

Adapting Beyond Educational Background: Self-Adjustment Strategies of Workers in Nonlinear Careers

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Abstract: Self-adjustment in the workplace becomes a challenge for individuals working outside their field of study. This study aims to understand the experiences of workers adapting to jobs unrelated to their educational backgrounds. In-depth interviews and observations were conducted with two early adult female participants whose educational backgrounds differ from their work fields. Data were analyzed using a qualitative approach with phenomenology. The study results identified five key dimensions of self-adjustment: accurate perception of reality, stress and anxiety management, positive self-image, emotional expression, and interpersonal relationships. Strategies such as self-directed learning, emotional management through spiritual approaches or relaxation activities, effective communication building, and social support from the work environment proved helpful for participants in adapting to their jobs. This research provides insights for companies to create a supportive work environment that fosters employee development.

1 INTRODUCTION

Working in accordance with one's field of study is considered crucial as it enables graduates to apply relevant skills and knowledge acquired through education to the professional context (Kompasiana, 2024). The knowledge and skills learned in the educational setting are highly beneficial for facing challenges in the workplace. Relevant education also helps employees improve their abilities in line with job demands (Efectio Blogging, 2022). A competent and competitive workforce is shaped through educational background and work experience. Based on the survey conducted by the ILO Department of Statistics (2021), countries with higher income levels tend to have educational systems aligned with labor market needs.

However, data from Kompasiana Beyond Blogging (2024) reveal that many Indonesian university graduates work outside their fields of study. According to a survey by the Ministry of Manpower (Detik Finance, 2019), as many as 63% of workers in Indonesia are employed in jobs unrelated to their educational background. A similar phenomenon also occurs in Canada, where about 30% of employees work in areas that do not correspond to their education (Statistics Canada, 2024). Furthermore, some workers are even underqualified for their roles. The gap between job demands and educational background compels workers to make substantial personal adjustments (Kompasiana, 2021).

Employees with different educational backgrounds often face challenges in adjusting (Nägele & Neuenschwander, 2019). Different work environments and high job demands become the greatest challenges for adaptation. Anxiety and barriers to productivity may arise when high job demands conflict with an employee's educational background (Reio Jr. & Sutton, 2019). Conversely, productivity increases and anxiety decreases when employees successfully adjust to their roles (Satria et al., 2023). Strong adjustment skills also enable employees to face challenges in communication and cultural differences within multicultural work environments (Parerungan, 2019).

According to Rahadiano (2022), workers with a positive self-concept and effective communication skills adapt more easily to work environments different from their educational backgrounds. Conversely, those with negative self-concepts and poor communication skills often struggle to adapt. Dollwet and Reichard (2019) also found that employees with high Cross-Cultural Psychological Capital (PsyCap) are more likely to adapt quickly, build positive relationships, and manage stress effectively. Meanwhile, individuals with low PsyCap are more prone to stress and interpersonal conflict. In line with this, Novianti (2024) highlighted that multicultural workplaces often lead to stress and conflict due to cultural differences, making adjustment a necessity for employees.

Adjustment is the individual's ability to adapt to changing environments and situations (Runyon & Haber, 1984). It involves dimensions such as realistic perception, stress management, positive self-

assessment, emotional expression, and healthy relationship-building. Adjustment is influenced by internal factors, such as physical and emotional conditions, as well as external factors, including environmental support and cultural values (Maimunah, 2020). Feelings of frustration, inner conflict, and anxiety that often arise when facing challenges also affect individual adjustment (Veronika & Sugiarti, 2021). In other words, adjustment reflects how individuals respond to challenges and pressures in life.

When individuals can control their emotions, accept reality, and act rationally when facing challenges, they are considered well-adjusted (Handayani et al., 2021). Successful adjustment fosters happiness and reduces anxiety (Lelyemin, 2019). Conversely, failure to adjust can lead to stress, anxiety, and even difficulties in fulfilling work responsibilities. Adjustment also significantly affects learning motivation, as strong adaptability enhances work motivation (Astutik et al., 2024). Therefore, adjustment plays a crucial role in various aspects of life, ranging from emotional well-being to professional success.

A study by Saragih and Wahyuni (2019) revealed a significant relationship between adjustment and work enthusiasm, where adjustment strongly contributes to work spirit. Effective adjustment also significantly impacts employees' social well-being (Supriyanto & Rizkianti, 2022). Workers who can adjust well also tend to have higher quality social relationships. Wu et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of emotional adjustment during crisis situations, such as those experienced by medical personnel during the COVID-19 pandemic.

These findings highlight the vital role of adjustment in enhancing both employee well-being and performance, particularly in challenging circumstances.

Other studies also underscore the importance of adjustment in responding to life changes. Research by Lusi (2021) found that students who work while studying need to make emotional and cognitive adjustments to manage dual roles. These students demonstrated effective adjustment, enabling them to balance academic and professional responsibilities. Similarly, Nariswati et al. (2023) reported that first-year students adjusted to campus life through proactive behaviors, such as seeking information from seniors and participating in social activities. Gelles et al. (2020) further showed that students adjusted during emergency remote learning through strategies such as time management, maintaining focus, and setting routines.

Beyond students and workers, adjustment is also significant in family and community settings. Abbas (2019) found that adjustment among married couples influences marital satisfaction, shaped by factors such as emotional regulation, realistic attitudes, and responsibility management. Yong (2021) studied adjustment among nursing home residents and discovered that decision-making control, social support, and self-efficacy played a role in improving their well-being. Daily activity management and social relationship-building further supported the adjustment process. Dufner (2019) added that self-enhancement tendencies are positively related to adjustment, life satisfaction, and reduced depression.

Adjustment plays an important role for employees in enhancing emotional well-being and creating a harmonious work environment. Clara and Rizky (2023) showed that self-compassion significantly contributes to adjustment, enabling employees to be more open toward themselves and to foster positive workplace relationships. Adjustment is also essential for employees to adapt personally and socially within the workplace (Wongsuwan, 2022). The study suggested that social support, resilience training, and well-being promotion can serve as supporting factors to strengthen adjustment effectiveness. Therefore, research on adjustment is necessary to improve employee performance and job satisfaction.

Previous studies have examined self-adjustment in various contexts, such as first-year college students (Nariswati et al., 2023), medical personnel during crises (Wu et al., 2020), and employees in multicultural workplaces (Novianti, 2024). However, these studies are still general in nature. They have not specifically discussed the concrete strategies used by workers in non-linear careers. Such adaptive strategies are particularly important for employees whose jobs do not match their educational backgrounds. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by using a phenomenological approach to explore workers' subjective experiences in adapting to non-linear careers.

Building on this gap, the present study focuses on workers who occupy jobs that do not align with their educational backgrounds. The main concern lies in how these individuals adjust themselves to roles that demand different knowledge and skills. At the same time, it also considers the strategies they apply

to overcome challenges in such non-linear careers. By exploring their lived experiences, the research seeks to reveal how adjustment takes place in real workplace situations. Through this approach, the study aims to provide a deeper understanding of both the adjustment process and the strategies that support successful adaptation.

2 METHOD

Participants

The participants were selected using purposive sampling, where individuals were chosen based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. The participants consisted of two women in early adulthood: subject F, aged 27, and subject B, aged 25. Each participant worked in a field unrelated to her educational background. The detailed characteristics of the participants are presented in

Table 1 : *Participant Characteristics.*

Category	P1	P2
Age	27 years old	25 years old
Education	Bachelor of Educational Management	Bachelor of Agribusiness (Agriculture)
Occupation	Hospital Marketing	Startup Digital Marketing (Work From Home)

Design

The research method used was qualitative with a phenomenological approach, which presents research findings descriptively along with interpretations regarding the meaning of the participants' lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). This method was deemed appropriate for the purpose of

this study, namely to explore and interpret the ways participants adjusted themselves in relation to changes in their lives. Data were collected through observation and in-depth interviews, with the main guiding question being: "How do you adjust yourself to work in a field that is not aligned with your educational background?" along with other related questions.

Procedure

Participants signed an informed consent form to indicate their willingness to take part in the study. The informed consent was also signed by the researcher as a form of mutual agreement. Subsequently, interviews were conducted for approximately one hour in a closed room to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. Data were also collected through observations made during the interviews. Afterward, the researcher transcribed the verbatim recordings and highlighted important statements from the interviews, which were then developed into themes, interpreted, and concluded.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore self-adjustment in each individual. The interview guide was developed through deductive reasoning, where the researcher identified predetermined subjects and examined hypotheses or theories. The development of the interview guide consisted of three steps: (1) identifying aspects that construct self-adjustment, (2) developing indicators for each aspect, and (3) formulating core questions. All questions in the interview guide were open-ended. The researcher

used prompts such as “Please describe...,” “Please explain...,” “What made you...,” and “How do you....” Probing questions were adapted based on the participants’ responses to previous questions.

Data Analysis Technique

The data analyzed consisted of verbatim transcripts from the recorded interviews. The qualitative analysis technique applied was content analysis. The type of content analysis chosen was latent content analysis, in which the researcher examined the data to identify underlying meanings within the text. In this analysis, the unit of analysis was the statements made by each participant. The content analysis process was divided into four stages: (1) decontextualization, (2) recontextualization, (3) categorization, and (4) compilation (Bengtsson, 2016). The following are the stages of data analysis in this research:

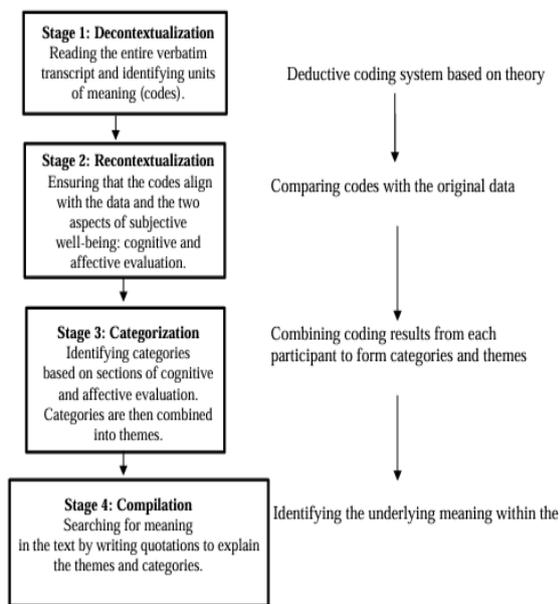


Figure1 : Stages of data analysis

3 RESULT

Self-adjustment consists of five dimensions that describe how individuals are able to adapt to various situations in their lives, namely: (1) Accuracy of perception of reality; (2) Ability to manage stress and anxiety; (3) Positive self-image; (4) Ability to express emotions; and (5) Interpersonal relationships. Within each dimension, themes emerged that illustrate participants’ abilities and interpretations. The following table summarizes the dimensions experienced by the participants, along with the themes and subthemes identified within each dimension.

Table 2 : Dimention of Self Ajustment

Dimension	Theme	Subtheme
Accuracy of Perception of Reality	Efforts to balance abilities and reality	Learning tasks from supervisors, attending courses for skill development
Ability to Manage Stress and Anxiety	Concrete efforts to cope with stress	Attending Islamic study groups, visiting cafés, and engaging in healing activities
Positive Self-Image	Confidence in oneself	Focusing on self-development potential, having faith in one’s abilities
Ability to Express Emotions	Skills in expressing feelings	Considering colleagues’ personalities, expressing emotions virtually
Interpersonal Relationships	Building mutually beneficial relationships	Establishing reciprocal beneficial relations, fostering closeness through gatherings

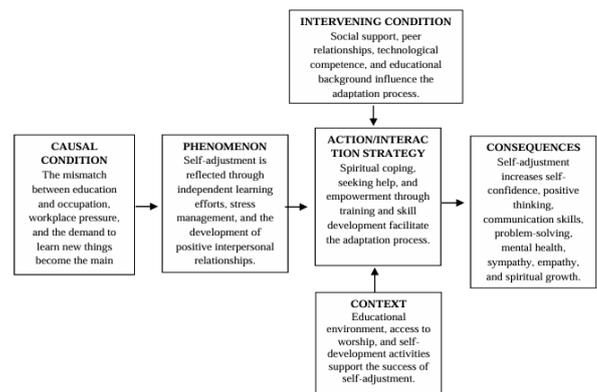


Figure 2 : Conceptual Framework Diagram

Each participant engaged in both similar and different efforts to adjust to the changes occurring in their lives. The first dimension is the accuracy of perception of reality. Each participant developed their own strategies to deal with existing realities. The themes identified within this dimension are as follows:

Theme 1: Efforts to Balance Abilities and Reality

Each participant faced challenges in adapting to jobs unrelated to their educational background. Subject F had to study the medical field despite coming from an educational management background, while Subject B had to master digital marketing, which is far different from agribusiness. Both participants strove to develop themselves in order to remain relevant in their work. The accuracy of perceiving reality and the ability to adapt became the key factors in coping with dynamic job demands, encouraging them to continue learning and improving their skills.

Subject F sought to understand her work by learning from supervisors, colleagues, and the internet. She realized that learning something new requires persistence and willingness to gradually acquire knowledge.

“The biggest challenge was understanding the medical field even though my background is in educational management. Since I work in hospital business development, I am required to also learn medical knowledge because it involves building partnerships and managing patient satisfaction. I deal with this by continuously studying what I don’t understand, learning from

my supervisors, colleagues, and online sources until I gradually grasp it. That is my way of facing this reality.”

Subject B faced major challenges in understanding digital marketing. She sought solutions through training, internships, and professional certifications, showing that investing in self-development is essential to close her skill gap.

“My biggest challenge is that I come from an agribusiness background, which is very different from digital marketing and communication. I needed extra effort to balance my abilities in this field. I solved this by attending various training programs, internships, and even obtaining recognized certifications. These have supported my progress, even though it takes time to face this reality.”

Facing the professional world requires a high level of adaptability and continuous learning. Subject F and Subject B demonstrated that limitations in educational background are not barriers to growth. With a strong learning spirit and persistent effort, they were able to enhance the competencies required in their jobs. This proves that the willingness to learn is an essential asset for overcoming challenges in the workplace. In this way, they successfully balanced their abilities with the realities of their work.

Theme 2: Concrete Efforts to Overcome Stress

Subject F and Subject B employed different strategies in managing the stress they

experienced. Both attempted to maintain emotional balance through approaches that suited their personal needs. Subject F prioritized a spiritual approach by strengthening her relationship with God, while Subject B chose a more personal approach through “me time” and socializing with friends. These approaches reflect the importance of recognizing individual emotional needs when dealing with life’s pressures. In coping with stress, both participants sought solutions that enabled them to live more peacefully.

Subject F managed stress by reinforcing her spirituality through worship and attending Islamic study groups, which provided her with a sense of calm.

"I cope with stress by seeking solutions to its causes. In addition, I balance it by strengthening my spirituality. Whenever I feel sad, stressed, or anxious, I always turn to Allah for help and protection. I worship, and what makes me feel most supported is when I attend Islamic study groups. There, I can control my emotions; what was once stress and anxiety turns into calmness."

Subject B preferred spending time on personal relaxation, such as visiting cafés and sharing stories with friends, as a way to relieve stress.

"When I already feel stressed, I take some healing me time to release the pressure, usually by going to a café and sharing stories with my close friends."

Managing stress requires approaches tailored to individual needs. Subject F and Subject B demonstrated that both spiritual methods and

relaxation techniques can be effective when practiced consistently. They were aware of the importance of finding the best ways to reduce emotional tension. This highlights that self-awareness is the first step in stress management. By doing so, they were able to maintain balance in life and work more productively.

Theme 3: Confidence in Oneself

Subject F and Subject B demonstrated strong self-confidence in facing the professional world despite various challenges. They trusted the abilities they had built through experience and training. Subject F felt competent in social and marketing aspects, while Subject B believed in the digital marketing skills he had sharpened. This confidence was supported by work experience and the willingness to continue learning. It reflects the importance of self-confidence in dealing with workplace challenges.

Subject F was confident in his ability to build social relationships that supported his work in marketing, even though he experienced difficulties in the medical field.

"The positive thing within me may be my ability to easily adapt. I have an extroverted personality, so I really enjoy social interaction, building relationships, and even cooperation. This trait gives me the ability and makes it easier for me to work in business development, which involves marketing and public relations in establishing collaborations. Therefore, I excel in marketing and collaboration. However, there are still challenges when carrying out business

development because I face difficulties in the medical aspect."

Subject B felt more confident after two years of working and attending various training programs that made him more proficient in digital marketing. This proves that self-confidence grows along with consistent experience and learning.

"I am confident in my abilities because I feel much better compared to when I first entered the world of digital marketing. Perhaps because I have been in digital marketing for quite a while, I have become more accustomed to it, and previously I also participated in many training programs. I have been working for about two years and joined several training sessions and internships before working here."

Self-confidence is an important factor in facing the challenges of the professional world. Subject F and Subject B successfully built their self-confidence through consistent experience and learning. Confidence grows along with achievements and continuous efforts to improve skills. This shows that self-confidence is not innate but can be developed through life experiences. Thus, they were able to carry out their work with a positive attitude and high optimism.

Theme 4: Ability to Express Emotions

Subject F and Subject B had different approaches to expressing their feelings in the workplace. Both encountered challenges influenced by the social conditions of their work environment. Subject F needed to be cautious because her

workplace was filled with gossip and conflict, while Subject B, who worked from home, relied on company facilities such as face-to-face gatherings to express feelings directly. These two approaches illustrate that effective communication requires strategies adapted to the specific work context.

Subject F adjusted the way she conveyed her feelings by understanding the character of her colleagues to avoid potential conflict:

"Since almost all employees in the hospital are women, there is a lot of drama, gossip, backstabbing, and competition. Therefore, I need to be careful when expressing my feelings or opinions by first adjusting to each individual's character. This way, I can still express my feelings or opinions in the best possible manner without causing conflict."

Subject B took advantage of office gatherings to express feelings directly, especially when dealing with issues that were difficult to resolve virtually:

"It is indeed difficult to express feelings and emotions because of the many differences in perception, especially when communication happens online rather than face to face. However, because the company provides gatherings as ice breaking sessions for employees to express their feelings directly whether at the office or outside the office it helps a lot. These gatherings are held once a month, and if there are difficult situations that cannot be resolved virtually, an offline meeting is also arranged to collectively resolve the matter."

Effective communication requires the ability to adapt to the social environment. Subject F and Subject B demonstrated that appropriate emotional expression can strengthen workplace relationships. They employed different approaches depending on the conditions and the characteristics of their colleagues. This shows that understanding the social context is crucial in creating smooth communication. With effective communication, conflicts can be prevented, and the work environment can become more conducive.

Theme 5: Building Positive Reciprocal Relationships

Subject F and Subject B recognized the importance of creating harmonious relationships in the workplace. Both emphasized collaboration, communication, and mutual respect as the keys to successful teamwork. Subject F focused on complementary collaboration among team members, while Subject B utilized gatherings to strengthen work relationships. Their efforts demonstrated that a positive work environment is built through effective cooperation.

Subject F strived to establish positive working relationships that were mutually beneficial and respectful of colleagues' opinions. She also highlighted the necessity of open communication to avoid misunderstandings:

"I try to respect everyone's opinions, collaborate as best as possible, and learn from one another based on the knowledge we gained during our studies so that we can help each other, provide

benefits, and offer support. These differences can be used to complement each other's expertise. And most importantly, communication among team members must be maintained to avoid misunderstandings."

Subject B made use of time outside of work to build closer bonds with colleagues, which made communication easier and more effective:

"To build good relationships with my colleagues, I take advantage of gatherings to create closeness with friends. Fortunately, my team members live not too far from me, so we can still meet directly if we want to communicate and exchange ideas."

Building positive workplace relationships requires mutual respect and effective collaboration. Subject F and Subject B demonstrated that open communication and active engagement strengthen team solidarity. They realized that good relationships are not formed instantly but through continuous joint efforts. This underscores that healthy interaction fosters a productive work environment. With effective collaboration, team success becomes easier to achieve, and tasks can be completed more efficiently.

4 DISCUSSION

This study shows that participants faced challenges in adjusting to jobs that were not aligned with their educational backgrounds. Subject F had to learn about the medical field despite having an educational management background, while Subject B

strived to master digital marketing, which was far from her agribusiness education. Nevertheless, both participants demonstrated a strong willingness to learn and persistent effort in facing these challenges, enabling them to balance their abilities with the demands of their jobs. This finding is consistent with Nägele and Neuenschwander (2019), who stated that employees with different educational backgrounds often face challenges in the adjustment process. However, when individuals are willing to learn and make greater efforts to cope with job demands, success in the workplace can be achieved.

The participants also demonstrated different ways of managing stress when dealing with job pressures. Subject F adopted a spiritual approach by strengthening her worship practices and attending Islamic study groups, while Subject B preferred “me time,” such as visiting cafés and socializing with friends. These strategies highlight that stress management must be tailored to each individual’s emotional needs, with the aim of supporting better adjustment in the workplace. This is consistent with Handayani et al. (2021), who emphasized that appropriate stress management strategies help individuals enhance their adjustment abilities when facing work-related pressures. When individuals are able to regulate emotions, accept reality, and respond rationally, they are more likely to adapt effectively.

Self-confidence emerged as an important asset for participants in navigating the challenges of the workplace. Subject F demonstrated confidence in her social and marketing skills, while Subject B felt more self-assured in her digital marketing abilities, which had been honed through training. This confidence motivated them to seek experiences and make

continuous efforts to build their professional competence. In line with Rahadianto (2022), workers with a positive self-concept and strong self-confidence tend to adapt more easily in work environments different from their educational backgrounds. This suggests that strong self-confidence can be a crucial factor in supporting adaptability and career development in the workplace.

Participants also showed the ability to express their feelings by adapting to the social conditions of their workplaces. For example, Subject F chose to be cautious in expressing her opinions in a competitive environment, while Subject B utilized company gatherings to communicate more openly. This underscores the importance of applying appropriate communication strategies so employees can adjust effectively in the workplace. Consistent with Parerungan (2019), the ability to adapt enables employees to manage communication challenges and cultural differences in multicultural work environments. Therefore, effective communication strategies play a key role in fostering harmonious and productive work relationships even in dynamic work conditions.

The importance of building positive workplace relationships was also evident in the participants’ efforts to establish communication and collaboration with colleagues. Subject F emphasized mutually beneficial collaboration among team members, while Subject B took advantage of office gatherings to strengthen professional bonds. These efforts reflect that open communication and good teamwork are essential elements in creating a solid team and supporting individual adaptation in the workplace. This finding aligns with Yong (2021), who

noted that positive social relationships support individuals in adjusting successfully. Such relationships provide satisfaction and well-being, thereby enhancing individuals' capacity for adjustment in their environments.

5 CONCLUSIONS

Conclusion

Based on the findings, participants demonstrated self-adjustment abilities across five dimensions: accurate perception of reality, ability to manage stress and anxiety, positive self-concept, ability to express emotions, and interpersonal relationships. Each participant had unique ways of coping with job challenges unrelated to their educational backgrounds, such as learning new tasks through training and self-study. Stress management was conducted using strategies suited to their emotional needs, including spiritual approaches and personal relaxation activities. Self-confidence served as an essential factor enabling participants to face the workplace, developed through experience, training, and belief in their potential. In expressing emotions and building interpersonal relationships, participants highlighted the importance of effective communication and positive collaboration to create a harmonious work environment.

Theoretical Recommendations

This study emphasizes that workplace adjustment involves interconnected cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal abilities. Theories of self-adjustment may be further developed by considering individuals' backgrounds, stress

management strategies, and the reinforcement of self-confidence. Moreover, future research could explore external factors such as organizational support and workplace environments that influence individuals' adaptation processes.

Practical Recommendations

Companies are advised to provide training and skill development programs for employees working outside their educational backgrounds to help them adapt more quickly. Additionally, support for employees' emotional well-being can be offered through counseling programs, relaxation activities, or spiritual reinforcement tailored to individual needs. To enhance self-confidence and effective communication, companies could organize collaborative activities such as gatherings or communication workshops that promote a positive and harmonious work atmosphere.

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