

## **GUILT AND SHAME PRONENESS: THE ROLE OF WORK MEANING AND PERCEIVED UNETHICALITY OF NO HARM NO FOUL BEHAVIOR AMONG PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES**

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### *Abstract*

*The lower moral emotions - i.e. shame and guilt - proneness has been linked by Cohen, Wolf, Panter, and Insko (2011) with a higher tendency of doing corruption. This present study hypothesized that meaningful work and perceived unethicality of no harm no foul behavior (NHNF) can predict the proneness in positive directions. Simple linear regression analyses on data from 210 employees (122 males, 88 females;  $M_{age}=27.96$  years old;  $SD_{age}=5.265$  years) in the Greater Area of Jakarta, Indonesia showed that meaningful work, but not NHNF unethicality perception, can predict most of moral emotions proneness. This study provides empirical evidence against speculative claims that meaning, both in the general and work life, contributes to human morality. Corruption can be minimized by improving work meaning. The underlying assumption is that both meaning and morality make up "a good life". This article uses an explanation of the work spirituality inspired by religious teachings - which indeed greatly influence the psychological reality of Eastern society, like Indonesian. This study provides optimism for the prevention of unethical behaviors since meaning is an entity that can be constructed and intervened. We need a serious commitment to have appropriate cultural strategies for developing favored meaning.*

**Keywords:** shame proneness; guilt; moral emotion; work meaning; ethical psychology; corruptive tendency

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## **Introduction**

Corruption can be defined as the act of abusing power for personal gain (Transparency International, 2016; Zaloznaya, 2014). Corruption refers to dishonesty impacting a nation on various aspects such as education, way of life, employment and most importantly humanity (Behera, 2014). It is an illegal use of official power either by the government or other high-ranking individuals in private sectors in order to enrich themselves at the expense of others (David, 2012). Corruption damages the performance of an enterprise both materially (leading to financial bankruptcy) and reputationally (leading to decreased competitive advantage).

Various factors of corruption have been associated with the politics, governance culture, judiciary as well as public sector wages (Abraham & Pradipto, 2016; Arifianto, 2001; Martini, 2012). However, Moore (2009) stated that corruption serves as a dynamic process that is difficult to capture empirically. While it is true that corruption can be referred to an outcome of a certain process, not many studies have been conducted on its process but rather studying it as an end product. Few studies have focused their viewpoint on psychological process of the individuals who have committed those crimes.

Based on several studies incorporating personal and cultural features as well as the moral orientation, it has been found that high level of neuroticism, future-orientation, power distance, masculinity and uncertainty avoidance are positively associated with corruptive behavior (Zaloznaya, 2014). In addition, Abraham and Pane (2014) summarized five psychological approaches in explaining corruption, i.e. psychodynamics, behavioristic psychology, cognitive psychology, socio-cognitive, and cultural psychology.

In the midst of a variety of theoretical and empirical studies of corruption, at the individual level, Cohen, Wolf, Panter, and Insko (2011) claimed that moral or self-conscious emotions are proxies of corruptive tendencies. Self-conscious emotions arise when an individual reflects one's self and evaluates the self in relation to existing values and standards (Tracy, Robins, & Tangney, 2007). It is believed that moral behavior emerges from the existence of moral emotions which is linked with moral standards and moral cognition. When an individual knows what is right from wrong, it forms their intentions to do the right thing (i.e. moral intentions) (Tracy et al., 2007). In general, these emotions emerge when the self evaluates itself (e.g. our

character, our worth, etc.), and the self-conscious emotions serve either as an immediate reinforcement or a punishment of the performed behavior.

Moral emotions can bring about feedback before an individual performs a behavior (i.e. anticipatory shame, guilt or pride) and even after the behavior is elicited (i.e. consequential shame, guilt or pride). Anticipated moral emotions are inferred from past experience or situation that can bring about the similar responses, whereas consequential moral emotions emerge when an individual has undergone the experience. Thus, an individual has the dispositional tendencies to undergo those emotional states, which is termed as proneness to moral emotions (i.e. shame-proneness, guilt-proneness, pride-proneness) (Tracy et al., 2007). Theoretically, individuals who are prone to moral emotions are able to experience those emotions when anticipating potential behaviors as well as the consequences of these behaviors (e.g. failure in doing something good, moral offenses, etc.). It is also believed that individuals who are prone to moral emotions are more likely to experience anticipatory and consequential moral emotions than their less prone counterparts (Tracy et al., 2007). Many researchers have differentiated between the existences of self-conscious emotions. Within this research, moral emotions that become the focus of the study are guilt and shame proneness.

Guilt and shame can be defined by two schools of thought: self-behavior distinction and public-private distinction (Cohen et al., 2011). Based on the self-behavior distinction, guilt arises when an individual evaluates or forms attribution of his/her own ethical behavior. Evaluations of the behaviors elicited can bring about negative feelings. Guilt, in turn, brings about regret such that the individual is motivated to make a right out of the wrongs that he/she has done. It emerges due to the fact that one has violated their self-conscience. As a result, repair action becomes a function of guilt as people would have the tendency to do over their wrongdoings. Based on the public-private distinction, the experience of guilt occurs privately where an individual feels a sense of regret or condemnation when a personal transgression occurs (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, guilt proneness can be measured based on these two aspects: *negative evaluation of behavior (Guilt-NBE)* and *repair (Guilt-REP)* tendencies.

Based on self-behavior distinction perspective, shame arises when an individual evaluates or forms attribution about one's self. These evaluations can bring about negative feelings about one's representation of the self. Instead of

regret, self-condemnation can arise such that there is a tendency to withdraw from situations or people that brings about humiliation and degradation (i.e. avoid consequences of one's transgressions or failures). Based on the public-private distinction, there is an indication that negative feelings about one's self emerge when the faults of the self are exposed to the public's eyes (Cohen et al., 2011) Therefore, shame proneness can be measured based on these two aspects: *negative evaluation of the self (Shame-NSE)* and *withdrawal (Shame-WIT)* tendencies.

By acknowledging the latest developments in psychological studies of corruption, as described above, the authors believe that it is urgent to conduct a scientific investigation to determine predictors of shame and guilt proneness. Two predictors proposed by the authors are (1) Work meaning, and (2) Perceived unethicality of no harm no foul behavior.

Throughout history, there have been a number of opinions and classical studies about the work meaning. Ancient Greeks considered that work is the thing that separates a person from his/her leisure, while the Protestant ethic views work as a noble cause (Shea-Van Fossen & Vredenburg, 2014). In social psychology, early research on work meaning can be traced from the topic of *psychology of insufficient justification* (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2007). It is described by Aronson, et al., that this psychological symptom is a reduction effort of cognitive dissonance performed when justification from outer-self (external justification) is not adequate (insufficient). People then justify their behavior from the inner-self (internal justification). More elaboratively, there is a description of research conducted by Festinger and Carlsmith in 1959 (*as cited in* Aronson et al., 2007, pp. 171-172; Nainggolan et al., 2012, pp. 100-101), as follows:

“An experimental researcher asked the students to spend their time for one hour to perform a series of tasks that were truly boring and repetitive. After that, the researcher informed the students that the purpose of this study was to determine whether people would do the work better if they were informed in advance that the work was interesting. Each student was told that they had been randomly placed in the ‘control group’, a group which was not informed in advance about the attractiveness of the task. However, the researcher explained that there was a woman (female student) who has just arrived in the waiting room that would be included in the ‘experimental group’, which was the group that was informed in advance about the attractiveness of the task. The researcher said that she needed to convince the female student that the

task she was about to do was interesting and fun. However, he said, it would be more convincing if a fellow student informed that to her instead of the researcher himself. So, the researcher asked the students to lie about that task to the female student in the waiting room (the task was actually boring, but the students were asked to tell her that the task she was about to do was fun). Most students are given 20 dollars to lie. This is a great external justification. Some were given only one dollar to lie. It is a small external justification. After the study had ended, the researcher interviewed the students regarding the extent to which they enjoyed their tedious task in the beginning. In accordance with the researcher's hypotheses, students who were previously paid 20 dollars for lying assessed that the initial activities they were doing was a bleak and boring experience. But the students who were only paid one dollar said that the task was very pleasant. In other words, people who have received abundant external justification to lie did not believe in their lies, while those receiving little external justification *tried to convince themselves* that the lie they said was close to the truth."

The study showed that intrinsic work meaning can be staged by external rewards that are not too big for the work performed. In other words, rewards that are too big make people feel dozy on the meaning of their work. What is unique from the above study is that even in the deceptive (unethical) act, work meaning can be found. Nonetheless, the study emphasized on the *source* of work meaning, not the *effect* of work meaning - as would be investigated in this present study.

Work meaning is defined as "the value of a work goal or purpose, judged to the individual's own ideals or standards" (May et al., *as cited in* Lips-Wiersma & Wright, 2012, p. 657). Work meaning is known to have effects on a number of dimensions of job behaviors, such as job engagement, empowerment, personal performance, organizational commitment, reduced risk of turnover, and well-being (Clausen & Borg, 2011; Rosso, Dekas, & Wrzesniewski, 2010). Meaningful work produces a positive outcome, namely the improvement of caring or nurturing aspect of others through existential reasoning which is intrinsic in nature (Lee, 2015). Work meaning is also known to play a role that mediates the relationship between living calling and life meaning; this means that work meaning has an impact on life in general, not just in the work or organizational context (Duffy, Allan, Autin, & Bott, 2013). A series of questions that are useful to identify the work meaning inside ourselves are as follows:

"What is your calling? What is the force that compels and calls you? What makes you stay strong and keep on walking despite the pain, which makes you willing

and able to stand tall after a fall? What makes you rejoice even though you were not rewarded by gold and flowers? What makes you stay loyal despite many attractive offers out there, makes you choose what *is* right, not what *feels* good?" (Sugianto, 2015, p. 181).

Meaningful work is a work that is not primarily to meet the biological needs or in order to survive, and this meaning is more likely to be contained in the jobs undertaken by high volition (Duffy, Autin, & Bott, 2015). Therefore, it is not surprising that people with higher social class (those with less structural and financial constraints) are found to have a higher work meaning (Allan, Autin, & Duffy, 2014). Nonetheless, the effect size is small, and it means that the work meaning is also found in people with a lower social class. They have a source of work meaning in the form of relatedness to others (contribution to the common good), not self-determination as in those with a higher social class.

A person who lacks meaning of the work will spend their working time (generally 8 hours per day for Indonesian office workers, or one-third of the 24 hours from the time a person has in a day) as a formality (for example, organizational charlatan behavior, or pretended to be working; Abraham & Berline, 2015), routine (the "conveyor belt" - in Indonesian: "*ban berjalan*" - which is stuck in the "working system that connects one part to another, from the beginning to the end and back to the beginning"; KBBI Edisi III, 2008), or just functionally earns daily living. Therefore, in doing the job, they will feel more tired or even burnout because of the absence of a bond between themselves and the work, or lack of artistic views towards the work.

It appears that most of the effects of the work meaning that were investigated previously are a-moral (irrelevant to the morality). To the extent of the authors' knowledge, there are only two studies linking work meaning to morality. *First*, Ong, Mayer, and Tost's (2014) study concluding that work meaning moderated the predictive relationship between working activity in socially responsible organizations and prosocial behavior - which is positively associated with moral consistency and negatively associated with moral licensing - of the employee. *Second*, Huff's (2014) study linking skills or expertise (meaning well) with morality (doing well). He argued that skills such as advanced logical-mathematical operations, self-regulation, reflection, management, negotiation, social networking, and user-centered orienting are necessary, in addition to moral judgment, for the occurrence of a moral action. Expertise and skills are concrete realizations of will to meaning in work. It is

assumed that experts, thanks to their meaning-making in work, have a much more adequate capacity of knowledge, perception, and reaction than non-experts, so as to act accurately and efficiently in processing feedback on their actions, including moral actions. For example, by having work meaning, the experts are facilitated to make necessary improvements to his/her actions in case of failure. Recognizing the natures of skills and expertise, it is not surprising that Huff (2014) affirmed the paradox of their contribution to morality, "Thus the relationship between morality and the skills and expertise I outline here is at the very least complex, if not contradictory and dialectical. Skills and knowledge can be separated from morality and can indeed serve immoral ends" (p. 456).

However, this present study has *meaningful work* in mind not only as mastery of knowledge and skills but more fundamental than that. For example, work meaning can be found in four levels (Rosso et al., 2010), i.e. (1) personal (beliefs, motivation, values), (2) social (family, leaders, co-workers, groups and communities), (3) work characteristics and contexts (job design, financial situations, organizational mission, national culture, and non-work fields), and (4) spiritual (calling, spirituality). Of the various levels, one that is strongly associated with the hypothesis of this study is *authenticity* in the personal level. Authenticity means (1) not alienated from the self, (2) has a deep connection with the self-values, and (3) act in accordance with one's true self (Abraham, Takwin, & Suleeman, 2017; Rosso et al., 2010; Wood, Linley, Maltby, Baliousis, & Joseph, 2008). Authenticity is directly related to morality (Gino, Kouchaki, & Galinsky, 2015). An inauthentic person would feel a challenge to his/her moral self-concept. Gino et al. (2015) explained that there is compatibility between inauthenticity and dishonesty (as an unethical or immoral behavior), namely, "They are both a violation of being true" (Gino et al., 2015, p. 2). The decline of moral self-image has implications towards one's moral emotions (Cohen et al., 2011). Therefore, the first hypothesis of this present study is that "*Work meaning is able to predict Guilt-NBE (H1<sub>1</sub>), Guilt-REP (H1<sub>2</sub>), Shame-NSE (H1<sub>3</sub>), and Shame-WIT (H1<sub>4</sub>) in positive ways*".

Perceptions of unethicality of no harm no foul behavior is the next variable that was assumed can predict shame and guilt proneness. No harm no foul behavior (NHNF) is "a questionable behavior committed by a consumer in which the actor perceives no direct harm that will be suffered by anyone receiving the consequence of the action" (Abraham & Maulida, 2015, p. 163).

However, the loss which is not overt (or vague: what is the loss, who is at loss), as in the personal action of recording the music from the radio or the Internet, caused controversy. Some people still think that the action is unethical based on the loss that is gradual and cumulative. For example, the thought is true for a musician who is supposed to receive royalties from any music consumption.

Abraham and Maulida (2015) gave their analysis that (1) cognitive distortions caused by the perception of lack of significant casualties of NHNF has made people become less aware that NHNF may have slowly undermined a person's moral foundation, (2) Moral disengagement has theoretically become a bridge of explanation about the relationship between NHNF and unethical behavior, such as corruption, (3) in assessing the immorality of NHNF, people consider the ethical perspective of deontology (which emphasizes on conformity to public policy as well as the norms of society and spirituality) is more appropriate to implement rather than the perspective of utilitarian (which emphasizes on the consequences of an action; for example: "Robin Hood Effect"). In the context of psychological mechanism in the likeness of moral disengagement, individuals who commit NHNF apply (1) moral justification (e.g. by believing that copying the contents of a commercial CD would not hurt anyone directly), (2) favorable comparison (e.g. by believing that downloading software without paying is still more ethical than stealing directly from the store), (3) displacement or diffusion of responsibility to support their NHNF actions (e.g., by believing that many other consumers also copy music or download pirated software freely) (Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014; Muncy & Vitell, 1992).

Thus, the shame and guilt proneness are allegedly derogated by NHNF when NHNF is perceived as a behavior that is acceptably ethical or morally unproblematic. By that, people learn that (1) A lot of the behaviors are not to be regretted, (2) A lot of behavior does not need to be corrected, (3) We do not need to be too tense to do too much reflection on the "gray" behavior which is in the border region between moral and immoral. Therefore, the second hypothesis of this present study is that "*Perceived unethicity of no harm no foul behavior can predict Guilt-NBE (H2<sub>1</sub>), Guilt-REP (H2<sub>2</sub>), Shame-NSE (H2<sub>3</sub>), and Shame-WIT (H2<sub>4</sub>) in positive ways*" (H2).

### **Objective**

This study aimed at empirically testing the hypotheses (H1<sub>1</sub> - H1<sub>4</sub> and



$H2_1 - H2_4$ ) on the roles of work meaning and perceived unethicity of no harm no foul behavior in predicting guilt and shame proneness (see Figure 1).

## Method

### *Participants*

Participants of this study were 210 employees (122 males, 88 females;  $M_{age}=27.96$  years old;  $SD_{age}=5.265$  years) with a minimum of one-year working experience in the private sector company in the Greater Area of Jakarta, Indonesia. Instrument validity and reliability tests were conducted earlier in a pilot study on 61 participants.

### *Instruments*

Measurement of the instrument of moral emotions was adapted from *Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale* (GASP) which was constructed by Cohen et al. (2011). This instrument has an instruction, as follows “In this questionnaire you will read about situations that people are likely to encounter in day-to-day life, followed by common reactions to those situations. As you read each scenario, try to imagine yourself in that situation. Then indicate the likelihood that you would react in the way described” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 966). The original scale consists of 16 items, which are divided into four dimensions, namely (1) Guilt-NBE, e.g. “After realizing you have received too much change at a store, you decide to keep it because the salesclerk doesn’t notice. What is the likelihood that you would feel uncomfortable about keeping the money?”; (2) Guilt-REP, e.g. “You reveal a friend’s secret, though your friend never finds out. What is the likelihood that your failure to keep the secret would lead you to exert extra effort to keep secrets in the future?”; (3) Shame-NSE, e.g. “You successfully exaggerate your damages in a lawsuit. Months later, your lies are discovered and you are charged with perjury. What is the likelihood that you would think you are a despicable human being?”; and (4) Shame-WIT, e.g. “You take office supplies home for personal use and are caught by your boss. What is the likelihood that this would lead you to quit your job?”, “After making a big mistake on an important project at work in which people were depending on you, your boss criticizes you in front of your coworkers. What is the likelihood that you would feign sickness and leave work?”. In the adaptation process, the authors added 24 items, according to the

context of the work in a private company so that this scale has 40 items. Options for the response of this scale are ranging from “*Very Unlikely*” (score of 1) up to “*Very Likely*” (score of 7). The higher the total score shows the higher guilt and shame proneness. Validity and reliability test results showed that the items of Guilt-NBE are valid with the minimum corrected item-total correlation (CIT) of .614 and maximum of .898, and Cronbach’s Alpha=.943, with 10 final items that would be used in the field study. Items of Guilt-REP are valid with the minimum CIT of .301 and maximum of .838, and Cronbach’s Alpha=.908, with 11 final items that would be used in the field study. Items of Shame-NSE are valid with the minimum CIT of .514 and maximum of .827, and Cronbach’s Alpha=.925, with 9 final items that would be used in the field study. Items of Shame-WIT are valid with minimum CIT of .323 and maximum of 0.449, and Cronbach’s Alpha=.612, with 4 final items that would be used in the field study. Thus, the number of GASP scale items used in the study were 34 items; there are six items which were omitted during the item validation process.

Measurement instrument of work meaning was adapted from *Comprehensive Meaningful Work Scale* (CMWS) constructed by Lips-Wiersma and Wright (2012). This instrument consists of 28 items and has seven dimensions, namely (1) Developing the inner self, (2) Unity with others, (3) Service to others, (4) Expressing full potential, (5) Balancing tensions (self/other, being/doing), (6) Reality, and (7) Inspiration. Examples of items of Developing the inner self are “I don’t like who I am becoming at work” (unfavorable item, reversely scored), “At work, I feel divorced from myself” (unfavorable item, reversely scored). Examples of item of Unity with others are “I have a sense of belonging with my work peers”, “I can talk openly about my values when I and my work colleagues are making decisions”. Examples of items of Service to others are “I feel I truly help our customers/clients”, “I and my work peers contribute to products and services that enhance human well-being and/or the environment”. Examples of items of Expressing full potential are “I make a difference that matters to others”, “I experience a sense of achievement”. Examples of items of Balancing tensions (self/other, being/doing) are “At work, we have a good balance between focusing on getting things done and noticing how people are feeling”, “I have a good balance between the needs of others and my own needs”. Examples of items of *Reality* are “At work, I and my colleagues face up to reality”, “I and my work

peers recognize that life is messy and that is OK”. Examples of items of *Inspiration* are “The vision we collectively work towards inspires me”, “The work we are doing makes me feel hopeful about the future”. The response choices of the scale are from “*Strongly Disagree*” (score of 1) to “*Strongly Agree*” (score of 6). The higher the total score shows the more meaningful work that is internalized by the participants, while the lower total score indicates more meaningless work. Validity and reliability test results show that the items are valid with the minimum CIT of .273 and maximum of .693, and Cronbach’s Alpha=.872, with 21 final items that would be used in the field study.

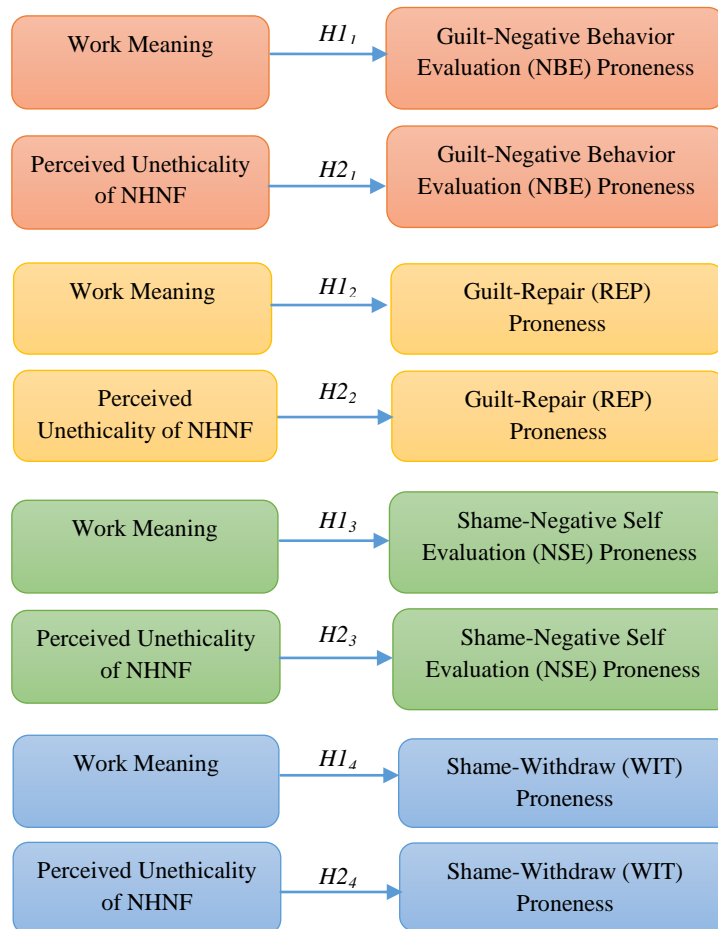


Figure 1. Hypothetical model

The scale measuring ethical/moral evaluation (perceived unethicity) of NHNF was adapted from Vitell and Muncy (*as cited in* Chowdhury & Fernando, 2014). This scale consists of five items, namely (1) 'Burning' a CD rather than buying it, (2) Returning merchandise after buying it and not liking it, (3) Recording a movie off the television, (4) Spending over an hour trying on clothing and not buying anything, and (5) Installing software on your computer without buying it. Choices of the response of this scale are from "Strongly Morally Acceptable" (score of 1) up to "Strongly Morally Wrong" (score of 6). The higher the total score indicates the unethicity of NHNF perceived by the participants. Validity and reliability test results show that the items are valid with the minimum CIT of 0.508 and maximum of 0.708, and Cronbach's Alpha=.824, with 5 final items that would be used in the field study (no items were omitted in the validation process).

#### *Procedure and design*

The authors distributed a questionnaire consisting of three psychological scales in Indonesian measuring the predictor and criterion variables. This is a quantitative, correlational-predictive design study, with data analysis techniques in the form of simple linear regression analysis which was performed eight times in accordance with a hypothetical model of predictor-criterion relationships as shown in Figure 1.

The predictors are work meaning and perceived unethicity of NHNF. The criterion variables are the four dimensions of moral emotion, namely Guilt-NBE, Guilt-REP, Shame-NSE, and Shame-WIT. Before the regression analyses were conducted, the instrument measurement was tested in advance with the criteria of (1) Reliability, with qualifications of reliable scale if the index of Cronbach's Alpha  $\geq .600$ ; (2) Item validity, with a qualification of valid item if the index of Corrected Item-Total Correlation (CIT)  $\geq 0.250$ .

#### **Results and discussion**

This presents study showed results as shown in Table 1. Work meaning is able to predict three out of the four moral emotions, namely Guilt-NBE, Guilt-REP, and Shame-NSE; entirely in positive directions. However, work meaning is not able to predict Shame-WIT. Thus,  $H1_1$ ,  $H1_2$ , and  $H1_3$  were supported by empirical data; while the  $H1_4$  was not supported by empirical

data. Perceptions on unethicality of NHNF was only able to predict one moral emotion dimension, namely Shame-WIT in a positive direction. The perceived unethicality was not able to predict three other moral emotions. Thus,  $H2_1$ ,  $H2_2$ , and  $H2_3$  were not supported by empirical data; while  $H2_4$  was supported by empirical data.

Table 1. Simple linear regressions predicting moral emotions proneness ( $n=210$ )

Prediction	$F(1, 209)$	$R^2$ (Effect size)	$B$	$SE B$	$\beta$	$p_\beta$
$H1_1$ : Work Meaning $\rightarrow$ Guilt-NBE	11.487 $p=.001^{**}$	5.2%	0.192	0.057	0.229	.001**
$H1_2$ : Work Meaning $\rightarrow$ Guilt-REP	5.093 $p=.025^*$	2.4%	0.151	0.067	0.155	.025*
$H1_3$ : Work Meaning $\rightarrow$ Shame-NSE	4.513 $p=.035^*$	2.1%	0.117	0.055	0.146	.035*
$H1_4$ : Work Meaning $\rightarrow$ Shame-WIT	1.477 $p=.226$					.226
$H2_1$ : NHNF $\rightarrow$ Guilt-NBE	2.717 $p=.101$					.101
$H2_2$ : NHNF $\rightarrow$ Guilt-REP	0.242 $p=.623$					.623
$H2_3$ : NHNF $\rightarrow$ Shame-NSE	0.429 $p=.513$					.513
$H2_4$ : NHNF $\rightarrow$ Shame-WIT	11.573 $p=.001^{**}$	5.3%			0.230	.001**

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; SE = standard error; NHNF = Perceived unethicality of no harm no foul behavior

This study provides an extension to studies on the effects of work meaning. Meaningful work does not only affect happiness (self-realization, self-fulfillment, and so on), as found in the previous studies (e.g. Michaelson, Pratt, Grant, & Dunn, 2014) but also on moral or virtuous life. A virtuous life is indeed known to be inseparable from happiness. Some even argued that happiness - especially the eudemonic one - is the effect (or side effect) of moral life (see, for example, Bloomfield, 2014; Prayoga, Rufaedah, & Abraham, 2016). So, this study gives a broader mechanism how happiness could be experienced through the meaning of work - that contributes to moral life (i.e. moral emotions). This study also deepens the previous discourses connecting life meaning with morality. For example, the following Wolf's (1997) statement indicated that the meaningful life is favored by human morality:

“To acknowledge and respect people’s attachment to what gives meaning to their lives is, rather, to acknowledge people’s interest in, or even need to see their lives

as bound up with something worthwhile, and though the sort of worth in question may not be identical with moral worth ..., neither is it in any way conceptually opposed to it. To the contrary, many of the most common sources of meaning in people's lives are highly commendable from a moral point of view, fostering, as they do, community, well-being, and virtue" (Wolf, 1997, p. 314).

Furthermore, Woolley (2014) explained that meaningfulness and morality are both covered in ethical consideration which contains principles that answer how one should live a life. Woolley (2014) took the example of the profession of lawyers who often act as a moral analyst on the basis of utility value (pragmatism), and dry of meaning, whereas (1) The social justice that is the ultimate goal of the lawyer needs very much a thorough meaning not just the meaning on legal issues, and (2) Meaningfulness will help the lawyers in conducting moral judgments and, otherwise, morality can also be the source of the meaning of life. For example, the meaning makes us more sensitive to norms because the norm itself contains the meaning; as Woolley (2014) put, "specific cases help us understand what norms mean, particularly where those norms have an inherently subjective component, like meaning ... the morality and meaning of ... professional life are *largely co-extensive*" (p. 17, 21).

Such discourses and similar connections between life meaning and morality are indeed speculative and operate more at the philosophical level. Not many have tested the propositions of Wolf (1997) and Woolley (2014) on the empirical-psychological level. This present study contributes in terms of filling the psychological theoretical gap in the field of work and morality, especially moral emotion.

This present study found that meaningful work is able to predict Guilt-NBE, Guilt-REP, and Shame-NSE in positive directions. In other words, the dimensions of meaningless work, i.e. undeveloped inner self, disunity with others, unservice to others, unexpressed full potential, imbalanced tensions (self vs. other, being vs. doing), negation to reality and inspiration, associated negatively with Guilt-NBE, Guilt-REP, and Shame-NSE.

In the context of Indonesian society which is known as a religious community, an explanation of the work meaning becomes central to be seen through the lens of the belief. Religious belief is assumed to be attached to the work meaning of Indonesian society. Regarding this, Singh (2012) ever discussed the work meaning in Sanatan Dharma-which is adjacent - though not synonymous - with Hinduism.

In the perspective of Sanatan Dharma, the concept of *Karma*, the linkage between cause and effect are instrumental in understanding the work. Each cause certainly has a balanced effect, and every effect would have a cause that moves it. Singh (2012) described, as follows:

“Action like knowledge is neutral. It is neither good nor bad by itself. It is the *intent* with which it is performed that determines its quality. For instance, if there is someone who is skillful in using knife and is driven by a killer’s instinct, he could use this knowledge and skill to kill someone. Driven by a surgeon’s instinct and skill, the same knowledge could be used for saving some life .... Performance of all actions-karma-with an absolute control on the mind and intellect and with utmost interest and skill as ordained in selflessness conveys the *true meaning* ... results in ... pursuit of *perfection*” (Singh, 2012, p. 29, 34).

The *intent* in the above example is equivalent to *giving meaning* to work. When meaning is revealed in action which is morally bad, then, as the retribution, moral perfection will be further and longer to achieve. In the context of this present study, it is embodied into shame (NSE) and guilt (NBE, REP) proneness which are increasingly eroded.

In the perspective of Christianity, “Men are workers by nature” (Sabdon, 2015, p. 157). Sabdon (2015, p. 159, 161, 163) further stated that there are three important propositions about the work, i.e. (1) A person who refuses to work means he/she does not accept him/herself as a human being with his/her greatness, namely as a person who fundamentally represents God that is an *Entity Who Works*, (2) Work has a complete meaning and value not only in the creation plan of the universe but also in God’s plan to save the world, and (3) Therefore, the work must be cleared of wrong motives that can corrupt the meaning, value and purpose of work.

In other words, meaningless work will have implications on the attitudes and behavior in working and in public life that would harm “the salvation project of the Lord”, which will be revealed in behavior that (1) do not love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength (deny the work meaning as worship to God), and (2) do not love the fellow human (e.g. customers, clients, colleagues) like you love yourself. In the context of this present study, this is embodied in shame (NSE) and guilt (NBE, REP), which do not develop when committing unethical behavior that impact others negatively, both individually and collectively.

In the perspective of Islam, Sharabi (2012) put forward a number of propositions about the work, as follows: (1) Man cannot have or enjoy anything except anything that they have fought or done, (2) Through hard work, sins could be absolved, (3) Work is a form of worship to God, therefore, the work must be done with the best efforts and properly, and (4) Work has a social meaning to the benefit of others.

It appears that the work meaning in Christianity and Islam have many similarities. Those who do not endure meaning-making of their work will experience a moral loss. If the explanations above are integrated with authenticity mechanism presented in the *Introduction*, it seems clear that those who undergo meaningless work will deny their nature, not only as workers (a human who is working) but also as a human being. As a consequence, he/she is getting away from (1) duties as *Khalifah to God on Earth* (Islam), *Image of God on Earth* or *Imago Dei* (Christian), and from (2) moral perfection (Hindu). The discrepancy between the morally 'ought' and 'own' self - because of the denial - can cause serious psychological dissonance and stress (Gill, 1999). Dissonance reduction can be done by developing cynicism as a defensive reaction, and this cynicism is positively correlated with unethical behavior and negatively correlated with citizenship behavior in work organization (Cartwright & Holmes, 2006). By using another psychological perspective, when someone gives less meaning to their work, eudaimonic well-being or positive evaluations of the self are damaged so that the general moral or evaluative dimensions of their life, such as autonomy, positive relations with others, and purpose in life, are damaged as well (Kitayama, Akutsu, Uchida, & Cole, 2016). The whole explanation networks are able to predict the low moral self-efficacy, ethical emotion, as well as shame and guilt proneness, based on meaningless work.

Shame-WIT cannot be predicted by work meaning. According to the items constructed in *Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale* (GASP) (Cohen et al., 2011), withdrawal could be expressed in positive actions (e.g. Employee who was caught stealing from the company decides to call it quits) when individuals remove themselves from situations that could bring about negative consequences if they, being thick-skinned or shameless, decided to remain still within the situation. Furthermore, it can also be expressed in negative actions when individual avoids or evades situations in which restoration can still be made, but instead the individual decides to leave all responsibilities (e.g. After



an employee makes a big mistake in a project and has been criticized by the boss, he/she decides to take a leave of absence and relinquished all responsibilities) (Cohen et. al., 2011). The two possible directions of Shame-WIT allegedly screwed the correlation direction, so that the relationship scores might diminish each other and generated an absence of correlation.

This present study found that perceived unethicity of NHNF is not able to predict three moral emotions (Guilt-NBE, Guilt-REP, Shame-NSE, Shame-WIT). This is probably because the study has not taken into account the philosophical perspective and cultural orientation of the participants, whereas they affect one's perception about the (un)ethicity of NHNF (Al-Khatib, Vitell, & Rawwas, 1997; Culiberg, 2015). Lower uncertainty avoidance, for example, is a cultural orientation that believes that most norms are negotiable and relativistic (Paul, Roy, & Mukhopadhyay, 2006). Meanwhile, Indonesia is well-known as a country with low uncertainty avoidance orientation (Hofstede Insights, 2017). Furthermore, Culiberg (2015) found that people who embrace moral relativism as a philosophical perspective think more critically by giving more tolerable votes to questionable behavior based on the assessment towards any situation that includes moral dilemma. For the relativist, there is no absolute moral principle which is applicable to every situation. In addition, differences in economic well-being among the participants are also potential moderator variable of the effects of NHNF unethicity perception (Al-Khatib et al., 1997). The economic situation, as well as philosophical and cultural view of morality, need to be integrated specifically in the research on the effects of NHNF unethicity perception on moral behavior.

However, the perceived unethicity of NHNF is able to predict Shame-WIT in a positive direction. Cohen et al. (2011) found that, in some cases, Shame-WIT negatively correlated with honesty-humility, and positively correlated with delinquency, aggression, anger, false promises, and misrepresentation of negative emotion. If this logic is followed, it should be that the more a person perceives NHNF as unethical, the lower the Shame-WIT. However, this present study found otherwise a positive correlation, as hypothesized ( $H2_4$ , see Figure 1) although the correlation is not found within  $H1_4$  (involving Shame-WIT) and  $H2_1 - H2_3$ . To explain the gap, the authors relied on some explanations. *First*, Makogon and Enikolopov (2013) stated that "Empirically it has been found that *people are more likely to react to*

transgressions with negative self-evaluations *than with withdrawal-action tendencies*". This means that the existence of Shame-WIT is not so prominent within the participants. *Second*, a number of studies (e.g. Abraham & Berline, 2015; Abraham & Gunawan, 2014) found that the dimension of Shame-WIT is the most problematic dimension in terms of its reliability and correlation with the predictor. *Third*, NHNF construct in its' pathway is much closely related to moral emotion (e.g. Shame-WIT) compared to the relationship between work meaning and moral emotion. Both NHNF and moral emotion proneness scales contain statements accompanied with concrete *behavioral descriptions*, compared with work meaning scale covering weightily items on deeper *theorizing* about the self-work relations. *Fourth*, it might be that, in the context of the relationship with NHNF, the semantic meaning of the positiveness of Shame-WIT is more salient in the participants' social cognition. As mentioned previously, Shame-WIT also has a positive connotation semantically, e.g. when the public expects and appreciates positively if its leader resigns after doing unethical things detrimental to the common good.

### Conclusions

This study concludes that work meaning is able to predict the proneness to 75% of moral emotions (Guilt-NBE, Guilt-REP, Shame-NSE, but not Shame-WIT) in positive directions. However, perceived unethicity of no harm no foul behavior is not able to predict them.

This study contributes as the first research, to the authors' best knowledge, which explicitly relates work meaning with corruptive tendencies represented by moral emotions. Work meaning which is lived everyday in the context of the job and the organization proved to have serious implications for developing one's morality in the workplace. Chronic or accumulative meaningless work can cause erosion of moral emotions proneness.

The implication of this present study is that interventions to enhance the meaning of work should be built at the personal, interpersonal, organizational, social, and, ultimately, cultural levels. Regarding this, Michaelson et al. (2014) proposed the following methods to intensify meaningful work: (1) establishing subjective identity (value, orientation, belief about work done) that is compatible with the sense of life purpose of the workers, (2) building work

situations (job natures, job engagement, group and structural activities) that support that kind of identity, (3) cultivating the need for transcendence, i.e. to relate individual and organizational goals to the larger objectives called for by the cosmos (e.g. by upholding the religious values related to work, and making social impact), (4) promoting democracy and social justice within the organization, (5) resisting alienation of the workers from their work by developing integrity on all fronts, from organizational leadership to employees. Those ways will constitute an authentic work environment that enriches the meaning of work in an organization. By those, it is expected that shame and guilt proneness would be higher and immoral behavior could be prevented. The organizational leaders are expected to give attention to the meaning of work of their people since the recruitment process. Building, maintaining, and enhancing the meaning of work are proved to be a sociopsychological way - strengthening existing effort such as technological improvement (e.g, Abraham & Sharron, 2015) - to prevent corruption and other unethical behaviors.

In addition, cultivating alternative meanings of “*development*” and “*progress*” by separating them from materialism and consumerism is an important cultural strategy to build meaningful work. This can be achieved by reinforcing four pillars (McDonald, 2004), namely (1) living culture - by not reducing our own culture to be merely funniness and entertainment, but embracing cultures representing “our collective sense of who we are”; Korten, *as cited in* McDonald, 2004, p. 74, (2) a sustainable environment - by promoting interconnectedness perspective that the continuous existence of biosphere is inversely related with materialism, (3) good governance - by saving public consciousness from harmful effects of ubiquitous commodification, and (4) a healthy economy - by not conforming to global imbalance trend. Indeed, Rotzoll (1992) reminded us that physical goods are also sites for meaning contestation, and Truesdale (2010) added that the meaning of materialism might not be the same among people. Therefore, it is important not to easily give up nor cursorily claim triumph over materialism and consumerism. Both surrender and boast of victory over them, in the context of this present study, are closely related with self-defeating and meaningless work. In improving a meaningful work, the necessary thing to remember and habituate is the principle that “Regular examination of our attitudes towards

persons and things and of our aspirations must have free rein” (Truesdale, 2010).

The limitation of this study lies on the participants who only come from private sector, not including public officials. A number of studies found that corruption in Indonesia is an institutionalized corruption in which bureaucratic culture, such as patronage culture, in public office plays a pivotal role (Amarullah & Maulana, 2017; Knowledge Sector Interview, 2017). Various related characteristics of the culture, e.g. “too hierarchical, slow, unprofessional ... paternalistic, swelling budgets, excessive procedures, ... lack of accountability and supervision, ... hegemonic political regime” (Amarullah & Maulana, 2017, p. 20, 21) increases the chances of corruptive and other unethical behaviors. Faced with such culture and social influences, emotion traits such as guilt and shame proneness may have lower efficacy in coping with the situations where there are strongly contagious and congregated unethical actions. Subsequent research is challenged to test the robustness of the relationship between work meaning and moral emotion proneness found in this study in the context of bureaucratic environment involving state official authority or governmental body.

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