Work-Life Balance: Exploring Meanings and Opportunities Among Employees of Central Mindanao University

Athena Jan I. Derayunan, Hanna Leah E. Relacion, April Rose F. Buntod, and Bryan Lee D. Celeste

Department of Behavioral Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences,
Central Mindanao University, Musuan, Maramag, Bukidnon, Philippines 8710

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the work-life balance among employees of Central Mindanao University. It focuses on the meanings and opportunities attached with work and life by discovering their day-to-day struggles, and experiences. Descriptive and exploratory research approaches were used wherein respondents were conveniently sampled. Data were gathered through one-on-one in-depth interviews with 10 respondents following a set of inclusion criteria. The respondents represented 6 faculty members and 4 staff. Results of the study revealed that respondents go through work struggles due to unclear job duties and responsibilities; generally heavy work load; personal relationships and social activities were affected; feelings of helplessness to improve struggles. In spite of the difficulties encountered by the respondents, these have not affected them finding their work to be meaningful; enabling them economic stability and personal fulfillment.

Keywords: work, life, balance

INTRODUCTION

Greenhaus et al. (2003) defined work life balance as the how individuals balance their involvement between their responsibilities related to their job and family or life and their satisfaction with the outcome.

Nowadays, people live in a fast-paced society where pressures and various forms of stressors affect work and life balance. In the contemporary world, where technology is thriving, bringing in sophisticated fields of electronics and devices, obscures the boundary between work and life (Gaskell, 2020). Achieving balance between work, family, and that of personal responsibilities is an important commitment and is posed to be challenging for individuals as it affects commitment, well-being, productivity, sustainable work, and stress (Voydanoff, 2004; Broers, 2005).

Achieving Well-Being Through Work-Life Balance

This study is anchored on the Model on Self-Concordance and Organizational Support Theory as this research tried to explore on the meanings and opportunities attached to achieve work and life balance.

The self-concordance model of Sheldon and Elliot (1999) said that the model makes it understandable the process wherein goals relate to well-being. Taken from Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory (SDT), it proposes that individuals not only pursue goals for several reasons but also because of goals with motives that represent deep values (intrinsic or identified) (Judge et al., 2005). Propelled by their identified or intrinsic goals, they try to achieve life improvement and personal growth. As mentioned by Gravador & Calleja (2018) the model promotes sustained effort over time, which will then

increase the probability that the goals will be attained, and later lead to positive changes in well-being (p.787).

This has resonance to the study of Koon (2020) and Mukherjee (2019) stating that, organizations fail to identify the interlace of work and life which is necessary in order to strengthen employee well-being; superiors see work-life balance as a craze and ignores the importance of such. Giving opportunities in the workplace that may enhance career growth of employees is imperative; these opportunities represent options, new goals set, and possibilities that individuals in the workplace conceive to have in their future at work and in their personal lives (Zacher & Frese, 2011).

While the self-concordance model gives a grasp on how an individual's goals relate to well-being, it is also integral to understand how employees may be supported by the organization which is explained by the Organizational Support Theory (OST). It emphasizes on how much support is provided to employees by valuing their contributions and provide care for their well-being (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Failure to extend support to employees' need for work and life balance sends a negative view towards the organization.

Work-life balance initiatives in various organizations are primarily concerned with the employees' interaction between paid and unpaid work activities, things such as leisure along with personal development (State Service Commission, 2005). Mesimo-Ogunsanya (2017) proposed that there should be shared benefits for employees and the organization. Though work has been recognized as

an avenue for social growth, personal fulfillment, having sense of identity as well as being one of the determining factors people can improve their quality of life, it has been said that it is also an avenue wherein it presents multiple risk factors for the biopsychosocial health of employees it may in the form of absenteeism and even chronic disease (Vieco Gómez & Abello Llanos, 2014).

Conceptualizing Work-Life Balance

There is an abundance of studies revealing literatures of work-family life as representative of work-life. However, these terms are in theory distinct (Kalliath & Brough, 2008). The definition of work may be relatively clear in organizations however, the life component goes above familial responsibilities. As such, it should be understood that in order to provide for the necessary support and aid in the achievement well-being through work and life balance, there is a need to better understand how individuals interpret the scope of work and life.

Additionally, individuals juggle several roles all at the same time which include work and non-work roles. Although, debates on work and life being separate and independent domains have arisen in which, several literatures have disproved that employees will not allow personal life to meddle with work-life (Jayasingnan et al., 2021).

Rosso and colleagues (2010) identify four major sources of meaning of work. First, is the self that encompasses the values, motivations, and beliefs that employees draw on to understand the meaning of their work. Second, by other people, both on and off the job, including coworkers, managers, and leaders to which the employee belongs and family. Third source of meaning involves the context of the work itself, including the design of job tasks, organizational goals, one's financial circumstances, and the role of nonwork domains, including the national culture that shapes narratives of work. Then the fourth and final source of meaning is spirituality.

It is important to consider that there should be opportunities in the workplace for the career growth development of the employees. This could be in the form of incentives, rewards, and other mechanisms that might foster positive attitude, high morale in the workplace, productivity, and satisfaction. Zacher and Frese (2011) strongly proposes that the focus on opportunities describes how many new goals are set, options, and possibilities that the employees perceived to have in their personal and future at work.

Most literatures on work-life are focused the balance between work and family, giving emphasis on the life component as about familial relations and responsibilities. It should also consider the other aspects of life in order to understand and support work and life balance.

Consequently, this research is take-off on exploring the work-life conditions of the employees in the academe and how this can contribute to the understanding of well-being from the experiences of the employees. Based on the perceived understanding and to attain a clear picture between the work and life domains, narratives of employees were considered.

So then, this paper discusses on points describing on the day-to-day struggles; experiences and meanings attached to work and life, or in their personal and professional experiences. Thus, the overarching question on this research is, "How do Central Mindanao University employees find meanings and opportunities on their work and life?"

The purpose of this research is to contribute to the body of literature to sociology of work, social and organizational psychology putting premium on the employees in the academia. Most importantly, this research is conceptualized for future work interventions, trainings/ seminars and personal development of the employees of Central Mindanao University.

METHODOLOGY

As this study explored the meanings and opportunities attached to the personal and professional experiences of CMU employees, the researchers employed both descriptive and exploratory approaches using in-depth one-on-one interviews to understand deeper employees' views of work and life; also, because the study is focused in a small community. The study was conducted in a year and was done in the various units encompassing the nine colleges of Central Mindanao University, the "Academic Paradise of the South", Musuan, Maramag, Bukidnon. Ten (10) respondents comprised of 6 faculty members (4 females and 2 males) and 4 staff (2 females and 2 males) were selected through convenient sampling following two criteria namely: a. He/She must be a temporary or permanent employee of the University; b. He/She must be working in the University for at least a year. The total number of respondents were arrived at, due to the saturation of responses presenting no more new data.

Prior to the gathering of data, a letter request was forwarded to the Office of the President through proper channels. Once approved, study was then issued an Institutional Ethics Review Committee permit to proceed with the conduct of the study, after thorough evaluation of the informed consent and data gathering protocol. Respondents were then approached personally and were given a background of the study then were asked for their consent to conduct the interview. Once consent was granted by the respondents, interviews were scheduled during their vacant time; the place of the interview was set by the respondents according to their convenience making sure the place was well ventilated. Face masks were worn by the researchers and respondents and were sat at least one meter apart. Before the interview, informed consents were read individually to the respondents and had it signed by them using their own pen. Interviews were done by three (3) faculty members were two of which were females and a male; interviewers were assisted by a male research aid who took notes. Also, the researchers used an audio recording device to catalogue all responses. Interviews lasted for 45 minutes or more per respondent.

Sample questions for the interviews included asking for their day-to-day struggles and if it has affected their lives, what were the reasons. Data were then analyzed and interpreted through thematic analysis.

Scope and Limitations

The eruption of the pandemic presented challenges in the conduct of the study. It caused delays on the data gathering due to the nationwide lock down and the declaration of enhanced community quarantine in Central Mindanao University. This study focuses on the narratives of Central Mindanao University employees. Nevertheless, because of different perspectives and experiences, the outcome of this study may not represent other employees of different organizations.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers wrote a letter to the Head of Agency of Central Mindanao University to ask for an approval to conduct the study. Consent forms were as well signed by the respondents and confidentiality was observed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the struggles and the meanings and opportunities attached to work-life balance as perceived by the respondents.

Struggles

Heavy Workload

Doing tasks that are work-related is a relevant part of a job. However, when an individual is entrusted or receives more than what he/she can accomplish more so, more than what is required of the job may result to negative impact to employee. Heavy workload may mean catching up on tight schedules, spending more time stressing, and longer working hours.

As employees of Central Mindanao University, one is required to perform tasks and duties to deliver results. Nonetheless, both the faculty and staff respondents of Central Mindanao University shared their experiences on heavy workload that they have to undertake.

Aside from focusing on instruction and tending to teaching related tasks, faculty members are also faced with responsibilities such as research and extension activities from time to time. At times, when an administrative designation is assigned, the bulk of commitments pile up. For most of the time, these responsibilities overlap at one point or another with each other. Employees who occupy staff positions are no exemption to the pile of responsibilities. They too experience similar position. This is evident in the comments of the respondents, as one stated that:

Respondent # 3: As a college registrar, as a storekeeper, as an accounting clerk, as an office clerk plus document controller mura kog gi lukdo na nimo tanan pasakit sa trabaho. Bug-at jud kaayo. (I function as a college registrar, storekeeper, as an accounting clerk, office clerk, and as a document controller. It is such as heavy task.)

Respondents # 9 and 2 also expressed that:
Kanang daghan bitaw kaayo ihatag na trabaho kay halos dili man ko gusto ug- maka multi-task ko, kay dili ko effective sa multi-task. Kanang one at a time lang. (To much work is given which makes me multi-task. It should be given one at a time.)

Kung naa kay admin load makita jud nimo unsay gakahitabo. That's one great stress jud kay kanang naka ingon gyud o kagahapon pag storya namo sa department nga 'bulahan ang mga faculty nga walay admin load (When you are given administrative load, it will make you realize how stressful it is. Good for those faculty who have no administrative load.)

Most of the respondents have administrative designations, if not, experienced having designations. Apart from those, while faculty members engage in research and extension activities on top of their instruction responsibilities, employees who occupy staff positions work beyond their position's duties and responsibilities in the event that a designation is assigned.
Another respondent revealed:

Respondent # 4: Tanan nimo oras ibuhos gyud nimo sa office. Murag kalimtan jud nimo imong kaugalingon kay murag gi own ka sa office ba.   (All your time in is poured in the office to the extent of forgetting about yourself just like the office owns you).

Other respondents expressed that in the performance of their work responsibilities, and in their commitment to provide quality service, they tend to work beyond the regular working hours extending work into their personal time. This is in relation to Broers (2005) stating that being able to successfully maintain stability and balance between career and personal life and the impact on one's satisfaction at work and personal life can be effortful. Achieving work-life balance impacts overall job performance (Thevanes & Mangaleswaran, 2018).

Unclear Job Duties and Responsibilities

Job duties constitutes a concrete package of employee and employer expectations in order to bring about a tangible understanding of job duties and responsibilities in which, produces the desired work outcome effectively. Nevertheless, unclear job duties and responsibilities happen when employees are not clarified of their roles and are not given clarity as to what is expected of them as part of their job.

Upon interview of the respondents, majority of the employees occupying staff positions and other faculty members relayed their concerns regarding their present position at work. One employee shared by saying:

Respondent # 10: As an employee dli man pud ingon nga dili ta makapili kung aha ta ibutang pero based unta sa imong expertise ibutang unta ka sa place

nga dapat butangan sa imo. (As an employee, we cannot choose where to be assigned, but it should according to your expertise).

Also, respondent # 8 mentioned that:
Eventually, murag nagka daghan ang trabaho and then walay improvement in terms sa nga unsaon pag handle, unsaon pag I mean support pud na ma improve ang opisina. (There seems to be no work with no improvements in terms of how to handle these and also support for improvements in the office.)

While respondent # 2 said that:
Irritable ko basta naa koy kailangan humanon or naay task nga gihatag or kung naay problem sa office nga kailangan ug immediate nga mga solution, action. (I become irritable especially when there are tasks assigned or if there is a concern in the office that needs an immediate solution.)

Respondents felt that they were given tasks that were out of their area of expertise, if not, out of their know-how. They had to accept tasks that are at some point, out of their scope. It was expressed that no advancements were made to address these concerns.

Employees who sense that their responsibilities are not clearly defined can lead them from performing their maximum capacity, affected work output, and may have inability to find that their jobs make a difference. This found coherence with the study of Múnera et al. (2013); Bedoya et al. (2014) stating that the educational sector has the most psychosocial affectedness having different factors in its work environment such as demands for permanent updating, labor market demands, changes in structures and strategies.

Personal Relationships and Social Activities

Relationships and social activities are important in an individual's life. It keeps one healthy in the sense that it allows every person to share oneself and be connected; this also enables people to be feel a sense of belongingness and purpose therefore achieving balance and well-being. Employees of Central Mindanao University felt that their job demands had affected the quality of relationships with their family and friends. Also, affecting their social interactions. As one respondent said:

Respondent # 5: Tungod kay na accustomed nata nga ingon ani na arrangement mura bitaw nga ang akong life naka focus sa career, naa sa atong work. (Because we have been used to this arrangement, it seems that my life is focused with my career).

Respondent # 6 also expressed that: Siguro sa akoa kung moingon kog imong social, imong time sa imong family, napa kay friends, napa kay socio-civic groups ana bitaw na gusto nimo e push nga mga charity wala na dili na gyud sya, kulang sya. (For me, time with socializing, family, friends and socio-civic groups and charity works is affected.)

Even time spent for personal care is affected since most of the time spent is focused on work responsibilities.

Respondent # 7 expressed by saying:
Tanan nimo oras ibuhos gyud nimo sa office kalimtan gyud nimo imong kaugalingon. Murag kalimtan jud nimo imong kaugalingon kay murag gi own ka sa office ba. (All your time is spent in the office and going to a point where you seem to forget yourself as if you are owned by the office.)

Employees felt that they lack the time to engage in social activities and are unable to attend with community activities due to the magnitude of workload that they have, so then time is focused towards the fulfillment of work. It was also revealed that family relationships had been affected to the point where family members complain since most time is spent in working. Likewise, the effect of such is that work is brought home making the home as extension of their workplace.

In order for individuals to be able to care for themselves and be able to impart a better version of oneself in work and with social relations, it is necessary that one builds mutual experiences with others and can share interests which in turn allows growth , security and a sense of community. With respect to this, the study of Osborne and Hammoud (2017); European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2010), explained that interpersonal behaviors influence productivity and that unlikely effects of such bring about negative interpersonal behaviors; relevant sources of well-being and satisfaction are social support which, includes family and friends. These also lead to recognition at work and respectful relationships.

Feelings of Helplessness

When individuals feel that they are powerless and are not able to react to a situation that is negative or stressful are events that may be experienced by anyone including people in the workplace.

Respondents showed psychosocial dissatisfaction by believing that there is nothing that they can do to improve their current situation; in many ways felt that taking a hold of positive outcomes of the position they are in is impossible. When individuals feel that they have no control over situations, a sense of helplessness is experienced. This was what the respondents of CMU had expressed. As two of the respondents claimed that:

Respondent # 10: Sa bagay, mura bitaw any time you will be out of this place. Ang kuan lang ang uncertainty ba mura man pud ug helpless kaayo ta. Helplessness gyud ang kanang murag struggle. (It looks like as though anytime you will be out of this place. The uncertainty makes us helpless and feels like a struggle).

Respondent # 8: Naa man gud mga policies sa work nga pagtuo nako dili ko kauyon nya diha akong conflict. Pero wala kay ma 'DO' tungod kay part ka sa organization. (There are work policies that I do not agree with. But what can we do about it, when you're part of the organization.)

Respondent # 2 also said that:
Murag wala koy choice bitaw. Ang akoang mindset

kay "kayanon nako ni kay wala kay choice. (I do not seem to have any choice. I put my mindset as "I can do this." I am left without any choice.)

To some extent, respondents felt that this was because they did not belong to the higher management of the organization that made it harder to be heard. They felt that they there is noting that they can do to improve their situation and that they are unable to take a hold of agreeable outcomes related to their work concerns. This has made them to not avoid the situation but behave in a way that seems there is nothing that could change the situation. This supports the study of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2010) stating that psychosocial health and discontentment with work are effects of the type and demands of work, as well as the availability of resources in order to manage the demands successfully (p.1).

Meaning and Opportunities

The perception of work to be meaningful motivates people in the workplace as they may find a sense of fulfillment and purpose in it. Individuals in the workplace may feel empowered and therefore, having control over their work responsibilities. Respondents of this study shared that they find meaning in their respective work and found it to be rewarding. Being able to impart their knowledge to students, address client's need, and somehow being able to touch lives are some of the reasons why respondents find meaning to their work. One of our respondents stressed:

Respondent #9: Aside from the monetary, I would say I had touched lives especially my to students. And I am really happy because some of them are working abroad, or maybe here in the locale. They are now working as managers so even if I see them in food chains, I am really happy that they were able to graduate.

Moreover, respondents # 5 and 1 said that:
Somehow, naa pud koy contribution sa kanang mga panghitabo sa CMU. Kay kanang I believe that I was able to deliver what I have to deliver to clienteles diri, to the administration, to the government. (Somehow, I feel like I also have a contribution to CMU. I believe that I was able to deliver to the clienteles, to the administration, and to the government.)

Tungod ni CMU nakahuman bya ko sa akong masters naka skwela bya ko sa akoang on-going karun tungod ni CMU. Dako bya jud kaayo syag allowance ihatag. Ingana, dako kaayo syag mahatag sa professional devt nimo kay murag wala gyud ka gi deprive ni CMU. (Because of CMU, I was able to finish my master's degree and I am presently on-going with another degree. CMU provides a generous amount of allowance and has a significant contribution to your professional development. CMU never deprives you.)

Employees of CMU find their jobs fulfilling, giving them favorable development in their careers. Both the faculty and staff can pursue a higher degree of education and or short courses on a full or partial scholarship basis. Although some respondents felt that they had not been considered to enjoy such benefit. CMU has as well supported them financially, providing employees with a relatively large salary. Others also expressed that CMU allowed them to connect with people and have been a way for them to bring about their advocacies through their work. This has eventually lead the respondents to have effectively balanced their professional and personal life. This supports the study of Zacher and Frese (2009 & 2011) mentioning that giving emphasis on opportunities show new goals, options and possibilities that employees consider in the time to come at work.

Other respondents of this study stressed on their current situation where their career path does not allow them to advance easily. A comparison was stated by other staff respondents in terms of their career paths with faculty members. They expressed that they had to wait for someone to retire, resign, or generally become separated from service so that they can succeed to a higher rank. As stated by one respondent:

Respondent # 8: Kuan pud unta kanang for promotion nga we don't want have to wait for anybody to retire or to die or to kanang resign in order for us to kanang move up para ma promote ka. (I wish we don't want to wait for anybody to retire or to die if not resign in order for us to be promoted).

Respondent # 3: Ang sa staff nga side, wala syay career path nga murag pag kuan nimo next nimo, dinhi naka... Then sa staff mao nay wala na murag wala lang, maghulat lang ka kinsay bakante, then ang usual nako nga makita man gud nako sa staff kay kailangan ka mag faculty para ma improve ingana. (The staff have no career path. You have to wait when a position becomes vacant. Based on what I have observed, you need to become a faculty member to be able to improve in terms of career.)

Furthermore, respondent # 6 said in relation to opportunities:

Ang ako gyud nga kung kana untang grants nga giving access to all. (I wish that all grants could be accessed by all.)

In relation to the career path of employees occupying staff positions or career service employees, their follow the government's plan on Recruitment, Selection and Placement (RSP). This is subject to the guidelines specified Civil Service Commission's Omnibus Rules on Appointments and Other Human Resource Actions (Revised 2018).

Although staff respondents feel that their career path is not as vibrant as compared to the faculty respondents, all respondents continue to stay positive in trying to work-out their careers and personal lives. They mentioned that:

Respondent # 10: I work for the government and I have to see to it that I work according to what is due of me and do more for government service.
Respondent # 3 also added that:

Kung unsa man ang trabaho dapat tiwason jud... maskin unsa pa ka kapoy para dili mag sapaw-sapaw. (Whatever work has to be done, I try to finish it even how tiresome it can be so that it does not pile up.)

In addition, respondents # 7 and 9 respectively said:

You have to do everything even if it is chaotic. At the end of the day, I have learned a lot.

Going back to how do I define my work, I still do find work challenging, I love my work there's no question about that but you also have to be honest that you could be burdened sometimes.

CMU employees try to do their best by employing strategies that would aid in the delivery of their job and avoid further concerns in relation with balancing their professional and personal lives. This found resonance in the study of Edralin (2013) where it stated that work-life balance had positive and negative spillover effects. These effects are stress and high levels of satisfaction; respondents were able to work through work and life through strategies like personal planning and time management.

CONCULUSION

At some point, job demands can curtail employee responsiveness to perform their best. In order to catch-up with the bulk of work, CMU employees use their personal and social time, setting aside familial responsibilities. They consider social relationships and activities, and community life as relatively encompassing their lives and are material. This has therefore, led to giving more priority to work and putting on hold what they perceive as valuable activities and personal time; quality of relationships are sacrificed to compensate for undone work. They are unable to express their concerns relating with their work but continuously perform their responsibilities in delivering their tasks.

It is noteworthy however, that in spite of the employees' struggles in balancing work and life and with the different difficulties encountered, CMU employees continue to be passionate in performing their duties and responsibilities at work. They find meaning in their work and value their time with family, friends, community, and personal space. CMU employees displayed satisfaction and have showed a sense of fulfillment in their work and experienced economic stability.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, this paper recommends that the University should develop programs that give emphasis on taking care of its human resources and improve organizational development. By creating psychosocial interventions or support that would help improve employee well-being and effectiveness that may help strengthen organizational productivity. This may be through the institutionalization of operations such as strengthening open-door policies for employees to express concerns and ideas. Other programs may also include encouraging social activities that will help engage employees, and wellness or self-care benefits for employees to discover ways to achieve work and family balance. The institution should also be able to support employees through giving equal access to opportunities in terms of professional development and other relevant advancements.

A similar study may be conducted incorporating the work from home schedule by incorporating variables such as creating work spaces at home, boundary-setting, and distribution of time. This may add and further improve psychosocial support programs that CMU may institutionalize.

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