



EXPLORING THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG ACADEMIC AND SUPPORT SERVICES PERSONNEL OF A STATE UNIVERSITY: IMPLICATIONS FOR PUBLIC MANAGERS

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive case study design, using the grounded theory method, explored the work-life balance of academic and support staff personnel at Northern Iloilo State University to develop a theory that could guide public managers in handling public organizations, particularly in academe. A total of ten (10) participants were selected to participate in focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and key informant interviews. Audio recordings of the FGD, IDI, and KII were transcribed and analyzed following the 3-stage coding process – open, axial, and selective coding – employing the constant comparison technique. Using thematic analysis, the researcher identified patterns, created codes, and arranged the codes into themes; significant themes emerged. These were the nature of work-life balance, strategies for achieving work-life balance, barriers to achieving work-life balance, and the impact of work-life balance on performance. The themes were tested, determining the explanations that led to the emergence of a theory, which the researcher called "The North Star" theory.

Keywords: *Work-life balance, State university, Public managers*

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INTRODUCTION

Achieving work-life balance (WLB) has appeared as a pressing issue in public administration, particularly in educational institutions. WLB describes the harmonious balance between work-related duties and personal commitments. For state university personnel, maintaining this balance is essential, given their high job demands in teaching, research, administration, and student services.

According to Dousin, et al., (2021), work-life balance is managing conflicts between work and personal demands to satisfy one's needs for well-being and self-fulfillment.

Work-life balance is increasingly crucial in the 21st century, as employees, including those in education, face mounting pressure to meet job demands while maintaining personal lives. For academic and support staff, achieving balance is particularly challenging. Identifying the factors affecting work-life balance is essential for improving employee welfare, performance, and institutional effectiveness.

State university administrators face challenges in developing effective work-life balance policies. This research aimed to provide insights for managerial decisions, promoting healthier work environments. The findings may inform effective human resource policies, alleviating work-life balance issues to boost job contentment, retention, and total institutional performance.

Blurring the divide between professional and personal spheres has made attaining equilibrium increasingly difficult (Herawaty, et al., 2024). A harmonious the nexus between work and family responsibilities is crucial for well-being and success (Vaziri et al., 2022).

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Effective work-life balance fosters a supportive work environment, boosting loyalty, productivity, and job satisfaction (Inegbedion, 2024), and positively impacts recruitment, retention, and commitment.

State universities face the challenge of delivering quality education while maintaining faculty and staff productivity and satisfaction. Growing academic demands and personal obligations can compromise work-life balance. Public managers in educational institutions must promote a healthy work-life synergy to promote employee wellness, job contentment, and optimal performance.

Despite its importance, academic and support services personnel often face high job demands and limited support, resulting in emotional exhaustion, burnout, and diminished job fulfillment.

The investigation explored the work-life balance of academic and support services personnel, examining factors that impact their work-life integration skills and assessing implications for public managers in state universities, particularly in policy development as well as strategies and Initiatives that promote employee health, happiness, and resilience.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Methodology

This chapter presents a summary of the study's methodology employed to investigate the personal-professional balance of academic and support services staff at NISU. Specifically,

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it presents the research design, data collection strategies, participant selection techniques, and data analysis procedures utilized.

Research Method

To examine the evidence, the researcher utilized thematic analysis and the constant comparative method. Source triangulation was employed to bolster the accuracy and dependability of the results by synthesizing multiple information streams.

A focus group discussion (FGD) was facilitated by a professional, external moderator to elicit nuanced insights from a targeted group of participants. Furthermore, key informant interviews were conducted with individuals possessing firsthand expertise, yielding valuable insights and perspectives.

In-depth interviews were also employed as an open-ended, discovery-oriented approach to obtain detailed, rich information from participants. As a qualitative research methodology, in-depth interviews aimed to delve into participants' viewpoints, experiences, emotions, and perspectives in depth, uncovering meaningful patterns and themes.

Research Design

This research utilized a descriptive case study approach (Lune & Berg, 2022) to investigate the concept of achieving a harmonious balance between personal and professional responsibilities.

The gathered data were analyzed employing Grounded Theory methodology (MDPI, 2022). This method involves generating theories from data, enabling the identification of relevant aspects within specific social contexts.

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A robust Grounded Theory should be deeply rooted in the data, providing a comprehensive explanation of events and predicting potential outcomes.

In this study, the evaluation criteria for the Grounded Theory focused on its ability to explain employees' perceptions and challenges in managing their personal and professional responsibilities, as well as its capacity to anticipate potential responses and outcomes.

Participants of the Study

This study targeted school heads, faculty, and staff at the Northern Iloilo State University, selected through purposive sampling (Lewin et al, 2020). The aim was to recruit participants with relevant experience and valuable insights into the personal-professional balance of university employees.

Three groups were focused on: school heads (deans, directors, and administrative leaders), faculty members (teaching staff involved in research and course delivery), and staff members (administrative and support staff). Eligible participants were currently employed, had hands-on experience with their job's daily demands, and were willing to share perspectives on managing their professional and personal responsibilities.

Sampling Design

Sampling design is a critical aspect of research methodology, influencing the accuracy and generalizability of study findings (Okasaki et al, 2023). In this study, determining the appropriate sample size for focus groups and in-depth interviews is essential to ensure comprehensive data collection while maintaining feasibility.

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A total of ten (10) participants from Northern Iloilo State University (NISU), including employees from the main and external campuses, were selected. These ten (10) respondents were composed of three (3) school heads, three (3) faculty members, and four (4) staff members participated in the focus group. The ten participants were further divided into individual in-depth interviews - to provide more detailed and personal insights into their experiences and key informants - to provide institutional context and further understand the policies and practices in place at NISU that impact work-life balance.

Research Instrument

To obtain the data, the researchers used a focus group discussion (FGD), key informant interview, and in-depth interviews with the participants. The questions on the interview served as the instrument that intended to gather the data on the perception and challenges on achieving work-life balance that effects their job performance.

Validity of the Research Instrument

To enhance validity, this study employed triangulation, integrating focus groups, key informant interviews, and in-depth individual interviews to provide a nuanced understanding of the phenomenon (Lewin, 2020).

By cross-validating findings across these multiple data sources, the researcher increased the credibility of the results and gained a richer comprehension on the phenomenon in the of the research phenomenon.

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Data Gathering Procedures

Before the study's conduct, approval of the adviser for the research plan was secured. After the approval, the researcher conducted the focus groups (FGs), key informant interview (KII) and in-depth individual (IDI) interviews.

Ten participants took part in a focus group discussion, led by an external moderator, to share their thoughts on the study's questions. Prior to the discussion, participants were thoroughly oriented on the study's goals and methods, with confidentiality protected, and consented to audio recording for data collection purposes. In the key informant interview conducted for the study, the 5 Ws (Who, What, When, Where, and Why) were essential in structuring the research and ensuring it captured the right information from knowledgeable community members.

Firstly, the Who refers to the participants in the study — two representatives chosen randomly from the heads of the community. These individuals were selected because of their firsthand knowledge and deep understanding of the community, allowing them to offer valuable insights into local issues. These participants were campus administrator and administrative officer who were well-versed in the situations and possibilities facing the area.

The What of the interview focused on collecting information about the community's problems and gathering suggestions for potential solutions. The key informants shared their unique perspectives on the nature of the community's needs and how these challenges could be addressed. This was cardinal to the study's aim of identifying actionable insights that could guide further development and decision-making.

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Regarding When, the interview was conducted at a time that was mutually convenient for the key informants, ensuring they could engage in a thoughtful discussion without time constraints.

The Where of the interview took place in a location that was comfortable and conducive to open dialogue. The setting allowed for a productive conversation where the participants felt at ease sharing their insights.

Finally, the Why addressed the goal of the interview, which was to obtain crucial information that could inform decisions about the community. The interviews provided an opportunity to tap into the knowledge and expertise of those with a deep understanding of local issues, which in turn helped identify key challenges and solutions for the community. By focusing on these 5 Ws, the study ensured that it collected meaningful, context-specific data that could be used to improve the community's well-being.

This study employed in-depth, one-on-one interviews with a select group of campus stakeholders, comprising a faculty member, staff member, and administrator, to gain a nuanced understanding of their unique perspectives on specific aspects of the campus setting. These interviews were structured as one-on-one conversations, which allowed the researcher to gather detailed insights from each participant, ensuring that their personal beliefs, experiences, and observations were fully captured. The researcher selected these three key individuals from different roles — faculty, staff, and administration — to get a well-rounded understanding of the program or issue being studied. Each interview was personalized to the

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role and responsibilities of the participant, so that the questions asked were relevant to their specific experiences and interactions with the topic at hand.

Data Analyses

The focus group discussion interviews were transcribed word-for-word, and the data were examined using specialized software for qualitative analysis. A three-phase coding procedure was employed to uncover meaningful patterns. Initially, the data underwent open coding, involving a meticulous examination to identify key phenomena and insights.

Specific codes were assigned to capture participants' direct responses and attitudes. Axial coding followed, where categories and subcategories were integrated, and related concepts were grouped to facilitate comparisons. This iterative process continued until no new information emerged.

Finally, selective coding was used to construct a central category that connected all categories, revealing relationships and explaining the core phenomenon. Throughout the analysis, comparison was the primary analytical tool, used to form categories, define boundaries, and identify patterns.

Thematic analysis was also utilized to determine patterns, create codes, and manage codes into themes, which were refined through an iterative process of merging, rearranging, and renaming codes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Work-life balance (WLB) has become a central concern in modern organizational studies, particularly in educational institutions where the demands of academic duties and

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administrative responsibilities can be highly taxing. This chapter seeks to explore the work-life balance of school heads, faculty members, and staff in a state university, applying a grounded theory triangulation method. The triangulation approach integrates three qualitative data collection techniques—Focus Groups (FGs), Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and In-depth Individual Interviews (IDIs)—to offer a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing WLB in this context.

Qualitative interviews revealed interconnected themes on work-life balance among university personnel, providing insights into their experiences, challenges, coping strategies, and the impact on institutional performance.

Both academic and support services staff at NISU face significant pressure due to excessive workload demands, tight deadlines, and high expectations. This leads to long working hours, stress, and burnout.

Although NISU offers some flexibility in work arrangements, such as remote work and leave policies, these resources are inconsistently applied, particularly for academic staff, whose work is difficult to adjust remotely.

Leadership practices and decisions around workload distribution, performance expectations, and institutional priorities directly influence employees' work-life balance. Lack of clear boundaries, insufficient recognition of personal achievements, and minimal support for flexible work arrangements create a challenging environment for achieving balance.

Employees' inability to achieve work-life balance negatively affects job satisfaction, engagement, and well-being, which, in turn, reduces institutional performance. Burnout,

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stress, and disengagement lead to decreased productivity, higher turnover, and a lack of commitment to institutional goals.

Many respondents acknowledge the difficulty of separating work from personal life, especially in roles like school head and faculty where demands extend beyond typical work hours. This aligns with the concept of work-life integration, where the two spheres are interwoven rather than distinct.

Several respondents emphasize the importance of efficient time management as a strategy for juggling work and personal responsibilities. Being able to complete tasks efficiently during work hours allows for more dedicated personal time.

Based on the triangulation of data from FGs, KIIs, and IDIs, several important insights were identified:

Effective leadership is critical to shaping the culture around work-life balance. Leaders who model balance by setting clear boundaries, promoting flexibility, and providing support for staff well-being contribute to a healthier and more engaged workforce.

Workload management is a central issue. The allocation of teaching, research, and administrative duties must be balanced to prevent staff from becoming overwhelmed. Providing adequate resources, such as teaching assistants or administrative support, would ease workload pressures.

To truly support work-life balance, NISU needs to expand its mental health services and family-friendly policies. Without these supports, employees are at risk of burnout, which ultimately affects the quality of service and institutional performance.

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Work-life balance is not static, it is influenced by internal and external factors that change over time. Managers must regularly assess and adjust policies to meet evolving needs, especially in response to changing work environments or crises (e.g., during pandemics).

Employees who achieve work-life balance tend to be more engaged, satisfied, and productive in their jobs, as they feel supported in managing their personal and professional lives.

CONCLUSION

This study's findings on work-life balance among university employees have led to recommendations aimed at addressing challenges and enhancing their overall well-being.

Enhance the work-life balance (WLB) for academic and support services personnel at Northern Iloilo State University (NISU), several key recommendations have been proposed, each addressing specific challenges and promoting a flexible and supportive work environment.

Implement flexible work hours, compressed workweeks, and remote work options. These arrangements would provide employees, particularly those with caregiving responsibilities, greater autonomy over their schedules, reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction.

Establish on-campus childcare facilities or offer childcare subsidies to assist employees with young children. Enhanced parental leaves policies that support both mothers and fathers

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would also help employees balance family and work demands during critical life events like childbirth or adoption.

Provide mental health resources, including counseling, stress management workshops, and wellness programs, to support employees' well-being and resilience. Promoting mental health awareness and reducing stigma would encourage employees to seek support, thereby improving job satisfaction and overall well-being.

Implement a clear remote work policy, particularly for non-teaching periods, to help staff manage their personal and professional responsibilities effectively, promoting a healthier work-life integration.

These recommendations are designed to improve work-life balance at NISU by providing flexibility, support for family and caregiving responsibilities, mental health resources, fair workload distribution, and career development opportunities. Implementing these measures will increase job satisfaction, support employee retention, and contribute to the university's success.

Public managers and university administrators have a key role in shaping the work environment to enhance work-life balance (WLB) for academic and support services personnel.

Implement flexible work policies, such as flexible hours, compressed workweeks, and remote work, to give employees more autonomy, reduce stress, and boost job satisfaction. Also creating a supportive, inclusive culture where employees can openly discuss work-life

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balance challenges and receive the necessary support. Regularly evaluate work-life balance policies to ensure they meet employee needs and support the university's success.

By implementing these recommendations, public managers and university administrators can foster a more flexible, supportive, and balanced work environment. These initiatives will not only improve job satisfaction and employee retention but will also enhance the university's overall success and reputation by promoting a healthier and more engaged workforce.

Improve work-life balance (WLB) in public educational institutions, several key recommendations can be implemented to foster a supportive and flexible work environment for academic and support services personnel.

Institutions should adopt flexible work arrangements and provide family support, including flexible hours, remote work, childcare options, and inclusive parental leave policies, to reduce employee stress, enhance productivity, and ease work-family balance.

These recommendations aim to create a flexible and supportive work environment, boosting employee satisfaction and retention, and institutional success, while promoting a healthier and more motivated workforce.

Future researchers on work-life balance in public education should investigate the long-term impact of WLB policies on employee productivity, job satisfaction, and retention to build on existing knowledge and address gaps in the field. Additionally, examining how leadership styles and institutional culture influence WLB policies will help identify best practices for fostering supportive work environments.

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Gendered experiences of WLB should also be a focus, particularly how caregiving responsibilities affect women in comparison to men. Research into how diverse family structures, such as single parents and dual-income households, experience WLB will provide a more inclusive understanding of employees' needs.

Lastly, involving employee feedback directly through surveys and focus groups will ensure that WLB policies are responsive to the real needs and challenges faced by staff. Future research should explore the complex interplay of personal, institutional, and cultural factors influencing work-life balance, informing the creation of more effective and inclusive policies.

The recommendations provided above aim to address the work-life balance challenges faced by school heads, faculty, and staff at the state university. The rationale behind these recommendations is to create a sustainable and supportive work environment where both academic and support staff can thrive personally and professionally. By addressing work-life balance barriers, NISU's public managers can enhance employee well-being, reduce burnout, and foster a culture of engagement and productivity, ultimately contributing to the institution's long-term success.

This study has shed light on the personal and professional challenges and strategies of academic and support services personnel at a state university. When employee well-being is seen as part of the university's mission and values, it becomes a shared priority for all stakeholders. Public managers must ensure that staff wellness is incorporated into strategic planning, policy-making, and performance evaluations. By making employee wellness a strategic objective, NISU can align its goals with staff satisfaction, creating a culture where

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employees feel valued and motivated. This integrated approach ensures that staff wellness is not a peripheral concern but a central part of NISU's operational success, leading to improved employee engagement, retention, and institutional performance.



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