguez & Legaspi 2012, p20). According to the town tourism officer Jayson Lagrada, approximately 60 percent of locals depend on embroidery as source of income. From an outsider's perspective, it is easy to say that embroidery is a major livelihood of the locals in Lumban as evident in the rows of embroidery shops in its thoroughfares. Embroidery is considered a major employment provider, giving men and women, young and old opportunities to directly or indirectly partake in the production process of embroidered materials.

Lumban embroiderers assure the success of the business mostly by adopting varying work arrangements. This is achieved through the interplay between employer and employees and plays a key role in maintaining a harmonious business relationship. It has also been noticed that work-life balance is an important consideration of embroiderers, not only of women but of men alike. Varying work arrangements are not only extended to women as working mothers, but in a similar way afforded to men, as heads of the family, to balance their time for work and home responsibilities. This presents a valuable insight on how FWAs are perceived to respond to the work and life responsibilities of local embroiderers regardless of gender. This study notes that work-life balance is not just the women's concern but of men alike. Humphreys (2013) emphasized that family-friendly working arrangements are not women's issues, they are people's issues. This study provides local embroidery stakeholders in Lumban a definition of FWAs and how these are mirrored in the business.

When asked how and why FWAs exist, embroiderers often respond that this 'age-old work practice' has been in existence for quite some time. It had been a practice for several generations and has become the norm, the way things are done. However, to them, FWAs

are ambiguous, along with how these can be practically utilized in the workplace to maximize its full potential for a positive outcome that will benefit them and their employers

The study is aimed at both embroiderers and embroidery shop owners to successfully address their changing employment needs, generate viable business operations and ensure valuable utilization of available labor supply. By drawing on experiences from both parties, this study seeks to provide evidence through the SET in understanding how "trust, loyalty and mutual commitment" affect the views of employers and employees on meaningful FWAs that can be acceptable to both parties.

Methods and research design

This qualitative study focused its analysis on FWAs in the embroidery business in Lumban, Laguna; its existing practice in embroidery shops; and how "trust, loyalty and mutual commitment" are valuable considerations in the formulation of FWAs between embroiderers and shop owners.

The study participants consist of embroidery shop owners in Lumban, Laguna who have been engaged in the business for at least one year. These entrepreneurs are considered as single proprietors based on information derived from municipal records. They embody the majority, if not the total embroidery business in the town. Select embroiderers engaged in hand and machine embroidery were chosen, being the primary source of information needed for this study. These embroiderers were at least 15 years of age, had been engaged in the embroidery industry for not less than one year and may have worked as regular, part-time, contractual, per piece, or commissioned embroiderer (Table 1).

A qualitative descriptive approach is the design of choice when a straightforward description of a phenomenon is desired (Lambert & Lambert 2012). Participant observation, as a form of qualitative descriptive research, enables researchers to learn about the activities of people under study in the natural setting through observing and participating in those activities (Kawulich, 2005). It provides the context for development of sampling guidelines and interview guides (De Walt & De Walt, 2002 as cited by Kawulich, 2005). It helped the researcher develop questions and extract answers that correspond

to valuable meanings and sense in the ‘native language’. Participant observation considered the physical elements that affect the workplace and work arrangements; its surroundings; written descriptions and observations of the embroiderers in town; recording of activities and interactions that take place while in situ; informal interactions with the embroidery stakeholders; observing non-verbal communication; symbolic meanings, physical clues and daily occurrences in the lives of embroiderers that unfold through prolonged engagement and interaction with the researcher. The responses derived from data gathered in Lumban were processed and validated together with the respondents to attain conformity and strength of meanings.

Table 1. Respondent’s Profile

Nature of work	Age	Gender	Nature of participation in the embroidery business
Embroiderer	Past 50	Female	Started embroidery at 15; worked as full-time embroiderer at 18 and continued until present; doing embroidery work has been passed on in their family for three generations
Embroiderer	Past 50	Female	Learned embroidery at 12 to augment the family’s daily expenses and for personal needs in school. Her mother is also an embroiderer.
Embroiderer	Past 40	Female	Learned to do embroidery when she moved to Lumban after marrying a town local. She has been doing embroidery for 15 years.
Embroiderer	Late 30s	Female	Started doing part-time embroidery at age 10 to augment her daily allowance in school and continued to be an embroiderer. She also works as a manicurist when time permits.
Embroiderer	Late 40s	Male	Worked as house helper but learned how to do embroidery as well. He has been an embroiderer for 20 years.
Embroiderer	Late 50s	Female	Started embroidery work at 12; did embroidery to help parents for daily expenses at home. Money earned from doing embroidery became her main source of income until present.
Embroiderer & Embroidery shop owner	Past 60	Female	A retired embroiderer but does piece-work embroidery during her leisure time. She started doing embroidery while in grade school.

Embroiderer & Embroidery shop owner	Past 80	Female	Started embroidery while in grade school; engaged in piece-work embroidery before but now owns and manages an embroidery shop. She maintains a pool of regular embroiderers and has established links with shops selling embroidered materials in Manila.
Embroidery Shop owner	Late 50s	Female	Claims she does not know how to embroider. Owns a store selling embroidered products, maintains a workshop, caters to institutional buyers in Manila and has a sizeable group of loyal customers.
Embroidery Shop owner	Late 60s	Female	Learned embroidery work at a young age but later worked as a teacher. Upon retirement, she started her own embroidery business. She subcontracts embroidery work and delivers to select clients.
Embroiderer & Embroidery shop owner	Early 80s	Female	Used to own an embroidery shop but since retirement, currently subcontracts embroidery work.
Embroiderer & Embroidery shop owner	Late 60s	Female	Similar to others who started doing embroidery at a young age, she now has an embroidery shop and has regular clients (noted designers) in Manila.
Embroiderer & Embroidery shop owner	Mid 60s	Male	Used to do piece-work embroidery but now has his own embroidery shop. In addition to doing embroidery, he personally markets his products in different outlets and provinces in the country.
Embroiderer	Past 50	Female	Does piece-work embroidery in the workshop of Magdalena Baksafra.
Embroiderer	Past 40	Female	Did piece-work embroidery in her younger years. She is currently a regular employee in the local government but still assists by doing embroidery when time permits.
Embroiderer	Early 60s	Female	Used to do piece-work embroidery at 15. She continued to do embroidery and sells cooked food to augment the daily income derived from embroidery.

Embroidery production system

The production system of embroidered commodities in Lumban may be characterized as a type of FWA of which part-time work schedule is most common among embroiderers. Part-time work is viewed as a 'positive step towards idle labor utilization,' despite its nature as a part-time work arrangement. It provides prospects for elders and parents to work at home while tending to their children as well as opportunities for children to earn and augment the pecuniary needs of the family.

In a related schema of FWAs, it has been observed that many households have transformed a part of their homes or private dwellings into workshops as spaces to do embroidery (Rafols, 2009). "Locational flexibility" is also observed as it relates to the preference for working places that satisfy the changing geographical locality of employees' workplaces to 'meet the changing needs of employers' as suggested by Humphreys, et al (2013). Workplace flexibility is defined as "the ability of workers to make choices influencing when, where and for how long they engage in work-related tasks" (Hill et al., 2008 as cited by Golden, 2012). Its potential benefits for workers include the indirect improvement of individual productivity via health (Butler et al., 2009; Grzywacz et al., 2008; Grzywacz et al., 2007; Halpern, 2005; Jang, 2009, Golden, 2012) and the promotion of better work and family balance (Boushey, 2008; Jang, 2009, Golden 2012).

The quantity of time required to go through the process of making an embroidered fabric like the barong tagalog and others such as women's gowns, apparel, tablecloth and bed covers vary depending on the size, fabric, intricacy and enormity of embroidery required. As such, Humphreys, et al (2013) relates this type of flexibility to variations in the number of hours performed to accomplish a specific task required. This significant FWA consideration allows employees to differ their "starting and finishing times of work outside a compulsory core-time, provided an agreed volume of hours are worked over a given remuneration period" (Humphreys, et al 2013).

Thus, important questions that emerged in this study include the different work arrangements and how the so-called 'work-life balance' of embroiderers in the town of Lumban, Laguna are observed. These questions also relate to the struggles of shop owners (as employers) and the embroiderers (as employees) in coming up with a common FWA acceptable to both that fosters balance in the

embroiderers' work and life responsibilities. These struggles or 'exchange relationships' will be analyzed through the lens of the SET.

According to the town municipal record, approximately 60 percent of locals depend on embroidery as source of income. Lumban takes pride in being afforded the recognition as the 'hand embroidery capital of the Philippines'. From an outsider's perspective, it is easy to say that embroidery is a major element of the "spirit of Lumban" (Ibid). There are several embroidery shops that line the major thoroughfares of the town and many private dwelling places have areas where hired workers do embroidery.

Lumban became even more popular because of its unique embroidery called 'calado' (an embroidery work that resembles gaps or holes in the design). Local embroiderers in Lumban have varying clientele ranging from government officials, prominent clans, famous couturiers as well as locals who have specific designs. As a result, the embroidered products are, most of the time, priced at a premium because of exclusivity in the design and fine needle work. Old folks in Lumban describe their embroidery pieces as "nangungusap sa ganda" (expressing excellent quality) (Rodriguez & Legaspi 2012).

Work-Life Balance

Over the last decade, the issue of work-life balance has gained visibility in international and national policy agenda (International Labor Organization, 2011). Work-life balance is most frequently used to describe the equilibrium between responsibilities at work and responsibilities outside paid work; having a work-life balance means this equilibrium is in the right position for the individual concerned (Baral & Bhargava, 2010), (Dissanayaka & Ali 2013). Further, ILO Convention No. 156 requires that "signatories make it an aim of national policy that all workers with family responsibilities – both women and men – can engage in employment without discrimination or, as far as possible, scarcely any conflict between work and family obligations" (ILO, 2011).

The increasing focus on work-life balance has brought about a rise in various flexible work options (Hofacker, et al 2013). The introduction of varying FWAs to satisfy the demands of work and family responsibilities have gained significant considerations in recent years. Working time arrangements have diversified over several

decades in the context of changes in the laws and regulations in many countries to permit more flexible and individualized arrangements (Messenger, 2004; Boulin et al., 2006; Rubery, 2005; Fagan, et al., 2012). Such work arrangements provide employees better control over the location, time and duration of work to be done, resulting in bigger opportunities for workers to be able to take pleasure in a most advantageous sense of balancing work and life duties.

While these conditions are commonly perceived to have positive effects on the work-life balance of workers, this study looks into the various creative approaches in the implementation of flexible work options and its realistic effects on how embroidery workers balance and manage their work and non-work responsibilities.

Essential concerns on the importance of family-friendly working arrangements are explored and critically discussed to highlight the impact of developments in the workplace supporting work and family responsibilities. "Family-friendly working arrangements is defined as workplace arrangements that assist employees to combine paid employment with their caring responsibilities and personal lives away from work" (Humphreys, et al 2012). Humphreys, et al (2013) further explained how family-friendly working arrangements are contrasted in adapting part-time work schedule, flexitime and job sharing to affect and impact work arrangements that help balance the demands of work and family (Humphreys, et al 2012). Humphreys et al. (2013) discussed the implications of flexibility at work in relation to employment issues and challenges that need to address the 'growing demands of work with caring responsibilities' beyond the workplace. Considerations of FWAs also critically regard the employer and the employee's interests in the embroidery business to create sustainable operations and valuable utilization of available labor supply.

Flexible work arrangements

The development of FWAs is traced to the introduction of 'job sharing and career breaks' as suggested by Humphreys, et al (2012). The underlying benefits of these arrangements in relation to the economic considerations of FWAs were seen as important components in the 'family-friendly approach' providing equal opportunities in public sector employment. The success of developing innovative FWAs is related to the effective utilization of available information provided

by modern technology that would significantly fit in the organizational and cultural structure of the public sector.

FWAs refer to alternative arrangements or schedules other than the traditional or standard work hours, workdays and work week (DOLE DA No.2 Series 2009). FWAs are focused on: temporal flexibility, referring to the variations in hours of worked considered; locational flexibility which pertains to the location of work; and numerical flexibility or the number of employees as a consequence of the varying business demands.

FWAs likewise support the people's desire for balance in their work and individual commitments such as family, community, education, professional development, religion and general interests. The prevalence of dual-income households corresponds to the current 'economic culture' that allows alternative work arrangements to be recognized. Flexibility in the workplace benefits the employer by increasing profitability through reducing cost and the employee by balancing work commitments and personal needs.

It is essential that the success of FWAs are attained through 'mutual trust, compromise, negotiation and above all flexibility between the employee and employer' (Danielson, et al, 2012). Both parties are responsible for ensuring that the arrangement is suitable and working. Some employees may prefer to prepare a detailed proposal outlining their interest in an FWA or that their employer adopt formal policies to address issues. Others may slowly migrate to informal arrangements made between themselves and their immediate supervisor.

In evaluating the impact of labor flexibility, it is imperative to establish the distinction between the employer demand-driven flexibility of employees and employee supply-driven flexibility for employees (Heiler 1996 as cited by Baetge & Horstman, 2000). Demand factors as suggested by Baetge & Horstman (2000) relate to a strong commitment to retain the workforce as long as they maintain a sense of relevance to the business and show commitment to superior and enhanced work output.

This has been achieved through a philosophy of continuous improvement in a diverse range of areas, most of which are dependent on having staff who are flexible, skilled and rewarded for achievements (Baetge & Horstman, 2000). Supply-driven flexibility on the other hand relates to the benefits attributed by employees to acquiring a wider range of skills that is envisioned to increase employability, promotion, greater work opportunities and bargaining for better work

arrangements that would be beneficial to both the worker and the employer (Heiler 1996 as cited by Baetge & Horstman, 2000).

Unique workplace agreements are effects of seasonal demand for work and services (Baetge and Horstman 2000). 'Outsourcing of some functions or parts of functions' is a form of flexibility to maximize time spent to create work and a more cost effective approach to augment the workforce (Ibid).

While most studies focus on women who are more inclined to benefit from work arrangements that bring balance to their work and family life responsibilities, it is important to note the 'friendly working arrangements are not only a women's issue'. They are a people issue—all employees irrespective of their family situation or personal responsibilities need and want to have a greater balance between their lives inside and outside work (Humphreys, et al. 2013).

Eichler and Matthews (2004) present work-life balance as a means of creating a more 'flexible, supportive work environment, enabling employees to focus on tasks while at work. It creates a culture that is more supportive, provides programs to meet 'life event needs,' ascertains that policies offer employees as much control over their life needs, and uses flexible work practices as an approach to meet the needs of both business and employees.

Work life balance has been redefined as employing 'work-family reconciliation' where "reconciliation" mirrors the conflicts between work and family responsibilities (ILO 312th Session, November 2011). It was stressed at the Convention that failure to address work-family conflicts will have negative effects on employment opportunities and job quality, wellbeing and workers' output, likewise on their families, parents and their children alike, both in urbanized and developing countries.

At the Convention, it was further stressed that workers with family responsibilities be supported by a national policy where they can be gainfully employed without prejudice to family commitments. Such policies include, among others, FWAs, social security benefits and social care support and protection, provisions for leave, education and gender equality. The term "flexible" pertains to activities that provide workers the capacity to alter their hours of 'work and/or work schedules' and/or 'place of work' to meet the demands of their work and family. These are considered essential in improving livelihood strategies and the social protection of workers in the informal economy.

Social Exchange Theory

The SET is among the most influential conceptual paradigms for understanding workplace behavior (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). The SET evolved from Thorndike's (1932, 1935) work on the development of reinforcement theory and Mill's (1923) marginal utility theory (Searle, n.d.). Searle (1990) suggested that the SET is predicated on the concepts of rational behavior, reciprocity, distributive justice, mutual benefit and the idea of maximizing gains and minimizing cost between the 'exchange relationship' of parties involved. The basic premise of the SET according to Blau (1964) and Lawler & Thye (1999) is that two parties must provide each other a valued resource and that both must view the exchange as equitable (McGlendon, Klaas & Gainey 2002).

In the SET, behavior is grounded on the concept of rationality. That is, the more behavior affects reward, the more individuals will be inclined to manifest that kind of behavior. However, it was observed that the more an individual obtains rewards, the less valued it becomes and the individual eventually searches for alternatives by means of other behaviors or from a different source. While this is consistent with individuals' need for a match between their skill-levels and experience, Iso-Ahola's research on perceived competence (1990) suggested this may not be the only need they seek to satisfy. Later findings have shown that humans do not always think and act rationally, as there are emotional or effectual values, habitual or traditional values and human beings also act on different elements of value-oriented thinking (Holthausen 2013, p1). Hence, exchanges between people are not limited to material goods like money or resources, but also to symbolic values like respect or prestige (Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). Searle (1990) asserts that whatever the need, individuals will continue only so long as they perceive their needs to be satisfied.

Further, the social exchange model is based on reciprocation where the individuals in the exchange relationship offer each other benefits as long as the exchange is equitable and the elements of exchange are essential to both parties. Searle (1990) explains that an exchange between two individuals must be seen as by both as fair for the relation to continue or expand. For the relationship to be strong, it is not just significant to respond justly and equitably, but likewise to consider the 'unit of exchange,' whether tangible or intangible, to be of value to the parties involved. In essence, workers expect a 'sense of reciprocation' in

the work they offer and that they seek out just about something equitable, in exchange, to what they have contributed at work.

Social exchange similarly posits that the exchange rule brings the concept of 'distributive justice.' Beyond the notion of equity between two key actors in the exchange relationship, distributive justice extends to a wider context of fairness, even to third or fourth parties who have dealt with principal actors. Searle (1990) explains that it involves each person comparing his or her reward to that of others who have dealt with this individual and assessing what they received for the same or a similar contribution. Consequently, if the notion of distributive justice is perceived to be defied, the parties involved in the exchange relationship will cease to participate or lessen their involvement and may seek other opportunities where the situation employs equal if not fair rewards to all.

Further, this theory seeks to maximize gains and lessen the costs in the exchange relation. It follows the premise that humans strive for a positive outcome, meaning to maximize benefits and minimize costs when engaging in an exchange (Holthausen 2013). However, previous research has failed to integrate the issue of "not enough time" or "work or family commitments" into the notion of cost (Ibid). The definition of cost is relative to the parties who make the exchange, how they value the benefits and costs, the value or the outcome and how they behave during the exchange (West & Turner, 2007, as cited by Holthausen, 2013). Searle (1990) even emphasized it is important to understand that costs do not speak about financial matters only; costs can be relatively equated to time and energy spent in a relationship.

In this study it is important to consider the fundamental precepts of SET where relationships are drawn over time out of trust, loyalty and mutual commitments. Trust is a crucial element in the psychological contract and the social exchange relationship (Blau, 1964; Rousseau, 1989; Popaitoon, 2011), wherein strong trust in another encourages an individual to put in or devote more time or other resources in a relationship and the other party involved to contribute or invest in the exchange relationship for the reason that the prospect of reciprocation is highly expected in due time.

Loyalty is the outcome of 'supportive people management practices' in an organization where workers are grateful and reciprocate the organization's commitment to them by devoting their work and time to the employer.

Morgan & Hunt (1994) defines commitment as pertaining to an 'implicit or explicit pledge' of relational connection that continues to exist between and among exchange partners (Holthausen 2012). These relationships are established by certain 'rules' of exchange adopted through a series of interactions, which at the end form a norm or the guiding principle in the exchange process.

This study adopts the SET as used in social psychology (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005), (Nammir et al., 2012; Schiele et al., 2012), (Holthausen, 2013). Their concepts of assessing comparisons and various alternatives are used to describe how the parties in an exchange relationship, such as the embroiderer and shop owners, weigh their benefits and costs in determining their relationship as explained by Thibaut & Kelley (1959). These exchanges involve antecedents considered in the framework such as rational behavior, mutual benefits, costs and rewards and reciprocity. They suggest that people engage in an exchange relationship and in a way negotiate to attain their goals. The conceptual framework suggests that the considerations between embroiderers and shop owners affect their goal of continuing, improving or terminating interactions or the relationship. Depending on the objective of the relationship, actors might modify their resources to satisfy each other's expectations

Blau (1964), who defined SET as a theory of 'social interactions and interpersonal relations' is considered in this framework where 'social exchange' includes benefits, among others. The benefits derived may not have 'specific quantifiable' value suggesting that social patterns are constructed by social exchanges. The form of exchange relation provides the considerations and apprehensions on whether flexible work agreement will be considered. It revolves around the dynamics of the SET where trust, loyalty and mutual commitments are important resources in the exchange relationship. The basic premise of the SET according to Blau (1964) and Lawler & Thye (1999) is that two parties must provide each other a valued resource and that both must view the exchange as equitable, (McGlendon, Klaas & Gainey 2002) whether tangible or intangible.

Rewards and Costs

Rewards are described as any benefit exchanged in personal relationships. They may be material or symbolic, desirable and often perceived as gratifying or rewarding to one or both parties in the

relationship. Therefore, the reason for an exchange in the relationship is 'to maximize benefits and simultaneously minimize costs (Nammir et al., 2012). These benefits result to favorable exchange that bring about a positive outcome.

Foa and Foa (1974, 1980) as cited by Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005) presented the two forms of outcomes or benefits as a result of resources exchanged (costs and rewards) as economic and socio-emotional. Economic benefits satisfy financial needs and represent tangible or concrete rewards. Socio-economic, on the other hand, refers to the social and esteem needs that are often 'symbolic and particularistic.' These descriptions were considered in understanding the outcomes of the costs and rewards derived by shop owners and the embroiderers in Lumbar.

According to elders and other known shop owners, they consider both economic and socio-emotional factors affecting the business when extending FWAs to embroiderers. It is generally believed that maximizing rewards and minimizing costs relate to economic considerations. However, this idea is not only exclusive to the fiscal aspect of the business. Seattle (1990) suggests that costs can be incurred through time and energy invested in a relationship. According to Helm, Rolfes and Günter (2006), the basic assumption is that human beings strive for a positive outcome when considering the rewards and costs of a relationship. The embroiderers, similarly, consider maximizing rewards derived from shop owners. By and large, the mutual interests that explain the behavior of both the embroiderers and shop owners result in themes parallel to the behaviors discussed in the SET.

Mutual benefits

The monetary compensation afforded to embroiderers are minimal compared to normal daily wage in the region. While the embroiderers' current rate per hour only range from P15 to P30, they consider other forms of benefits or rewards as equally important such as their personal relationship with the shop owners. All embroiderers interviewed in this study emphasized that the monetary compensation is important but often, they put more value on the support and kindness the shop owners extend to them at work. These, to them,

are considered important rewards and are often more valued than economic gains.

The embroiderers interviewed generally emphasized they have not considered leaving their current 'boss' (referring to the embroidery shop they have been working for in the last 10 years) in exchange for a higher monetary compensation. One of them said "even if we know of other embroiderers who are being paid higher compared to what we get from our current boss, we still choose to stay because of their kindness and understanding." 'Kindness and understanding' pertains to flexibility of time extended to the embroiderers in their work hours and being able to bring home work when pressed for time.

Another form of reward that emerged during the interview pertained to the praise and acknowledgement they received for excellent workmanship. Although these praises may mean relatively little to some individuals, these are strong rewards for many embroiderers. For example, some embroiderers said that hearing their names mentioned by the clients who wore their work made them feel important and rewarded. It was also mentioned that seeing their embroidery pieces worn by varying clients, especially when these are featured in magazines, newspapers and media, give them a sense of fulfillment and pride. These to them are rewards they always share and brag about verbally and in various social media. In fact, most embroiderers asked if clothes worn by local celebrities in various formal occasions as well as the formal embroidered Filipino attire worn by politicians and their spouses during the State of the Nation Address of the Philippine president in Congress looked familiar. They are overwhelmed and elated when someone influential wears what they have done and feel a great sense of pride. These pleasurable emotions make them feel rewarded and highly motivated to work. These socio-emotional outcomes send the message that a person is valued and/or treated with dignity (Shore, Tetrick, & Barksdale, 2001), (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005).

The oldest living embroiderer in Lumban, at 89, and one of the highly regarded female embroiderers started doing embroidery while in grade school. She now owns a shop and has a pool of embroiderers working for her. She said she takes care of her embroiderers because she considers them essential and necessary to her shop. She even extends them loans if necessary so that they don't need to worry about family expenses and can focus on their work instead. In addition, she pays them higher if their embroidery work is exceptional. In the past,

she provided meals and snacks since she recognizes their physical needs and well-being specially during extended work hours. She also said these privileges mean a lot to them, suggesting that she knew their importance since she had been an embroiderer working for an employer in her younger years. Further, as a Christian, she said she always wants to do these to cultivate a sense of spirituality in the workplace. This, she believes, provide a harmonious and caring work environment and brings about positive attitudes among people in the workplace.

According to her, the costs incurred in providing her embroiderers assistance are relatively negligible compared to what she receives from them, implying the kind of work they do and their attitude and cooperation. The embroiderers, in return, extend their hours of work when required and they don't mind staying late without any extra pay when requested. In addition, her embroiderers said they look forward to their daily bible sharing at the end of the day, even the non-Christians because it provides them spiritual enlightenment and moral discernment. The embroiderers considered these gestures as a way of returning the benefits they received. Although there are costs to the embroiderers such as giving up a few hours with their families for extended work without pay, the benefits they get are perceived to be greater. Tsui, Pearce, Porter and Tripoli (1997) as cited by Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005 explained this typology as employer and employee providing each other resources resembling mutual investment. Here, the shop owner provides 'particular resources but is awarded long-term rewards' and the embroiderers provide 'symbolic resources' in return. These varying exchange resources explain how economic and socio-emotional outcomes influence the mutual benefits, shared and received, both by the shop owner and the embroiderers.

Reciprocity

The SET suggests there may be no guarantee for reciprocal rewards after investing costs or money, since no contracts are made (Gefen & Ridings 2002 as cited by Holthausen, 2013). Hence, the purpose of an exchange is to maximize benefits and simultaneously minimize costs (Nammir et al., 2012), which would lead to a positive outcome. Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005) explained that "reciprocity or repayment in kind is probably the best-known exchange rule." This is very much observed in the embroidery businesses in Lumban. There

is no written contract similar to an employment contract that binds the shop owners and embroiderers. The unique characteristics of the arrangement between shop owners and the embroiderers explain that the traditions of reciprocity may be defined and distinguished based on three unconventional typologies as suggested by Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005): “reciprocity as a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges; reciprocity as a folk belief; and reciprocity as a moral norm.” Gouldner (1960) similarly outlined the nature of reciprocity based on these principles.

Reciprocity as a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges.

The exchange process entails ‘bidirectional transaction’ where there is an existence of an action given and something returned. As such, interdependence involves ‘mutual and complementary arrangements’ (Molm 1994). Reciprocal interdependence emphasizes fortuitous interpersonal exchange, wherein the action by one party leads to a reaction by another party involved in the exchange process. If a person supplies a benefit, the receiving party should respond in kind (Gergen, 1969). In view of this, the “reciprocal exchange” is explained as one that does not comprise explicit bargaining as suggested by Molm (2000, 2003) but is seen more on how one’s action is determined by the other party’s behavior. As a result, Molm (1994) suggested that this type of interdependence minimizes risk and promotes cooperation.

One of the established shop owners in Lumban who started the innovative design combining embroidery with hand painting has been in the embroidery business for more than 20 years. She ventured in embroidering other fabrics and materials to create unique items. Although she is not an embroiderer, she understands the tricks of the trade because of her exposure to the embroidery industry practices and the processes involved in managing the business. For this, she has been recognized as a successful entrepreneur and has established connections both in the private and government sectors.

Her generosity is known to many embroiderers. She pays them more than the on-going business rate and covers their social benefits such as Pag-ibig and social security contributions. She established a culture of open communication with her six embroiderers. She welcomes their suggestions and ideas particularly in the design, execution and creativity of an embroidered piece. In fact, embroiderers even share

their grievances with her, whether personal or work related. This, she believes, provides a meaningful workplace for her embroiderers. She manages her embroiderers guided by the philosophy that when you treat them well, they do the same in return. Hence, she maintains good working relationships with them in terms of the kind of work they do and adherence to delivery deadlines, which is considered very crucial in the highly competitive embroidery business.

Other embroiderers shared their life stories and work experiences with their 'bosses,' referring to other embroidery shop owners. They often narrated similar experiences where they were treated and provided well and how patterns of reciprocal interdependence created a 'self-reinforcing cycle'.

Reciprocity as a folk belief

Gouldner (1960) explained that reciprocity as a "folk belief" entails 'cultural expectation that people get what they deserve'. The general belief of 'universal justice' or what normally is referred to as 'karma,' suggests that people are likely to lessen their hostile behaviors, believing that 'you get what you give'.

This description of reciprocity, as a folk belief, is likely seen in the embroidery business in Lumban. Being a town rich in religious beliefs and traditions and where the embroidery industry was introduced by the Franciscan missionaries in the early 15th century, reciprocity as a folk belief is deeply rooted in religion and spirituality. The context within which reciprocity as a folk belief is not only observed between the shop owners and the embroiderers but also the between these parties and society as a whole. The shop owners are often active in church activities as well as social events in the town. They often give contributions and share other resources with what they perceive will give 'good returns' or positive 'karma'. As an example, some shop owners give liturgical vestments, chasubles and other embroidered fabrics to adorn church altars. Others give embroidered clothes, objects and symbols that often used to dress religious icons. The embroiderers, on the other hand, share their time by doing volunteer work in similar church activities, specifically religious celebrations, in the belief that they will enjoy abundance of blessings both in their work and family.

Reciprocity as a norm and individual orientation

Norms are often described as standards that reflect acceptable behaviors. Often, a norm explains how one should behave and how others should behave in return. However, not all individuals value reciprocity in the same manner. There are others whose beliefs are strongly influenced by religion, cultural practices and individual differences.

Social psychologists put forward the idea that individuals vary in the degree they accept and support reciprocity as defined by their exchange orientation. Exchange orientation as defined by Murstein (1977) “refers to the tendency to believe that one’s relationship with others should be governed by a principle of reciprocity such that favors and gifts should be exchanged equally among parties involved in the relationship.” Cropanzano (2005) explained that those classified as ‘high in an exchange orientation’ are concerned about their obligations and are likely to value reciprocity. Those considered ‘low in exchange orientation’ are unperturbed by their obligations and less concerned about reciprocity.

In the earlier examples cited in this study, several embroiderers mentioned their sensitivity particularly in the way they are treated at work. It has been emphasized, quite vividly in this case study, that economic benefits are perceived to be secondary to the socio-emotional benefits received by the embroiderers. The values associated in the exchange resources of both the shop owner and the embroiderers suggests how and why they ‘ought’ to behave as such. The ‘universal principle’ where they support each other and in return expect to be reciprocated with the same consideration and benefits are very evident. Several embroiderers shared their experiences where their bosses showed them ‘acts of kindness’ which they reciprocated with excellent embroidery work and organizational support and commitment. It was observed that embroiderers who benefit positively from their bosses reciprocate with positive behavior at work. Adams (1965) explained that people involved in the exchange process make calculations about the resources they give and receive from each other and estimate its worth, whether ‘mutual or equitable’ (Mitchell, et al 2012). If there is a perception of imbalance, suggesting that ‘more is given than received,’ the parties involved aim to maintain ‘equity perceptions’. The quid pro quo description of the exchange process is emphasized in terms of ‘balanced benefits and costs.

However, there are also other shop owners who are not as generous and giving to their embroiderers. In this case, individual differences exist in the way reciprocity is observed. These shop owners work on the philosophy that embroiderers are paid to work. Often, this was observed in shops where embroiderers are also family members and close relatives of the owner. The shop owners, often parents or grandparents, implore family members - children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces and close relatives, that they are expected to give their fair share of resources for the benefit of their 'own' business. Homans (1958) explained this valuing as the 'economic exchange' in connection with distributive justice. Distributive justice is concerned with the fair allocation of resources among diverse members of a community (Maiese, 2013) (Burgess, 2013) or in this case, a family. The idea of distributive justice is emphasized where the 'benefits and costs' are shared among the members of the family.

There are also shop owners who involve and highly encourage their embroiderers by soliciting ideas on the design, how to create and execute them on fabric, the type of embroidery as well as the appropriate materials needed to produce what is needed. They collaborate and involve everyone and consider their inputs valuable in achieving the perceived end result. These have been observed during visits in some shops where it was evident that there were limitations in the abilities and resources, both of the shop owners and the embroiderers, in creating an end product. Thibault and Kelly (1959) assert that social exchange relations are based on interdependent interactions, wherein contributions are based on the level of dependence on the other as compared to others. The shop owners, knowing their limitations but having the economic resources, rely heavily on the ideas, skills and abilities of their embroiderers to create what is needed for their business. The embroiderers on the other hand, know they need work provided by the shop owners and they have the resources (referring to their embroidery skills) needed. "When one party provides another with a valued and beneficial resource, an obligation is generated to return a beneficial resource" (Mitchell, et al, 2012), which result to beneficial and productive behaviors as suggested by Blau (1964).

Bounded rational behavior

The concept of bounded rationality has its roots in Herbert A. Simon's attempt to construct a more realistic theory of human economic decision making (Gigerenzer and Selten 2002). H.A. Simon (1916-2001), a Nobel Prize awardee for economics in 1978, laid the groundwork in understanding bounded rational decision making resulting to the evolution of "satisficing" - to "satisfy" and "suffice".

The different parties involved in the exchange process are rationally seeking to maximize profit. However, in reality, decisions and choices are often 'satisficing' choices rather than maximizing or optimizing' (Simon, 1956). Often, choices and decisions are influenced by past experiences including preconceived judgement and stereotypes. Under these circumstances, the environment is defined by the limited information or resources available, the limited ability to process and evaluate choices and limited time available to make optimum choice.

The embroiderers and shop owners rely heavily on each other's resources to survive. The embroiderers would often seek work from shop owners they already know. Often, they stick to a 'boss' for as long as they feel the resources they give are equally returned in the exchange process. Aside from this, the embroiderers, being non-college degree holders, do not have much job choices in town, preferring only to work nearby to minimize costs for transportation and other expenses. Similarly, these factors describe the type of environment as suggested by Simon where humans are bound to aspire for something they consider acceptable although not optimal.

In reality however, the embroiderers are the heart and soul of the embroidery business in Lumban. Without their skillful hands and creativity, the business of embroidery will not thrive. In many industries, they may be defined the core of the business and therefore must be taken care of and be paid commensurate to the output they provide to remain in business. They can in fact demand for more in terms of pay but they are contented with what they receive as compensation for work rendered. This explains Simon's idea of bounded rationality: where embroiderers do not truly maximize whatever gains they can attain because of their limitations. "Very limited knowledge and cognitive limits" (Barros 2010) restrict the embroiderers from choosing better alternatives.

Balancing the demands of work and family responsibilities

Flexible work options were introduced largely to meet employers' needs for flexibility or to keep costs down, although they may also meet employee needs and demands (Krausz et al., 2000 as cited by Golden 2012). Some forms of flexible work schedules, such as part-time work, compressed workweeks, annualized hours and flexitime, have a long history of implementation (Golden 2012). In Australia, the speedy expansion in part-time employment over the past two decades have largely been compelled by organizations' desire to achieve numerical and functional flexibility (the business case for flexibility) rather than a desire to assist employees balance work and family responsibilities (the equal opportunities case for flexibility) (Sheridan & Conway 2001). Aside from this, 'balancing employers' need for flexibility and workers' security is a tough challenge' (Serrano, 2014).

Part-time work is also often associated with a significant reduction in work-life conflict. (Russel, et al. 2007). Generally, this concept is widely explored in various researches and has been seen to have a positive impact on the employee.

The shop owners and embroiderers agree that FWAs are unwritten agreements and implemented in practical ways. In fact, these arrangements are not known to them as 'FWAs but simply as work schedule or agreements (kasunduan) that are verbally concurred by both parties.

Trust

Blau (1964) and Holmes (1981) note trust as an identifying outcome of favorable social exchange (Compranzano & Mitchell 2005, p14). Trust is seemingly formed between shop owners and embroiderers as a result of 'devotion to work' and commitment to 'on time' delivery of work. One common response among embroiderers explained that trust is extended by shop owners as a result of keenness and love for work noticeable in the workmanship and quality of embroidery. Aside from this, trust is ascertained by shop owners in the embroiderers' adherence to the time and date of delivery of embroidered items. "Employer's trust is apparent once love and dedication for work is shown by the embroiderers. It is manifested in the craftsmanship and qualities of embroidery work achieved" as

mentioned by an embroiderer who started at a young age of 12 and now in her mid-50s.

Among the embroiderers interviewed, one said that at 15, she worked as full time embroiderer; another started doing embroidery at 12 where her earnings provided her family additional income. One said she started doing embroidery work at 10, her earnings augmenting her daily school expenses. Now in their 50's, they explained that trust is the result of payoffs and rewards that serve the needs of both shop owners and the embroiderers. In this relationship, they seek to promote their individual needs valuing commitment to the agreed time and date of work delivery and in exchange, trust and proportionate compensation is provided. Trust is not absolutely shown by the embroidery shop owners as a result of long service of the embroiderer. Even if lack of time to complete the embroidery work is apparent, the embroiderers' assurance to deliver work properly and on schedule results to reliance and at the end trust is gained.

The trust relationship that exists between shop owners and embroiderers is similarly based on reciprocation as considered in the SET. "That is, each individual in the relationship will provide each other benefits so long as the exchange is equitable and the units of exchange are important to the respective parties" (Searle, n.d.). The exchange relationship between shop owners and embroiderers should benefit each other fairly; trust is considered important to continue their work relationship.

Loyalty

The important and crucial consideration in choosing an employer is the care and concern given to their wellbeing rather than higher pay without regard to their welfare. This has been acknowledged by embroiderers who have worked under several embroidery shop owners over the years since they started working at a young age. This ultimately influenced their intention to stay longer and remain loyal to an employer. "When the employer is kind-hearted to her or his embroiderers, we tend stay loyal and feel guilty to leave. We consider staying loyal and longer if they treat us well and are lenient enough to allow us to go home and adjust our work hours if needed."

Social exchange relationships evolve when employers "take care of employees," which thereby engenders beneficial consequences (Compranzano & Mitchell 2005). Researchers have also further

delineated reciprocity norms (Eisenberger, Lynch, Aselage, & Rohdieck, 2004; Perugini & Gallucci, 2001; Uhl-Bien & Maslyn, 2003 as cited by Compranzano & Mitchell 2005). They present that reciprocity signifies 'quid pro quo' tendencies, whether positive or negative. "A negative reciprocity orientation involves the tendency to return negative treatment for negative treatment; a positive reciprocity orientation involves the tendency to return positive treatment for positive treatment." This relationship is clearly manifested in the embroidery business in Lumban. When shop owners extend positive treatment to their embroiderers, it generates effective work behavior and positive employee attitudes among embroiderers that in return prompt personal obligation to stay loyal to the employer. On the other hand, when negative treatment is shown, the tendency of moving to another employer is to be expected.

Mutual commitments

For managers, the engagement of company workers can always be improved, since workers are the greatest resource for companies (Holthausen 2012). Saks (2006) stressed the importance for managers to understand that 'resources and benefits' that are considered necessary by employees will most likely create a sense of commitment resulting to higher level of engagement. The SET explains that "employees' commitment to the organization is derived from their perception of the employers' commitment to and support of them" (Whitener, 2001, as cited by Holthausen 2012).

Morgan & Hunt (1994) explained further that in order to attain commitment, trust is an important factor. "This is because suspicion breeds suspicion, meaning that mistrust increases when there is mistrust at the beginning" (Holthausen 2012). This, subsequently leads to a diminishing commitment in the relationship, hence no long-term relationship is likely to happen. On the other hand, Wilson (1995) stated that 'cooperative actions and commitment to the relationship' is expected to increase between partners (such as embroidery shop owners and embroiderers) as they create a balanced 'power-dependency relationship'. This is where they both recognize their value to each other, hence mutual commitment towards the relationship is expected to increase.

Subsequently, a power-dependency relationship is critical in the relationship between shop owners and embroiderers to stay

committed. This relationship is similarly important in the SET as partners who have power may “extract value-sharing concessions” and control the other party in the relationship. The shop owners clearly have the means and power (whether money or other material resources) to control the embroiderers. However, the embroiderers have the necessary skills essential to create exquisite workmanship in their embroidered commodities that are important and vital in the embroidery business. But it is important to note that the supply or number of excellent embroiderers in Lumban is diminishing. This was, in fact, a dilemma admitted by shop owners and embroiderers. If the goods or services can only be served by one or only a few suppliers, a dependency is emerging (Young-Ybarra & Wiersema, 1999 as cited by Holthausen 2006). As such, the need to keep and maintain excellent embroiderers in the embroidery business is vital. Thus, the ‘power-dependency relationship’ between shop owners and embroiders tend to make the most of each other and in the end stay committed in their relationship. This yields positive outcomes for both parties which is necessary to continue their survival.

As observed in the embroidery business in Lumban, the worth given by both the embroidery shop owners and the embroiderers to what are valuable resources that made them see that what they contribute to their relationship is reasonable and fair (please clarify). Blau (1964) and Lawler & Thye (1999) expressed that the fundamental assertion in the SET is that both parties must afford one another an important resource, whether ‘tangible or intangible,’ and that both should perceive the exchange as reasonable and impartial. In addition, “as commitment refers to an implicit or explicit pledge of relational continuity between exchange partners” (Morgan & Hunt, 1994), commitment is important to continue in the exchange relationship.

Conclusion

The increasing focus on work-life balance has brought about a rise in various flexible work options (Hofacker, et al 2013). The introduction of varying FWAs to satisfy the demands of work and family responsibilities have gained notable considerations among shop owners and embroiderers as well. The potential of FWAs, simply defined as work schedule or agreements in the embroidery business in Lumban, is seen as important in achieving balanced time spent at

work and at home. This study further explained how work life balance has important implications in the exchange relationship between shop owners and the embroiderers in Lumban, Laguna.

Considerations such as rewards are perceived as any benefits exchanged in personal relationships that may be material or symbolic and desirable to both parties. Hence, the reason for an exchange in the relationship is 'to maximize benefits and simultaneously minimize costs (Nammir et al., 2012). These benefits result in a favorable exchange that brings about a positive outcome.

Costs, on the other hand, are "either punishments or forfeited rewards that result from social exchanges". In general, both the embroiderers and shop owners are prompted to seek opportunities where rewards are clearly visible. In the event that individuals perceive the apparent lack of rewards, they would find means to evade costs. By and large, these mutual interests that explain the behavior of both the embroiderers and shop owners resulted in mutual benefits, reciprocity and bounded rational behavior.

Mutual benefits emanated from the 'kindness and understanding' extended by both shop owners and embroiderers. Another form of reward that emerged during the interview among embroiderers pertained to the praise and acknowledgements they received for excellent workmanship in the embroidery work they have done. These socio-emotional outcomes send the message that a person is valued and/or is treated with dignity (Shore, Tetrick, & Barksdale, 2001) & (Cropanzano & Mitchell 2005). Although there are costs to the embroiderers such as extending their work hours without additional pay and giving up a few hours that could have been spent with their families, the benefits they get are perceived to be greater. Tsui, Pearce, Porter and Tripoli (1997) as cited by Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005) explained the typology where 'employer' and 'employee' provide each other resources resembling mutual investment: a shop owner provides 'particular resources but is awarded long-term rewards' and the embroiderers provide 'symbolic resources' in return. These varying exchange resources explain how economic and socio-emotional outcomes influence the mutual benefits, shared and received, by both shop owners and the embroiderers.

The SET suggests that there may be no guarantee for reciprocal rewards after investing costs or money, since no contracts are made. (Gefen & Ridings 2002 as cited by Holthausen, 2013). However, Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005) explained that "reciprocity

or repayment in kind is probably the best known exchange rule.” This is very much observed in the embroidery businesses in Lumban. There are no written contracts that bind shop owners and embroiderers similar to an ‘employee-employer relationship.’ The unique characteristics of the arrangement that exists between shop owners and the embroiderers explain that the traditions of reciprocity may be defined and distinguished based on three unconventional typologies as suggested by Cropanzano & Mitchell (2005) as: “reciprocity as a transactional pattern of interdependent exchanges; reciprocity as a folk belief; and reciprocity as a moral norm.”

Gouldner (1960) explained that reciprocity as a “folk belief” entails ‘cultural expectation that people get what they deserve’. The general belief of ‘universal justice’ and what normally is referred to as ‘karma’ suggests that people are likely to lessen their hostile behaviors, believing that ‘you get what you give.’ This description of reciprocity, as a folk belief is likely seen in the embroidery business in Lumban. Being a town rich in religious beliefs and traditions and where the embroidery industry was introduced by the Franciscan missionaries in the early 15th century, reciprocity as a folk belief is deeply rooted in religion and spirituality.

Trust is seemingly shaped between the embroidery shop owners and embroiderers as a result of devotion to work and commitment to on time delivery of work. Aside from this, trust is ascertained by the shop owner from the embroiderer if they see that adherence to time and date of delivery of embroidered items is followed. The trust relationship that exists between shop owners and embroiderers is similarly based on reciprocity as considered in the SET. “That is, each individual in the relationship will provide benefits to the other so long as the exchange is equitable and the units of exchange are important to the respective parties” (Searle, n.d.).

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