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# A Phenomenological Study of Organizational Culture and Employee Loyalty in the Creative Industry

**Diana Maghfiroh**
Institut Islam Kuningan, Indonesia
*Corresponding Author: dianamagfiroh0002@gmail.com

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**Abstract**

**Background:** Organizational culture shapes how creative industry employees experience autonomy, recognition, collaboration, and attachment to their organizations. Differences between declared organizational values and everyday workplace practices may complicate employee loyalty in dynamic creative settings.
**Objective:** This study explores employees' subjective interpretations of organizational culture and identifies cultural experiences associated with loyalty in creative industry workplaces. Method: The manuscript describes a descriptive qualitative phenomenological approach involving permanent and freelance employees at three creative companies in Jakarta and Bandung. It reports purposive selection, ten employee interviews, workplace observation, documentation, and analysis informed by Colaizzi's approach. Supporting interview records and detailed analytic documentation are not included in the submitted manuscript.
**Results:** The reported themes concern openness and informal norms, freedom and work flexibility, recognition of contributions, discrepancies between declared and enacted culture, leadership, and inclusion. Accounts attributed to companies A, B, and C suggest that employees associate supportive communication and appreciation with belonging, whereas hierarchical pressure and inconsistent practices may undermine trust. These interpretations remain provisional until supported by verifiable participant quotations and a transparent thematic audit trail.
**Conclusion:** The study highlights the importance of lived cultural experiences in understanding employee loyalty in creative organizations. Its practical implications concern inclusive leadership, meaningful recognition, flexible work arrangements, and alignment.

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## INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture and employee loyalty are two important concepts in human resource management that are closely interrelated (Robbins & Judge, 2019; Wijonarko et al., 2024). In today's global context, companies not only compete in product and service innovation, but also in creating a work environment that is able to retain its best employees (Ghani et al., 2022; Ulrich, 2016). A study by Sull et al., (2022) highlights that a strong

organizational culture is a key factor in attracting and retaining talent in an era of flexible and dynamic work. Amidst the trend of mass resignation and the demand for work-life balance, employee loyalty is an increasingly complex challenge that demands a new approach based on values and experiences (Elias et al., 2023; Kuzior et al., 2022).

In the creative industries, this issue becomes even more prominent. The creative industry is known for its dynamic, flexible, yet mentally and emotionally challenging work environment (May et al., 2022; Santiago-Torner, 2024). Employees in this sector generally consist of individuals who highly value freedom of expression, recognition of work, and support for new ideas (Jasmine & Utomo, 2024). Previous studies show that the creative economy sector makes an important contribution to Indonesia's national GDP (Aziz et al., 2024). However, the retention rate of employees in this industry is still relatively low (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023). Many creative workers change workplaces or choose the freelance route because they feel there is a lack of organizational support for their personal values (Gill, 2014; McRobbie, 2018).

This fact indicates a gap between the expectations and reality experienced by employees in creative organizations. While companies claim to embrace an open and collaborative culture, in practice there are still various structural barriers, weak internal communication, and lack of recognition of individual contributions (Santos et al., 2023; Sartori et al., 2023). This phenomenon raises fundamental questions: what exactly are employees' subjective experiences of organizational culture? And how do these experiences shape or influence their job loyalty. These problems, which are summarized in Table 1, show that employee loyalty in creative organizations cannot be separated from the way organizational culture is experienced in daily work.

**Table 1.** Creative Industry Organizational Culture and Employee Loyalty Issues

| No. | Problems | Impact on Employees and Organizations | Source |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Low employee retention in the creative industry | Creative workers change workplaces or choose the freelance route | (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023; McRobbie, 2018) |
| 2 | Lack of organizational support for personal values | Weakened emotional attachment to the organization | (Gill, 2014; McRobbie, 2018) |
| 3 | Structural barriers and weak internal communication | Gap between the claimed open culture and daily practice | (Santos et al., 2023) |
| 4 | Lack of recognition of individual contributions | Lower perceived support, motivation, and retention | (Sartori et al., 2023) |
| 5 | Mass resignation and demand for work-life balance | Loyalty becomes a complex challenge requiring a value-based approach | (Elias et al., 2023; Kuzior et al., 2022) |

The creative industry has developed into one of the leading sectors in the global and national economies, mainly due to its contribution to job creation and economic growth based on ideas and innovation. In Indonesia, the sector makes an important contribution to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Aziz et al., 2024). However, the industry also faces serious challenges in terms of workforce retention. High employee turnover rates, low loyalty, and the increasing phenomenon of "great resignation" signal a gap between employees' expectations and the reality of the work culture they experience (Liu-Lastres et al., 2023).

Creative companies often promote an open and collaborative organizational culture, but in reality there are still exploitative managerial practices, closed communication, and disregard for individual contributions. This creates dissatisfaction and encourages employees to seek a more humanized work environment. Therefore, this research becomes

very important to explore in depth the subjective experiences of employees towards organizational culture, especially in the creative sector which is highly influenced by emotional and interpersonal dynamics. Using a phenomenological approach, this study can reveal how organizational culture is perceived and lived in daily work, and how it shapes employee loyalty emotionally and cognitively.

Previous studies such as by Bogale & Debela, (2024) state that organizational culture is a system of shared values embraced by organizational members. However, in the context of the creative industry, which is full of personal expression and freedom ideology, a one-way approach to organizational culture is less relevant. A study by Khassawneh & Elrehail, (2022) shows that a participatory approach that emphasizes dialogue and collaboration is effective in maintaining employee loyalty.

This research offers novelty by using a phenomenological approach to explore the meaning of organizational culture in depth from the perspective of individual experiences (Lim, 2025). Previous studies have generally measured employee loyalty with quantitative surveys that do not capture the complexity of the psychological and social experiences of creative workers (Patton, 2015). By focusing on narratives and perceptions, this research provides space for employees' voices to reveal how they interpret the organizational values, norms, and practices they experience on a daily basis (Doering et al., 2022).

This study aims to explore the meaning of organizational culture as perceived by employees in the creative industry and examine how these experiences affect their job loyalty. Through a phenomenological approach, this research explores subjective dimensions that cannot be revealed through quantitative surveys, such as perceptions of recognition, feeling valued, work flexibility, team communication, and consistency between declarative values and organizational practices. In addition, this study also aims to identify organizational culture factors that encourage or hinder employees' emotional attachment to the organization. Thus, this study can provide a more comprehensive picture of the relationship between work culture experiences and loyalty, and formulate cultural elements that support the sustainability of employment relationships in the creative economy sector.

This research provides benefits in three main aspects. Theoretically, this research expands the discourse on organizational culture by placing employees' subjective experiences at the center of the analysis, especially in the context of the creative industry, which has not been explored much through the phenomenological approach. This approach complements previous studies that tend to be quantitative and normative. Practically, the results of this study provide valuable input for management and human resource practitioners in designing a work culture that is more inclusive, adaptive, and relevant to the psychosocial needs of the current generation of employees.

By understanding employee perceptions and expectations more deeply, organizations can improve workforce loyalty, productivity and retention. As for policy, this research has the potential to become a reference for policy makers in formulating human resource development strategies in the creative sector, especially in creating a healthy, participatory, and sustainable work environment, both at the organizational and public policy levels.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative method with a phenomenological approach. The main purpose of this method is to explore and understand the subjective meanings experienced by individuals in a particular social context. Phenomenology was chosen because it is able to explore employees' deep experiences of organizational culture that cannot be reduced only through numbers or quantitative indicators. This approach focuses on employees' lived experiences and interpretations of workplace values, communication, recognition, and loyalty. The analysis is interpretive and does not seek to establish statistical or causal relationships.

### Research Subjects and Locations

The research subjects were permanent and freelance employees working in three creative companies engaged in graphic design, digital agency, and visual content production. The three companies are located in Jakarta and Bandung. Subjects were selected purposively with the following criteria: (1) having worked for at least one year, (2) actively involved in the organization's creative process, and (3) willing to share their experiences openly. A total of 10 employees participated in the study. The three organizational settings provide contextual variation for interpreting employees' experiences; the available manuscript does not establish a representative sample of the wider creative industry.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected through the following complementary techniques:

1. In-depth interviews with 10 employees from diverse backgrounds.
2. Participatory observation of work interactions, team meetings and informal office culture.
3. Documentation studies such as work culture manuals, company social media profiles, and team activity reports.

Interviews served as the primary source of participants' accounts. Observation provided context for interactions and informal workplace practices, while documents offered information about publicly or internally expressed organizational values. These sources were considered together when interpreting discrepancies between declared culture and everyday experience.

### Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis was conducted using Colaizzi's phenomenological approach which included: (1) rereading the interview transcripts in their entirety, (2) marking relevant statements, (3) compiling main themes from significant meanings, and (4) compiling essential descriptions of employees' experiences of organizational culture and their loyalty. The interpretation was organized around six dimensions reflected in the findings: cultural meaning, freedom and flexibility, recognition, discrepancies between stated and practiced values, leadership, and inclusivity. These dimensions summarize the discussion rather than representing independently verified theme frequencies. No quantitative significance tests were conducted.

### Data Validity

To ensure data validity, researchers triangulated sources, reconfirmed findings with informants (member checking), and involved peer debriefing to avoid interpretative bias.Triangulation was intended to compare interview accounts with observations and documents; member checking and peer debriefing were used to assess interpretive credibility. The manuscript does not specify the dates, duration, or documented outcomes of these procedures, which should be supplied from the original research records if available.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### The Meaning of Organizational Culture from an Employee's Perspective

Across the accounts described in the manuscript, company A is characterized by open brainstorming, whereas company B is associated with more cautious communication under hierarchical expectations. This contrast illustrates how employees experience culture through everyday interactions rather than formal statements alone.The interpretation of organizational culture as an employee's subjective experience strengthens the view that culture is not only normative, but also affective.

Kiaos, (2023) mentions that organizational culture is formed through a process of symbolization and interpretation by organizational members in their daily lives. This is evident in the difference between company A and B, where employees feel a sense of

openness or caution that shapes the way they participate. In dynamic work environments such as the creative industries, cultural meanings tend not to come from written rules, but rather from unofficial norms, communication styles, and symbolic presences such as office layouts or the way supervisors receive feedback. Bogale & Debela, (2024) review also emphasizes that the deepest level of organizational culture is the basic assumptions that are unconscious but shape employee behavior.

Employees in company A, for example, absorb the value of daring to try because of the habituation to the open brainstorming process. In contrast, employees of company B tend to exhibit more cautious communication patterns due to indirect pressure from a hierarchical culture that is not formally written down. The study by Mello & Schloemer, (2022) mentioned that when informal values are more dominant than formal values, the perception of culture can be much different between one organizational unit and another.

In comparison with Kiaos, (2023) and Bogale & Debela, (2024), these accounts emphasize the experiential and affective dimensions of culture. The contrast is contextual and should not be interpreted as a measured difference in organizational performance or retention.

### Freedom and Flexibility as Pillars of Loyalty

Employees' accounts from company C describe flexibility as a form of trust and non-material appreciation. This finding concerns the meaning employees attach to autonomy, rather than a quantified effect of flexible working arrangements on retention. In the context of the creative industry, flexibility is often seen as a valuable non-material incentive. According to a report by McKinsey Global Institute (Mckinsey, 2021), more than 54% of young professionals in the creative sector cite "freedom and flexibility" as the main reason they stay with a company, more than financial compensation.

This is also in line with the concept of psychological contract as reviewed by Topa et al., (2022), where loyalty is formed based on employee perceptions of fairness and recognition of personal autonomy. Thus, companies that provide work time flexibility, creative freedom, and hybrid work systems create a psychological climate conducive to employees' emotional attachment (Gagné et al., 2022). Flexibility is also proven to support work-life balance, which is a priority for Generation Z and millennials today.

A review by Kossek et al., (2023) showed that employees feel more productive and loyal when they are given the trust to organize their own way of working. In interviews at company C, employees even referred to flexibility as an "invisible form of reward" that increases their sense of value and encourages long-term loyalty. This reinforces that in an idea- and emotion-driven economy like the creative industries, loyalty is not built by employment contracts, but by humanized and meaningful work experiences.

The interpretation is compatible with Topa et al., (2022) psychological contract perspective: perceived autonomy and reciprocal trust can inform employees' attachment to their organization. The cited external percentages require confirmation against their original reports and are not findings from the ten interviews.

### Recognition and Appreciation of Works

In company A, appreciation was expressed through recognition of individual contributions and acknowledgement through internal communication and social media. These practices were interpreted as signs that employees' creative work mattered to the organization. Recognition of individual contributions has proven to be a crucial element in strengthening employees' emotional attachment to the organization (González-Cánovas et al., 2024).

According to research by Sartori et al., (2023), perceived organizational support is directly proportional to employee loyalty, motivation, and retention rates. Open and personalized appreciation, as practiced by Company A, has a positive psychological impact in the form of increased self-efficacy and a sense of belonging. This culture of "celebrating

small successes" can even create a more cooperative work climate because each member feels their contribution is meaningful.

In terms of organizational psychology, Yang & Jiang, (2023) in their research on employee recognition found that contributions in daily work, when explicitly appreciated, can trigger positive emotions and well-being. In Company A, appreciation is not limited to material incentives, but also symbolically shown through public recognition on the company's internal communication channels and official social media.

This is in line with the positive reinforcement approach in shaping a supportive and empowering creative work culture. This interpretation corresponds with Sartori et al., (2023) on perceived organizational support and Yang & Jiang, (2023) on recognition of employee contributions. The interview-based material supports a description of perceived belonging, not a measured improvement in retention.

### The Case of Declarative Culture vs Real Culture Imbalance

In company B, the manuscript describes a gap between formally promised participation and employees' experience of limited voice. The account attributed to informant 5 suggests that symbolic participation can be perceived as insufficient when it does not affect actual organizational practice. The mismatch between declarative culture (what is written in the company's mission and vision) and real culture (what employees perceive) is one of the most common sources of dissatisfaction in organizations.

According to Di Lauro et al., (2023), many organizations operate an "espoused theory" that is inconsistent with the "theory-in-use", which is the difference between what is said and what is actually done. In company B, this contradiction created cultural ambiguity and decreased employees' trust in the system. They felt that their voices were not really being heard, despite being formally promised participation space.

Singh & Randhawa, (2022) study on organizational politics and cynicism also shows that when there is a gap between managerial symbolism and actual practice, employees will show skepticism or even cynicism towards organizational messages. This leads to high turnover intention, especially among young talents who have higher expectations of organizational transparency and honesty. The frustration expressed by informant 5 reflects the impact of a tokenistic culture, where participation is symbolic rather than substantial. This finding illustrates the distinction between espoused and enacted values discussed by Di Lauro et al., (2023) and is consistent with Singh & Randhawa, (2022) discussion of organizational cynicism. Any claim about actual turnover should be distinguished from the informants' reported distrust or dissatisfaction.

### The Role of Leaders as Culture Keepers

In company C, the creative director's empathetic interactions and openness to discussion are described as meaningful aspects of the work environment. Employees associated these interactions with being respected and supported. Leaders are not only executors of policies, but also symbols and guardians of organizational culture. Bogale & Debela, (2024) note that leaders act as creators, carriers, and reformers of organizational culture.

In company C, the inclusive and empathetic attitude of the creative director was shown to create a climate of psychological safety, where employees felt valued as whole people, not just workers. This reinforces the findings of Edmondson and Bransby (Edmondson & Bransby, 2023) that leaders who encourage open communication and show vulnerability tend to create work environments that support learning and creativity.

The servant leadership approach demonstrated by the leader in company C is also very much in line with the characteristics of the creative sector, where interpersonal relationships and trust play a central role. Canavesi & Minelli, (2022) review confirms that servant leaders tend to build a collaborative work culture, reduce work stress, and increase social bonds between staff.

Leaders who greet employees by name, ask how their families are, and open discussions with empathic questions are concrete forms of culturally transformative leadership. The interpretation aligns with Bogale & Debela, (2024) on leaders' role in culture, Edmondson & Bransby, (2023) on psychological safety, and Canavesi and Minelli Canavesi & Minelli, (2022) on servant leadership. The material suggests perceived support, without independently testing a leadership-to-loyalty causal pathway.

### Challenges in Building an Inclusive Culture

The account attributed to informant 10 in company B highlights a tension between claims of inclusivity and demanding workloads. This suggests that employees assess inclusion through actual working conditions as well as organizational messaging. Building an inclusive culture requires not only value commitment, but also alignment between vision and operational policies.

The study by Shore et al., (2011) emphasizes that true inclusion should include fair access to resources, opportunities and recognition. In practice, companies often claim an open culture, but still maintain exploitative work practices that are not conducive to diversity and well-being. The case recounted by informant 10 in company B shows how unrealistically high work pressure contradicts the values of inclusivity.

Furthermore, a review by Son Hing et al., (2023) shows that internal cultural inequalities, especially regarding workload, access to promotion, and gender treatment, are the main challenges in creating workplace equity (Women, 2022). In this context, culture will only be rhetoric if it is not accompanied by a functioning evaluation system, workload management, and feedback channels.

Inclusion, then, means not only opening up space for discussion, but also ensuring that the voices of various groups are truly incorporated into organizational decision-making (Korkmaz et al., 2022). Compared with Shore et al., (2011), the finding underlines the importance of meaningful participation and fair organizational practice. The discussion remains specific to the reported experiences and does not establish the prevalence of inequity across creative companies.

## CONCLUSION

Organizational culture has been shown to play an important role in shaping employee loyalty in creative industry companies. A culture that supports freedom of expression, values individual contributions, and creates an inclusive work atmosphere encourages a sense of belonging and emotional attachment to the organization. For this reason, companies are advised to develop open internal communication, train team leaders to have inclusive leadership, and develop work policies that are balanced and oriented towards employee welfare. Periodic evaluation of the suitability between the ideal culture and the reality on the ground is also an important step to maintain the sustainability of a positive work culture and encourage employee retention.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest. This research was conducted without any commercial or financial relationship with the three creative companies in Jakarta and Bandung that served as research settings, or with any other party, that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest. The participating companies and informants had no role in the design of the study, the analysis and interpretation of the data, the writing of the manuscript, or the decision to publish the results.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Diana Maghfiroh: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation (in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and documentation study), Formal analysis (Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis), Validation (source triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing), Data curation, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing, and Project administration. As the sole author, Diana Maghfiroh has read and approved the final version of the manuscript and is accountable for all aspects of the work.

## GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE USAGE STATEMENT

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used AI solely to improve the language clarity, grammar, and readability of the English text. Generative AI was not used to design the study, collect or analyze data, generate or interpret findings, produce participant quotations, or create references. After using this tool, the author carefully reviewed and edited the content and takes full responsibility for the accuracy, integrity, and final content of the manuscript.

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