

The Meaning of Work Experiences Among Coworking Space Employees: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis in Makassar City

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Abstract

The rapid expansion of coworking spaces has transformed contemporary work environments by promoting flexible work arrangements, collaborative cultures, and community-oriented operations. While previous studies have predominantly examined coworking spaces from the perspective of users, limited attention has been paid to the lived experiences of employees responsible for managing daily operations. This study aims to explore how employees construct and interpret the meaning of their work experiences within coworking spaces in Makassar City, Indonesia. A qualitative research design employing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was adopted to capture the subjective meanings embedded in employees' lived experiences. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with six employees representing various operational functions, including finance, administration, customer service, facility management, operations, and community management. The findings reveal three interrelated experiential dimensions: (1) everyday operational experiences characterized by role flexibility, multitasking, and service coordination; (2) the formation of professional identity through adaptive role expansion, emotional regulation, and continuous learning; and (3) the development of work meaningfulness and job satisfaction shaped by personal growth, social relationships, organizational support, and spiritual values. The study demonstrates that employees perceive coworking spaces not merely as workplaces but as environments that continuously shape their professional identity and interpretation of work. These findings contribute to the human resource management literature by extending the understanding of employee work experiences in flexible work environments and providing practical insights for developing sustainable human resource practices in the rapidly growing coworking industry.

INTRODUCTION

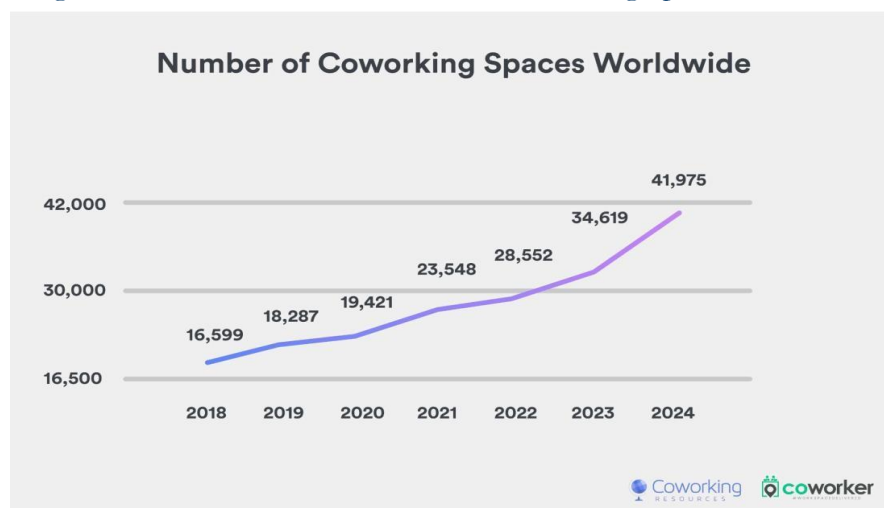
The post-pandemic era has fundamentally reshaped the nature of work, transforming not only where employees perform their jobs but also how organizations organize work and how individuals perceive their professional roles. Traditional work arrangements characterized by fixed office locations and standardized working hours have increasingly shifted toward flexible, technology-enabled, and hybrid work systems. This transformation has been accelerated by rapid digitalization, advances in communication technologies, increasing workforce mobility, and growing recognition of the importance of achieving work-life balance (Clifton et al., 2022). Consequently, remote and hybrid working models have become integral components of modern organizational practices, enabling employees to work effectively regardless of geographical constraints while fundamentally altering organizational structures and employment relationships.

The widespread adoption of flexible work arrangements has significantly increased the demand for work environments that facilitate productivity, collaboration, innovation, and professional networking. Although digital technologies allow employees to work remotely, many

professionals continue to require physical environments that provide social interaction, access to professional communities, and organizational support beyond the conventional office. Consequently, coworking spaces have emerged as an alternative workplace model that accommodates these evolving needs by integrating physical work infrastructure with collaborative and knowledge-sharing environments. Unlike traditional offices, coworking spaces bring together individuals from diverse occupational backgrounds—including entrepreneurs, freelancers, startup founders, remote employees, consultants, and creative professionals—within a shared workspace designed to encourage interaction, collaboration, and innovation.

The remarkable growth of the coworking industry demonstrates that flexible workplaces have evolved beyond a temporary response to the COVID-19 pandemic and have become an integral component of the contemporary work ecosystem. Industry reports estimate that the global coworking market reached approximately USD 21.84 billion and is projected to expand to more than USD 41.66 billion by 2030 (Kesari, 2025). Likewise, the number of coworking spaces worldwide has increased substantially, rising from approximately 16,599 locations in 2018 to more than 19,400 locations in 2020, with projections exceeding 41,000 locations in recent years (Risio, 2020). These trends indicate that coworking spaces are increasingly recognized as strategic infrastructure supporting digital transformation, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and knowledge-based economies rather than merely providing shared office facilities.

Figure 1.1. Growth in the Number of Coworking Spaces Worldwide



Source: *Global Coworking Growth Study* (Coworking Resources, 2020).

The rapid expansion of coworking spaces has also altered organizational practices and introduced new challenges in Human Resource Management (HRM). Unlike conventional organizations characterized by specialized job descriptions and hierarchical organizational structures, coworking spaces typically operate with relatively lean organizational systems. Employees therefore perform multiple responsibilities simultaneously, including administrative duties, customer service, facility management, community engagement, event coordination, marketing activities, and operational problem-solving. Rather than working within narrowly defined occupational boundaries, employees are expected to shift continuously between operational, managerial, technical, and interpersonal roles according to changing organizational needs. Such organizational flexibility enables coworking spaces to operate efficiently but simultaneously increases the complexity of employees' work experiences.

These changing organizational conditions reflect broader developments in Human Resource Management, where employees are increasingly required to demonstrate adaptability, resilience, communication competence, emotional regulation, and continuous learning rather than relying solely on technical expertise. Modern workplaces increasingly demand employees capable of

responding to dynamic customer expectations, collaborating with diverse stakeholders, managing multiple responsibilities simultaneously, and maintaining high-quality service performance under continuously changing circumstances. Such conditions have contributed to the emergence of boundaryless work, in which traditional distinctions between job roles become increasingly blurred. Consequently, issues such as role ambiguity, emotional labor, workload intensification, and professional adaptation have become prominent concerns within contemporary HRM research because they directly influence employee well-being, professional identity, and organizational sustainability.

From an organizational perspective, these developments highlight that human resources have become increasingly important strategic assets in sustaining coworking space operations. Employees are responsible not only for ensuring the efficient delivery of operational services but also for creating collaborative environments, facilitating community engagement, maintaining service quality, and supporting users' professional experiences. Their daily interactions with diverse users require continuous adaptation to varying customer expectations while simultaneously maintaining organizational performance and operational efficiency. Consequently, understanding employees' lived experiences has become increasingly important because their experiences directly influence service quality, organizational effectiveness, and the sustainability of coworking space businesses. This perspective positions employee work experience as a central issue in contemporary Human Resource Management rather than merely an operational concern.

The rapid development of coworking spaces has been particularly evident in emerging economies, including Indonesia, where the expansion of the digital economy, startup ecosystems, and entrepreneurial activities has accelerated the adoption of flexible workplaces. Initially established as community-based spaces serving technology enthusiasts and creative professionals, coworking spaces have gradually evolved into professional service organizations that provide integrated workplace solutions for entrepreneurs, freelancers, remote workers, small businesses, and corporate employees. This transformation reflects a broader shift from viewing coworking spaces merely as physical work environments toward recognizing them as organizations responsible for delivering professional services, facilitating knowledge exchange, fostering innovation, and sustaining collaborative business communities.

The Indonesian coworking industry has experienced substantial expansion during the past decade. According to the Indonesian Coworking Association, the number of coworking spaces increased dramatically from approximately 45 locations in 2016 to around 150 locations in 2017, reaching nearly 200 locations in 2018. Such rapid growth reflects the increasing acceptance of flexible workspace concepts throughout Indonesia while simultaneously indicating greater organizational complexity within coworking operations. As organizations expand, they require employees capable of managing increasingly diverse operational responsibilities, maintaining service quality, and responding effectively to continuously evolving customer expectations. Consequently, effective Human Resource Management has become a critical determinant of organizational sustainability within Indonesia's coworking industry.

Among Indonesia's rapidly developing urban centers, Makassar represents a particularly relevant context for investigating employee experiences within coworking spaces. As the principal economic gateway and commercial hub of Eastern Indonesia, Makassar has experienced sustained economic growth accompanied by increasing investment in service industries and creative economic activities. Official statistics reported that the city's economy expanded by 5.39% year-on-year during the third quarter of 2025, while the tertiary sector—the economic sector most closely associated with business services—recorded growth exceeding 5.5%. Furthermore, the continued increase in Gross Fixed Capital Formation reflects expanding investment in business infrastructure and service-oriented industries. These developments have created favorable conditions for the establishment and expansion of coworking spaces designed to support entrepreneurial activities, collaborative work, and flexible employment arrangements.

Despite these positive developments, the organizational environment of coworking spaces in Makassar differs considerably from that of larger metropolitan cities such as Jakarta, Bandung, or Surabaya. Compared with more mature coworking ecosystems, Makassar continues to experience the gradual development of entrepreneurial communities, creative industries, and collaborative business networks. Consequently, coworking space employees operate within organizations that must continuously adapt to changing market conditions, evolving user expectations, and limited organizational resources. These contextual characteristics make Makassar an important setting for examining employees' lived experiences because organizational flexibility, role expansion, and interpersonal collaboration become essential components of daily operational activities.

From a Human Resource Management perspective, the increasingly dynamic nature of coworking space operations presents significant challenges for employees. Unlike conventional organizations, where job responsibilities are relatively specialized and clearly defined, employees in coworking spaces frequently perform multiple roles simultaneously. Administrative personnel may also provide customer service, financial officers may assist operational activities, facility managers may coordinate community events, and operational staff may become involved in marketing, communication, or problem-solving activities whenever organizational needs arise. Consequently, employees regularly experience role expansion that requires continuous adaptation, rapid decision-making, interpersonal competence, and emotional regulation. These conditions reflect the growing prevalence of flexible and boundaryless work arrangements within contemporary organizations.

Such organizational characteristics suggest that the quality of coworking space services depends not only on physical facilities or technological infrastructure but also on employees' ability to integrate multiple competencies while maintaining positive interactions with diverse users. Employees must simultaneously ensure operational efficiency, provide high-quality customer service, facilitate collaboration among community members, coordinate organizational activities, and resolve operational problems within highly dynamic environments. Their experiences therefore extend beyond technical job performance to encompass psychological adaptation, professional development, and continuous meaning-making regarding their work. These unique characteristics distinguish coworking space employees from employees in many conventional organizational settings and underscore the importance of investigating their lived experiences from a Human Resource Management perspective.

Previous Human Resource Management (HRM) studies have extensively investigated workplace dynamics associated with role ambiguity, emotional labor, professional identity, and work-related well-being. These studies consistently demonstrate that increasingly complex job demands influence employees' psychological outcomes, organizational commitment, and work engagement. For example, Oshio et al. (2021) reported that role ambiguity amplifies the negative effects of workplace stressors on employees' psychological well-being, emphasizing the importance of clearly defined organizational roles and responsibilities. Similarly, Wang et al. (2025) argued that emotional labor has traditionally been viewed as a source of burnout, emotional exhaustion, and job dissatisfaction among service employees. However, their findings also suggest that professional efficacy enables employees to transform emotionally demanding experiences into meaningful work experiences. Furthermore, Zhang et al. (2025) and Carvalho et al. (2025) demonstrated that professional identity functions as an important psychological resource, enabling employees to regulate emotional demands while strengthening work engagement and resilience. Collectively, these studies indicate that employees' professional experiences are shaped not only by organizational structures but also by the ways individuals interpret and respond to workplace challenges.

Parallel to the HRM literature, research on coworking spaces has primarily focused on understanding the benefits experienced by users rather than employees. Existing studies have consistently shown that coworking environments encourage social interaction, knowledge sharing,

collaboration, innovation, employee well-being, and productivity (George et al., 2022; Lukeš et al., 2026). Lima et al. (2024) found that the social networks developed within coworking spaces contribute primarily to organizational learning and knowledge exchange rather than directly improving financial performance. Likewise, Tjahjawati et al. (2024) demonstrated that workplace ambience and service quality significantly influence customer satisfaction, while Bouncken et al. (2021) emphasized that spatial design and sociomaterial interactions shape collaborative work practices within coworking environments. These findings have substantially advanced the understanding of coworking spaces as collaborative organizational ecosystems that facilitate innovation and community building.

Despite these valuable contributions, existing coworking research remains predominantly user-oriented. Most studies investigate users' perceptions of workplace flexibility, collaborative environments, entrepreneurial ecosystems, and service quality, whereas considerably less attention has been devoted to employees responsible for sustaining daily organizational operations. This omission is noteworthy because employees constitute the primary organizational actors responsible for delivering services, maintaining operational continuity, facilitating community engagement, and ensuring customer satisfaction. Their experiences therefore provide important insights into how flexible organizations operate beyond the perspectives of users alone.

Another limitation of previous studies concerns their dominant reliance on positivist approaches that examine relationships among predefined variables. Research has frequently conceptualized role ambiguity, emotional labor, professional identity, and work engagement as measurable constructs linked through causal relationships. Although these studies have contributed significantly to theory development, they provide limited understanding of how employees themselves experience, interpret, and construct meaning from these workplace realities. Consequently, important aspects of employees' lived experiences—including their interpretations of role flexibility, emotional challenges, professional identity formation, and subjective perceptions of meaningful work—remain insufficiently explored.

This limitation represents a significant research gap because the organizational context of coworking spaces differs fundamentally from that of conventional organizations. Employees work within relatively lean organizational structures characterized by blurred job boundaries, continuous interaction with diverse stakeholders, and rapidly changing operational demands. Such conditions require employees to adapt constantly, regulate emotions effectively, and negotiate multiple professional roles while maintaining service quality and organizational performance. Understanding these experiences therefore requires an interpretive perspective capable of capturing employees' subjective realities rather than merely identifying statistical relationships among variables.

Accordingly, the present study adopts **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)** to investigate how employees construct meaning from their work experiences within coworking spaces. Unlike conventional qualitative approaches that primarily categorize experiences into thematic patterns, IPA seeks to understand how individuals interpret significant life experiences through a process of reflection and meaning-making. This approach is particularly appropriate because it acknowledges that employees' experiences are socially constructed, context-dependent, and deeply influenced by their personal interpretations of organizational life. By emphasizing lived experience rather than objective measurement, IPA enables a richer understanding of the psychological, social, and professional dimensions of work within flexible organizational environments.

METHODS

2.1 Research Approach

This study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a qualitative research approach that focuses on gaining an in-depth understanding of individuals' subjective experiences and the ways in which they construct meaning from those experiences (Smith et al., 2009). IPA

emphasizes the interpretation of participants' lived experiences and the meanings they attribute to their life situations. Accordingly, this approach is considered highly appropriate for exploring the work experiences of employees in coworking spaces.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis positions participants' lived experiences at the center of the analytical process, based on the assumption that experiences are never encountered in a neutral manner but are always interpreted by those who experience them. This interpretative process enables researchers to understand how individuals construct meaning from their workplace realities, including the ways in which social interactions and work environments shape their perceptions of work. Within this study, working in a coworking space is understood as a dynamic reality characterized by continuous interactions among the physical workspace, the fluid social environment of the community, and the managerial staff who must navigate daily work demands within an organizational ecosystem that operates without rigid bureaucratic boundaries.

The adoption of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis further emphasizes the researcher's role as a reflective interpreter of the meanings expressed by participants. The analysis extends beyond merely describing everyday events and instead seeks to understand the meaning-making processes through which employees interpret their work experiences. Through this approach, the study is expected to capture the subjective nuances of the work experiences of coworking space management staff comprehensively while revealing how these experiences are understood purely from the participants' own perspectives, free from preconceived assumptions imposed by the researcher.

A qualitative approach based on Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis is considered the most appropriate methodology for investigating the depth of individual experience because it enables researchers to understand how employees actively interpret the realities of their working lives. This approach provides opportunities to capture subjective experiences holistically, including how coworking spaces are perceived as environments that shape employees' everyday work experiences. Accordingly, the primary focus of this study is directed toward the authentic experiences of coworking space management staff and the processes through which they construct meaning from those experiences. These experiences are subsequently explored systematically through the stages of qualitative data analysis.

1. Qualitative Research

Qualitative research is a research approach that seeks to achieve an in-depth understanding of phenomena by exploring the meanings, processes, and social contexts in which they occur. Strauss and Corbin (1997, as cited in Sujarweni, 2023) argue that qualitative research produces findings that cannot be obtained through statistical procedures or quantitative measurement techniques. Instead, this approach emphasizes understanding complex and context-dependent social realities.

In general, qualitative research is widely applied to studies concerning social life, historical phenomena, individual and group behavior, organizational dynamics, and various other forms of social activity. This approach enables researchers to investigate phenomena holistically without reducing them to numerical data or measurable variables. Bogdan and Taylor (1992, as cited in Sujarweni, 2023) define qualitative research as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words, as well as observable human behavior. The resulting data are then analyzed to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences, actions, and social interactions.

Qualitative research is expected to provide comprehensive descriptions of the speech, written expressions, and behaviors of individuals, groups, communities, or organizations within specific social contexts. The analysis is conducted from a holistic perspective so that the reality under investigation can be understood in accordance with the meanings constructed by the research participants themselves. In this study, a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design is employed because the research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the work

experiences of employees in coworking spaces. This qualitative approach enables the researcher to examine social phenomena through the interpretation of naturally occurring individual experiences without manipulating research variables (Creswell, 2014, as cited in Purwanza et al., 2022).

The use of a qualitative approach enables the researcher to present detailed descriptions and explanations in the form of rich textual narratives based on the direct experiences of coworking space employees. The primary focus of this study is to understand how management staff construct meaning from their work experiences and how these experiences are lived and interpreted within their everyday professional routines.

The phenomenon examined in this study encompasses employees' work experiences within coworking spaces, including their interactions with the physical workspace, the social dynamics of the coworking community, and the broader organizational ecosystem in which they operate. Particular attention is given to understanding how management staff interpret the realities of their daily work, as well as the operational challenges and work demands they encounter while performing their responsibilities within coworking space facilities.

Accordingly, the qualitative approach adopted in this study seeks to answer the research question through the exploration, interpretation, and analysis of the empirical experiences of coworking space employees. It is expected to generate a comprehensive understanding of how employees construct meaning from their work experiences, particularly within the coworking space ecosystem in Makassar City.

2. Research Informants

In qualitative research, informants are selected using a purposive sampling technique, whereby participants are chosen based on their suitability to the objectives of the study. Informants are selected because they possess direct experience, active involvement, and sufficient work intensity within coworking spaces, enabling them to provide rich and meaningful insights into their work experiences. The informants in this study consist of individuals employed as employees or management staff who are actively responsible for the daily operations of coworking spaces in Makassar City. The selection of management staff is based on their direct involvement in service delivery, social interactions, and the day-to-day management of coworking space facilities. Their lived experiences are considered the most relevant source of information for developing a comprehensive understanding of how employees construct meaning from their work experiences within this organizational setting.

The inclusion criteria for the informants are as follows:

1. Individuals employed as staff responsible for managing coworking spaces in Makassar City.
2. Employees who are routinely and directly involved in the daily operational activities of coworking spaces.
3. Employees with sufficient work experience to enable meaningful reflection on and interpretation of their work experiences.

Unlike quantitative research, qualitative research does not determine the number of participants using statistical formulas. Instead, participant recruitment is guided by the principle of data saturation, whereby interviews continue until no substantially new information or themes emerge and the data become repetitive. With regard to participant selection, this study strictly follows the methodological principles of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). IPA prioritizes the depth of idiographic analysis rather than the breadth or generalizability of findings (Smith et al., 2009). Consequently, the number of participants is intentionally limited to a small and relatively homogeneous group who share direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. Methodologically, this study involves three to six active coworking space management staff as participants. This number is considered optimal because it allows the researcher to conduct an exceptionally detailed and in-depth analysis of each participant's narrative

while preserving the uniqueness of individual meaning-making processes. Although IPA generally recommends a small sample size, the final number of participants is not predetermined rigidly. Instead, participant recruitment continues until information sufficiency is achieved—that is, when additional interviews no longer generate new insights or themes (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022; Wutich et al., 2024). Within this study, informants are regarded not as research objects but as active subjects who possess unique experiences and personal meanings related to the phenomenon under investigation. A dialogical relationship is established between the researcher and the participants to facilitate an in-depth understanding of employees' work experiences in coworking spaces. The collected data are subsequently analyzed interpretatively to identify patterns, themes, and meanings that characterize the participants' lived experiences.

Table 3.1. Profile of Research Informants

No.	Informant	Characteristics	Number	Code
1	Coworking Space Employees	Management staff working in coworking spaces in Makassar City who possess comprehensive knowledge of the concept, policies, and daily operations of shared workspaces	6	INF1–INF6
Total			6 Informants	

As presented in Table 3.1, the informants consist of employees who serve as the primary participants in this study. The final number of informants is determined based on the principle of data saturation, whereby data collection is concluded once no new themes emerge from subsequent interviews.

2.2 . Research Location and Time

This study was conducted in coworking spaces located in Makassar City, Indonesia. The research site was selected because its work ecosystem is characterized by dynamic interpersonal interactions and intensive day-to-day operational activities. Coworking spaces in Makassar possess distinctive spatial characteristics, operational facilities, and community service demands that are highly relevant to the primary objective of this study—namely, to explore the meaning of employees' work experiences from the perspectives of management staff themselves.

The selected research setting represents a work environment characterized by high levels of social interaction and relatively flexible organizational structures. These characteristics provide an appropriate context for investigating the lived experiences of coworking space management staff in depth. Furthermore, the research site offers rich empirical data that support the study's objective of understanding how employees experience, navigate, and construct meaning from their professional lives within coworking spaces in Makassar City.

The study was conducted from May to July 2026. This period encompassed all stages of the research process, including research preparation, field data collection through in-depth interviews and observations, documentation, data verification, and further exploration of emerging findings. Data collection was carried out progressively while considering field conditions and participants' availability. The process concluded once sufficient information had been obtained to answer the research questions and no substantially new insights emerged from additional data collection.

2.3. Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected using several techniques commonly employed in qualitative research to obtain a comprehensive understanding of employees' work experiences within coworking spaces. The primary data collection methods consisted of in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, each of which was selected because of its suitability for capturing the phenomenon

under investigation. By integrating multiple methods, this study sought to develop a rich and holistic understanding of participants' lived experiences.

1. In-Depth Interviews

The principal method of data collection was semi-structured in-depth interviews, which enabled the researcher to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations through focused yet flexible dialogue. This interview format ensured that the discussion remained aligned with the research objectives while simultaneously allowing participants to express their experiences openly and comprehensively (Chand, 2025). The semi-structured approach provided opportunities to probe emerging issues, clarify participants' responses, and gain deeper insights into the meanings they attached to their lived experiences. Consequently, this method facilitated a comprehensive exploration of employees' work experiences and the meaning-making processes through which they interpreted the realities of working in coworking spaces.

2. Observation

Observation was employed to examine the actual day-to-day operational activities within coworking spaces in Makassar City. The observational process focused on three principal aspects: the physical work environment, service delivery dynamics, and the social interactions and daily work routines of management staff. These observations provided contextual information that complemented and verified the interview findings by allowing the researcher to directly witness workplace situations, employees' daily responsibilities, and the ways in which staff responded to operational challenges encountered in their working environment.

3. Documentation

Documentation served as an additional source of empirical evidence to support and strengthen the findings obtained through interviews and observations. The documentary materials included photographs, internal coworking space documents, organizational records, and other relevant written materials associated with the operational activities of the coworking spaces. The integration of documentation with interviews and observations constituted a triangulation strategy, thereby reducing dependence on a single source of evidence and enhancing the credibility and richness of the research findings.

Data collection was conducted iteratively until data saturation was achieved—that is, when newly collected information became repetitive and no substantially new insights or themes emerged (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Within contemporary qualitative research, data saturation is understood as the stage at which thematic patterns have become sufficiently consistent and additional data no longer contribute meaningful new information.

This approach underscores the principle that the quality and richness of data are more important than the number of participants. Data saturation was attained through the systematic and reflective application of in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, allowing the researcher to analyze employees' work experiences from multiple perspectives and to develop a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

2.4. Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted systematically to examine the qualitative data collected through in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. The primary objective of the analysis was to identify patterns, themes, and meanings emerging from the empirical experiences of employees working in coworking spaces in Makassar City, thereby providing a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. This study employed IPA-based thematic meaning analysis, a thematic analytical process grounded in the tradition of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The analytical procedure involved several stages, including repeated reading of interview transcripts, annotation of significant statements, identification of

preliminary themes, and interpretation of the meanings embedded within participants' narratives. Rather than merely categorizing responses, the analysis sought to understand how participants interpreted and constructed meaning from their lived work experiences.

The analysis was conducted in a reflective and iterative manner to capture the depth and complexity of employees' work experiences. This process enabled the researcher to gain a holistic understanding of how participants experienced, interpreted, and attributed meaning to the operational realities of working in coworking spaces (Smith et al., 2009).

Following Smith et al. (2009), the data analysis consisted of the following six stages:

1. Reading and Re-reading

The first stage aimed to establish the researcher's familiarity with the data. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to develop a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences. The objective was not merely to comprehend the content of the narratives but also to capture the emotional nuances, emphases, and flow of the experiences described by the participants. During this stage, the researcher sought to immerse themselves in the participants' experiential world while deliberately avoiding premature interpretation.

2. Initial Noting

After becoming familiar with the data, the researcher conducted detailed initial notes on the interview transcripts. These notes focused on three interrelated dimensions:

- Descriptive comments, concerning what participants experienced;
- Linguistic comments, concerning how participants expressed their experiences; and
- Conceptual comments, concerning the preliminary meanings underlying participants' narratives.

This stage was exploratory and interpretative, allowing the researcher to identify significant details and potential meanings embedded within each participant's account.

3. Developing Emergent Themes

The initial notes were subsequently examined to formulate emergent themes. These themes represented the essential meanings embedded within participants' lived experiences and were inherently interpretative, reflecting a dialogue between the participants' narratives and the researcher's analytical reflections. Rather than simply summarizing the data, the emergent themes captured how participants themselves made sense of their experiences in the coworking space environment.

4. Searching for Connections Across Emergent Themes

The emergent themes were then organized and clustered according to conceptual relationships and shared meanings. At this stage, the researcher explored patterns, similarities, and interconnections among themes to develop a coherent thematic structure. This analytical process resulted in the identification of overarching themes and related subthemes that systematically represented the dynamics of participants' work experiences.

5. Moving to the Next Case

Once an individual participant's data had been analyzed comprehensively, the researcher proceeded to analyze the next participant's narrative. Each case was treated independently, with the researcher consciously bracketing insights derived from previous analyses to avoid influencing the interpretation of subsequent cases. This stage reflects IPA's commitment to an idiographic approach, emphasizing the uniqueness and richness of each individual's lived experience before considering cross-case patterns.

6. Looking for Patterns Across Cases

The final stage involved identifying patterns of similarity and difference across all participant cases. Themes generated from individual participants were compared to uncover shared structures of meaning while preserving the distinctive characteristics of each participant's lived experience. Through this process, the researcher developed an integrated understanding of the phenomenon without overlooking the uniqueness of individual perspectives. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was selected because it enables researchers to gain a profound understanding of how employees construct meaning from their work experiences within coworking spaces. IPA positions lived experience and meaning-making as the central focus of analysis. Consequently, the objective of this study is not to examine causal relationships among variables but rather to interpret how employees experience, understand, and assign meaning to their work. Through its emphasis on the double hermeneutic process, IPA allows the researcher to interpret participants' interpretations of their own experiences, thereby providing a rich and nuanced understanding of employees' work experiences within the coworking space environment.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Findings and Interpretation

The interpretative analysis of interviews with six employees working in coworking spaces in Makassar City generated **three superordinate themes** that collectively describe how participants experienced and constructed meaning from their work. These themes emerged through the iterative analytical procedures of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), reflecting both the shared and unique dimensions of participants' lived experiences. Rather than representing isolated categories, the themes illustrate an interconnected process through which employees negotiate operational responsibilities, develop professional identities, and construct the meaning of work within flexible organizational environments. The three superordinate themes are:

1. Experiencing Flexible Operational Roles
2. Negotiating Professional Identity Through Everyday Work
3. Constructing Meaning and Job Satisfaction

1. Theme 1. Experiencing Flexible Operational Roles

The first theme reveals that employees perceive their daily work as extending far beyond formal job descriptions. Participants consistently described coworking spaces as organizations characterized by fluid work boundaries, where operational continuity depends on employees' willingness to perform multiple responsibilities simultaneously. Rather than perceiving these additional responsibilities as exceptional, participants regarded them as an inherent feature of coworking space operations. Employees responsible for finance frequently assisted customer services, while administrative staff simultaneously handled front-office services, digital communication, payment processing, and social media management. Operational personnel were likewise involved in facility maintenance, event preparation, and customer assistance whenever organizational needs required additional support. One participant explained:

"There is no such thing as 'this is not my job.' Whenever the space becomes busy, everyone helps wherever assistance is needed." (INF2)

This finding suggests that role flexibility has become institutionalized as an organizational norm rather than merely an emergency response. The absence of rigid role boundaries enables organizations to respond rapidly to fluctuating customer demands and community activities. However, participants also acknowledged that such flexibility substantially increased workload during seminars, community events, and periods of high occupancy. Consequently, flexibility was experienced simultaneously as an organizational strength and a potential source of operational pressure.

These findings support previous studies indicating that coworking spaces operate through highly adaptive organizational structures where employees continuously coordinate multiple operational activities (Bouncken et al., 2021). Unlike conventional organizations characterized by clearly defined job boundaries, coworking spaces require employees to maintain organizational effectiveness through functional flexibility.

2. Theme 2. Negotiating Professional Identity Through Everyday Work

Beyond operational flexibility, participants described an ongoing process of constructing professional identity through everyday workplace experiences. Professional identity was not primarily derived from formal organizational positions but gradually developed through repeated engagement with customers, colleagues, and operational challenges. Participants emphasized that learning to communicate effectively, solve unexpected problems, regulate emotions, and coordinate diverse activities gradually transformed how they perceived themselves as professionals. As one participant noted:

"At first I only saw myself as an administrative employee, but over time I realized that I had become someone responsible for ensuring the whole workplace operates smoothly." (INF4)

The analysis indicates that professional identity emerged through continuous adaptation rather than organizational designation. Employees interpreted challenging situations—including customer complaints, unexpected operational disruptions, and multiple simultaneous responsibilities—as opportunities for personal and professional growth. Nevertheless, this adaptive process also generated ambiguity regarding role expectations. Several participants reported uncertainty concerning job responsibilities, particularly when additional duties were assigned without corresponding organizational recognition or formal clarification. These findings resonate with previous research demonstrating that professional identity develops through workplace experiences rather than occupational titles alone (Carvalho et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). Within coworking spaces, identity formation appears closely associated with employees' capacity to manage uncertainty, emotional demands, and continuous organizational adaptation.

3. Theme 3. Constructing Meaning and Job Satisfaction

The final theme demonstrates that participants attached multiple meanings to their work, extending beyond financial compensation. Employees interpreted their work as opportunities for personal development, social contribution, professional learning, and, for several participants, spiritual fulfillment. Many participants emphasized that interacting with diverse users enhanced communication skills, emotional maturity, and self-confidence. Others perceived workplace challenges as valuable life experiences that strengthened patience, responsibility, and resilience. One participant stated:

"Working here has taught me patience. I have become better at communicating with different kinds of people, and I believe that experience is more valuable than money." (INF5)

Job satisfaction was likewise understood as a multidimensional experience. Participants associated satisfaction not only with salary but also with supportive colleagues, healthy organizational culture, opportunities for learning, and managerial appreciation. Conversely, insufficient recognition, excessive workload, unclear overtime policies, and limited career development opportunities reduced satisfaction despite positive interpersonal relationships. Interestingly, several participants incorporated spiritual values into their interpretations of work. Honesty, gratitude, responsibility, and sincerity were repeatedly described as fundamental principles shaping employees' professional experiences. These findings suggest that the meaning of work within coworking spaces encompasses psychological, social, professional, and spiritual dimensions simultaneously.

Consistent with George et al. (2022) and Lukeš et al. (2026), the findings indicate that coworking spaces create environments supporting collaboration and well-being. However, the present study extends previous literature by demonstrating that these positive outcomes are substantially mediated by employees' lived experiences in managing daily organizational operations.

4. Cross-Theme Interpretation

Across all three themes, a coherent experiential pattern emerged. Employees perceived operational flexibility as both a source of professional development and a potential contributor to work strain. Their professional identities evolved through continuous adaptation to dynamic organizational demands, while the meaning they attributed to work was shaped by the interaction between organizational support, interpersonal relationships, opportunities for learning, and personal values. Taken together, these findings suggest that employees' experiences within coworking spaces are characterized by an ongoing negotiation between organizational flexibility and personal meaning-making. Rather than interpreting flexibility solely as either an organizational advantage or a workplace challenge, participants constructed nuanced understandings in which operational demands, identity development, and job satisfaction continuously influenced one another. This interpretative process illustrates the phenomenological complexity of work within coworking spaces and provides empirical support for understanding flexible work environments from an employee-centered perspective.

DISCUSSION

The present study explored the lived experiences of employees working in coworking spaces in Makassar City using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The findings demonstrate that employees' experiences are characterized by three interconnected dimensions: flexible operational roles, professional identity formation, and the construction of work meaning and job satisfaction. Rather than representing independent phenomena, these dimensions collectively illustrate how employees continuously negotiate organizational expectations, interpersonal relationships, and personal values within highly flexible work environments.

1. Flexible Work Roles as a Defining Characteristic of Coworking Spaces

One of the most prominent findings is that employees consistently experienced role flexibility as an inherent characteristic of coworking space operations. Unlike conventional organizations where job responsibilities are relatively standardized, participants described their work as involving continuous transitions between administrative, customer service, operational, technical, and community-management responsibilities. This finding supports previous research suggesting that coworking spaces operate through fluid organizational structures that encourage adaptability and multifunctional work practices (Bouncken et al., 2021). However, the present study extends this literature by demonstrating that role flexibility is not merely an organizational strategy but also constitutes employees' everyday lived reality. Participants perceived flexible roles as a necessary condition for maintaining operational continuity, particularly during periods of increased customer activity or community events. Nevertheless, excessive flexibility also generated uncertainty regarding task boundaries and workload distribution. Similar observations have been reported by Oshio et al. (2021), who argued that unclear role expectations increase psychological strain and may reduce employees' well-being. The present findings indicate that flexible role arrangements become beneficial only when supported by effective communication, clear managerial coordination, and equitable workload allocation.

2. Professional Identity Emerges Through Workplace Experience

Another important finding concerns the dynamic formation of professional identity. Participants did not define themselves primarily through formal job titles but rather through accumulated workplace experiences. Repeated exposure to customer interactions, operational challenges, and problem-solving situations gradually reshaped how employees understood themselves as professionals. From an IPA perspective, this finding illustrates that professional identity is continuously reconstructed through lived experience rather than predetermined organizational structures. Employees interpreted difficult situations—including customer complaints, multitasking, and unexpected operational disruptions—not only as occupational demands but also as opportunities for personal and professional development. These findings corroborate previous studies demonstrating that professional identity functions as an important psychological resource enabling employees to cope with workplace challenges (Carvalho et al., 2025; Zhang et al., 2025). However, the present study further suggests that identity formation within coworking spaces is particularly influenced by organizational flexibility, where employees repeatedly cross functional boundaries and engage in diverse forms of interpersonal interaction. Consequently, professional identity should be understood as an evolving process shaped by continuous adaptation rather than static occupational status.

3. Meaning of Work Extends Beyond Economic Rewards

The findings further reveal that participants attached multiple meanings to their work beyond financial compensation. Employees interpreted work as a source of learning, self-development, interpersonal connection, community contribution, and spiritual fulfillment. These interpretations emerged from participants' reflections on their everyday experiences rather than from organizational policies alone. This multidimensional understanding of work aligns with Wang et al. (2025), who emphasized that emotional demands may contribute to meaningful work when employees perceive themselves as professionally effective. Similarly, participants in this study frequently described customer interactions and workplace challenges as opportunities to strengthen patience, communication skills, emotional maturity, and professional competence. Interestingly, several participants explicitly connected work with Islamic values such as amanah (trustworthiness), gratitude, sincerity, honesty, and responsibility. These findings suggest that the meaning of work within Indonesian coworking spaces is constructed through the interaction of organizational experiences and broader cultural and religious values. Such an interpretation extends existing coworking literature, which has predominantly emphasized collaboration and innovation while paying relatively limited attention to the role of spirituality in employees' work experiences.

4. Job Satisfaction as a Holistic Experience

Another notable finding concerns the multidimensional nature of job satisfaction. Participants consistently emphasized that satisfaction was influenced not only by salary but also by organizational appreciation, supportive colleagues, opportunities for learning, positive workplace relationships, and fair managerial practices. These findings support the proposition that job satisfaction represents a holistic psychological evaluation rather than a purely economic outcome. While adequate financial compensation remains important, participants regarded recognition, interpersonal trust, and opportunities for personal growth as equally significant contributors to workplace satisfaction. Conversely, insufficient organizational support, excessive workload, unclear overtime policies, and limited appreciation reduced employees' motivation despite otherwise positive interpersonal relationships. These findings reinforce previous research highlighting that organizational support plays a crucial role in maintaining employee well-being within service-oriented workplaces (George et al., 2022).

5. Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to the literature in several important ways. First, it extends Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) research within human resource management by demonstrating how employees construct meaning from their work experiences in flexible organizational settings. Second, the findings contribute to coworking space literature by shifting analytical attention from users' experiences toward the lived experiences of employees responsible for maintaining daily organizational operations. Previous studies have predominantly examined coworking spaces from the perspectives of entrepreneurs, freelancers, and users, whereas empirical evidence concerning operational employees has remained limited. Third, this study proposes that professional identity functions as a dynamic interpretative process linking role flexibility with work meaningfulness. Rather than representing independent constructs, these experiences interact continuously throughout employees' daily organizational activities.

6. Practical Implications

The findings also provide several practical implications for coworking space managers. Organizations should establish clearer role expectations while preserving the operational flexibility necessary for coworking environments. Regular communication, transparent workload allocation, and structured job descriptions may reduce role ambiguity without limiting organizational adaptability. Furthermore, employee development programs should emphasize communication skills, emotional regulation, conflict management, and adaptive problem-solving alongside technical competencies. Since employees' professional identities develop through workplace experiences, organizations should also strengthen recognition systems, mentoring practices, and career development opportunities to enhance job satisfaction and employee retention. Overall, creating supportive organizational cultures that balance flexibility with adequate managerial support will enable coworking spaces to maintain service quality while promoting employees' psychological well-being and professional growth.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how employees working in coworking spaces in Makassar City construct meaning from their work experiences through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The findings indicate that employees' work experiences are not solely shaped by the execution of formal job responsibilities but emerge through continuous engagement in daily operational activities, customer service, facility management, event coordination, and adaptation to fluctuating work demands. Consequently, work within coworking spaces is experienced as inherently flexible, dynamic, and adaptive, requiring employees to respond effectively to rapidly changing organizational and service environments. The findings further demonstrate that professional roles in coworking spaces are characterized by fluid boundaries rather than rigid functional divisions. Employees construct their professional identities not primarily through formal organizational positions but through everyday workplace practices, including assisting customers, resolving operational problems, maintaining workplace facilities, coordinating collaborative activities, and performing responsibilities beyond their official job descriptions.

Professional identity therefore develops as an experiential and evolving process grounded in employees' direct engagement with organizational realities. The study also reveals that employees attach diverse meanings to their work. For many participants, coworking spaces represent environments for continuous learning, professional growth, communication development, creativity, and resilience. Others perceive work primarily as a means of economic security, personal maturity, and the realization of personal values such as honesty, responsibility, patience, gratitude, and spiritual commitment. Similarly, job satisfaction extends beyond financial compensation and is influenced by organizational support, role clarity, equitable workload distribution, managerial recognition, positive social relationships, and opportunities for personal

and professional development. Furthermore, coworking spaces are perceived as organizational environments that differ substantially from conventional workplaces. Rather than functioning solely as shared work facilities for users, coworking spaces also serve as developmental environments in which employees continuously construct professional identities and negotiate the meaning of work through interactions with customers, colleagues, community members, and organizational systems.

These relational experiences collectively shape employees' understanding of themselves, their professions, and their future career aspirations. From a theoretical perspective, this study contributes to the Human Resource Management (HRM) literature by extending current understanding of employees' lived experiences within flexible work environments. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the study demonstrates that work experience encompasses more than task performance; it also involves the continuous construction of professional identity, work meaningfulness, and job satisfaction. By shifting attention from coworking space users to operational employees, this research broadens the existing coworking literature and provides new insights into the human dimension of coworking space management. Practically, the findings have important implications for the future development of coworking spaces, particularly in rapidly growing metropolitan areas such as Makassar City. As demand for flexible work environments continues to increase, organizations will require employees who possess not only technical competencies but also adaptability, emotional intelligence, collaborative capabilities, and customer-oriented service skills. Accordingly, the findings may serve as a valuable reference for managers and practitioners in designing human resource policies that strengthen employee development, organizational effectiveness, and service quality within coworking spaces.

Several limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the study involved a relatively small number of participants drawn from selected coworking spaces in Makassar City. Consistent with the idiographic nature of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the objective was to obtain an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences rather than to achieve statistical generalization. Consequently, the findings should be interpreted within the specific organizational and cultural contexts examined. Second, the findings were derived primarily from participants' subjective accounts obtained through semi-structured interviews. Although triangulation procedures were employed to enhance credibility, the richness of the data depended largely on participants' willingness and ability to articulate their personal experiences and interpretations. Third, this study focused exclusively on employees' perspectives. The viewpoints of coworking space owners, managers, community members, and users were beyond the scope of the investigation. Including these stakeholders may provide a more comprehensive understanding of organizational dynamics and service ecosystems within coworking spaces.

These limitations do not diminish the value of the present study but instead define the boundaries within which the findings should be interpreted. Future research should expand the empirical context by involving coworking spaces from different cities and organizational settings to explore potential variations in employees' work experiences across diverse cultural and organizational environments. Comparative studies between independent coworking spaces and corporate-managed coworking facilities may further enrich understanding of flexible work organizations. In addition, future studies may incorporate multiple stakeholder perspectives—including owners, managers, customers, and community members—to develop a more holistic understanding of coworking space management. Researchers may also employ alternative qualitative approaches, mixed-methods designs, or quantitative research to examine the relationships among role flexibility, emotional labor, professional identity, work meaningfulness, job satisfaction, employee well-being, and organizational performance. Such investigations would contribute to the continued advancement of Human Resource Management research in flexible and collaborative workplace settings.

Based on the findings of this study, several practical implications can be proposed for coworking space organizations and future researchers. First, coworking space managers should maintain organizational flexibility while establishing clearer role expectations and workload distribution. Although flexible job assignments are essential for sustaining daily operations, they should be supported by well-defined job descriptions, equitable task allocation, and effective coordination mechanisms to minimize role ambiguity and excessive workload. Second, organizations should strengthen employee recognition, welfare, and reward systems. Additional responsibilities, involvement in organizational events, and increasing service demands should be accompanied by appropriate forms of appreciation. Recognition should extend beyond financial compensation to include constructive feedback, career development opportunities, professional learning, and supportive managerial practices. Third, continuous training should be provided to enhance employees' communication, customer service, emotional regulation, and conflict management competencies.

Given the highly interactive nature of coworking spaces, employees require not only technical expertise but also interpersonal skills that enable them to respond effectively to diverse customer needs and dynamic workplace situations. Fourth, employees should view the dynamic nature of coworking spaces as an opportunity to strengthen adaptability, communication skills, problem-solving abilities, emotional resilience, and professional competence. At the same time, organizations should encourage open communication regarding workload concerns and provide mechanisms that enable employees to express operational challenges constructively. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to extend this line of inquiry by investigating broader organizational contexts, incorporating additional stakeholder perspectives, and examining how organizational flexibility influences employee well-being, professional identity, organizational commitment, and service performance. Such studies would further enrich the Human Resource Management literature and contribute to the development of evidence-based management practices for coworking spaces operating in increasingly dynamic and collaborative work environments.

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