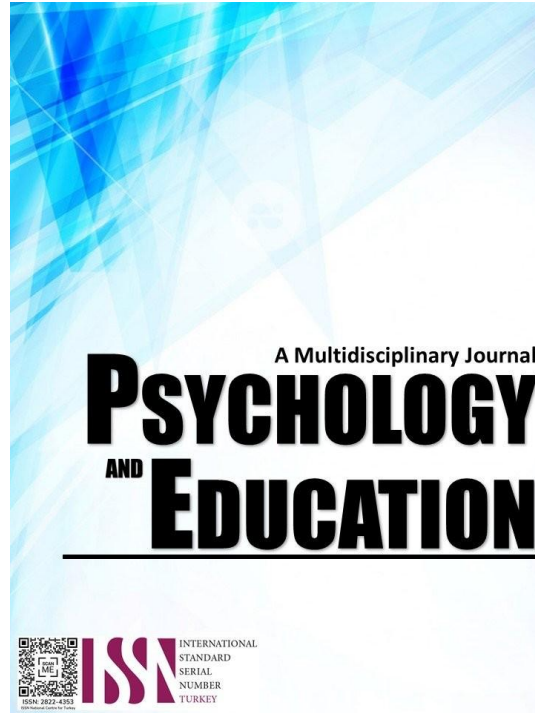


UNVEILING THE EXPERIENCES OF PROGRAM HEADS: A STUDY OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE



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Unveiling the Experiences of Program Heads: A Study of Work-Life Balance

Hubert Von V. Bachicha,* Noe P. Garcia

For affiliations and correspondence, see the last page.

Abstract

This qualitative single case study examined the experiences of five program heads of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges regarding their work-life balance. Through purposive sampling and following the set inclusion criteria, five program heads were selected. The study identified key challenges which were impaired decision-making, decline in health, turnover rate, being misunderstood, family problems, multitasking, work environment, failed commitments, lack of confidence, and work adjustments. In response, the program heads employed the coping mechanisms such as communicate effectively, find time to exercise, take breaks with family, encourage hobbies, clear work priorities, time management, foster supportive work environment, seeking religious support, functional problem solving, and develop emotional awareness. In light of their perspectives, their experiences led them to prioritize health, lead by example, reconsider priorities, practice of self-compassion, foster thoughtful communication, and take as a learning opportunity. Findings highlighted the resilience exhibited by participants and emphasized the personal resonance of their experiences, serving as an inspiration for individuals facing similar challenges. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on work-life balance, offering a holistic perspective on the dynamic interplay between professional and personal dimensions.

Keywords: *guidance and counseling, work-life balance, resilience, single case study, Philippines*

Introduction

“With great power comes great responsibility” -Uncle Ben (from Spiderman)

Being a head in an office is defined by others as a power because of the equivalent privileges linked to it. It is even used by others as a measurement of success because those who are promoted are usually those who perform well in their specific designations. In essence, it is an overwhelming factor that could encourage employees to do better at work. But, to have these privileges also means responsibility, for heads have various things to consider including their time for their family, relationships with the people around them, personal goals, and passions. In simple words, to have a position may be a challenge to the work-life balance of an individual.

In the evolving landscape of workplace dynamics, work-life balance has become a central concern for employees globally. Caringal-Go et al. (2025) conducted a qualitative study examining how employees navigate work-life balance in hybrid work arrangements, emphasizing the roles of human resource support and employee-initiated adjustments or “job crafting.” While the study offers valuable insights into contemporary work-life dynamics, it primarily focuses on rank-and-file employees and hybrid setups, thus excluding leadership figures such as academic program heads who often work in more rigid, in-person environments. This indicates a gap in understanding how individuals in higher positions, with more complex responsibilities and institutional demands, experience and manage their own work-life balance.

In the Philippine context, Reyes and Kalacas (2024) explored the work-life balance of married faculty members in a state university, highlighting how personal responsibilities intersect with professional demands in academia. Their findings emphasized the importance of wellness programs tailored to faculty roles.

However, the study was only limited to teaching staff and did not extend to academic administrators, such as program heads, who navigated a different spectrum of duties including managerial tasks, academic planning, and administrative supervision. This oversight suggested a lack of literature on how leadership roles within higher education institutions coped with work-life balance, particularly in settings where institutional expectations were high and support structures may be limited.

At the local level, Concepcion et al. (2022) examined work-life balance and career satisfaction among employees of a local government unit, offering a glimpse into work-life experiences in a public service setting. Though relevant in highlighting the challenges faced by government workers, the study does not account for educational leaders or the specific context of higher education in cities like General Santos. Program heads in academic institutions operate under different mandates and pressures, including accreditation compliance, faculty evaluation, and curriculum development. This lack of localized research focusing on educational administrators highlights a critical gap, underscoring the need to investigate the lived experiences of program heads and how they navigate the challenges of work-life balance in their unique roles.

As a former program coordinator, it had been my struggle to balance my time for my job and for my personal life. I cannot deny the fact that the position hindered me to have time for myself, for my family, and friends, to the point that I resigned. But I am inspired to see some program heads who could manage their life well, that they could even have time beyond work and had even gained greater milestones like acquiring degrees. I believe that I could learn more from their experiences to survive life even though I am no longer a program coordinator.

Having personally struggled with work-life balance as a former program coordinator, I recognize the urgency of understanding how some program heads manage to thrive despite the demands of their role. Inspired by those who achieve personal and professional success, I aimed to conduct this study to explore the experiences of program heads at Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, specifically their challenges, coping strategies, and insights in order to inform better support for educational leaders.

Research Questions

The researcher aimed to unveil the experiences of program heads of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, particularly, their work-life balance. Specifically, the researcher sought to answer the grand tour question:

1. How do the participants describe their experiences in work-life balance?

Methodology

Research Design

This research employed a qualitative research approach, specifically utilizing a single case study design, to explore the lived experiences and coping strategies of program heads within their organizational setting. The single case study was deemed appropriate as it enabled an in-depth examination of a unique and bounded case, offering detailed and contextual insights into the participants' work-life balance. Data collection methods included face-to-face semi-structured interviews, audio recordings, transcripts, field notes, and personal observations to accurately capture participants' perspectives and behaviors.

Qualitative research is particularly suited for understanding how individuals interpret their experiences in real-life contexts through methods such as interviews and observations (Mohajan, 2018). A single case study allows for the intensive analysis of a specific individual, group, or program and is especially effective in addressing complex "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 2018). By drawing on multiple data sources, the study aimed to develop a rich, triangulated understanding of the case, contributing to theoretical insights and providing a foundation for further research into organizational and social phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Participants

The participants for this survey came straight from the program heads of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges. These study participants were all those employees who were in a position or who were considered as head of their offices. In this study, the semi-structured interview guide was utilized by the researcher. Participants were supposed to feel more at ease because they were not overwhelmed with questions right away. However, the researcher discussed this in relation to this research study.

Additionally, participants were required to have substantial experience on being a program head of his or her office for more than five (5) years and demonstrated proficiency in his or her office as suggested by the director of the Human Resource Development Office of the said institution. This criterion ensured that participants had enough experience on maintaining work-life balance, which would contribute to a deeper and more detailed exploration of their experiences.

Conversely, the study excluded program heads who are five years or below in service. This exclusion criterion was established to ensure a focused analysis of the program heads who have enough experience in maintaining work-life balance. Similarly, retired program heads were excluded to maintain homogeneity in the age group, as the researcher prefers those heads who are still working at the moment.

Moreover, it is crucial to recognize that participant withdrawal is a common and expected occurrence in qualitative research, often resulting from a range of personal or practical reasons. Understanding this, I approached participant management with a proactive mindset. Whenever a participant chose to withdraw from the study, their decision was fully respected, ensuring that their autonomy was upheld throughout the research process. To protect the integrity of the study and maintain ethical standards, I took meticulous measures to safeguard their confidentiality and privacy, ensuring that any personal information was handled with the utmost care.

Procedure

Prior to data collection, the researcher sought formal approval by submitting a letter to the College President of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges. Upon receiving approval, interviews were scheduled based on the participants' availability. The researcher used a prepared interview guide to ensure consistency across interviews while allowing participants to express their experiences freely and in their own words. Face-to-face interviews were conducted, during which questions were read twice for clarity, and participants were given sufficient time to reflect on their responses. To ensure accuracy and confidentiality, participants' responses were clarified during the interview, consent was obtained for audio recording, and pseudonyms such as "Participant 1" and "Participant 2" were used.

Following the interviews, the researcher transcribed the recorded discussions into text for detailed analysis. Participants were provided with the transcripts to verify the accuracy of their responses. The data were then analyzed by identifying patterns, coding significant keywords, and developing themes that reflected key aspects of the participants' experiences in relation to the research objective. These themes were used to interpret the data meaningfully and to draw conclusions. The systematic collection, transcription, and thematic

analysis of the data enabled the researcher to generate well-founded results and insights relevant to the study's focus.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this research was conducted rigorously and systematically in collaboration with a data analysis expert, using thematic analysis to identify patterns relevant to the research objectives. Thematic analysis followed six phases: familiarization with the data, generation of initial codes, identification and review of themes, definition and labeling of themes, and the production of an analytical report (Wilde et al., 2019). Verbatim transcription of recorded interviews was carried out to ensure accuracy, followed by translation into English. Transcripts were repeatedly reviewed to ensure familiarity with the data and to align emerging insights with the research questions and theoretical framework (McMullin, 2023; Mishra & Dey, 2022).

Coding involved assigning labels to relevant text segments that represented participants' challenges, coping strategies, and insights regarding work-life balance. A coding table was created in Microsoft Word, consisting of three columns: participants' responses, codes, and emergent themes. Through this process, initial codes were grouped to identify meaningful patterns, which were further refined into structured themes. These themes captured essential constructs within the data, contributing to a deeper understanding of the research problem (Akinyode & Khan, 2018).

The analysis culminated in an analytical report that presented key themes derived from the participants' responses. Tables were used to highlight major findings related to the challenges and coping mechanisms of program heads. Individual cases were discussed, and themes were compared against observation notes to validate the findings. This thematic approach enabled a comprehensive and contextually grounded interpretation of the data, offering valuable insights into the participants' lived experiences.

Ethical Considerations

This research strictly adhered to ethical standards outlined by the RMMC Ethics and Review Committee, ensuring the protection of participants' rights and welfare. Key ethical principles such as voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality were observed throughout the research process. Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, procedures, and their right to withdraw at any time without consequence. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, personal identifiers were withheld, and pseudonyms were used to maintain anonymity. Informed consent was obtained through signed forms and recorded documentation, ensuring participants' understanding and agreement. All recruitment and interview procedures were conducted with transparency and respect for participants' autonomy, ensuring minimal risk and prioritizing their physical, emotional, and social well-being.

Moreover, this research was free from any form of ethical misconduct, including plagiarism, fabrication, falsification, and conflict of interest. Plagiarism detection tools such as Grammarly were used to ensure originality, and all findings were accurately reported without data manipulation. The research was conducted independently, without external funding or influence, ensuring objectivity and impartiality. Participants were not misled or deceived, and no harm was inflicted. Additionally, permission to conduct the study was formally obtained from the institution, and all research activities were performed following approved protocols. The researcher's enrollment in RMMC's Graduate School and adherence to ethical guidelines ensured the credibility and integrity of this academic work.

Results and Discussion

This section provides a general summary of the participants based on the essential data acquired from the generated transcripts and audio recordings of the interview that unveil the work-life balance of the program heads.

Description of the Participants

The participants of this research were the five program heads coded as Manoy, Manay, Ate, Kuya, and Ante. All of them were Program Heads of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges during the academic year 2022-2023, and they met the qualifications set by the researcher in the inclusion criteria which qualified them to participate in the research. They were all included on the list of the suggested names endorsed by the director of the human resource office of Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges, who have served the institution for five years and beyond, and who are still serving the institution religiously.

P1 is a 48-year-old male and already married. He has continuously served the institution for 16 years as a program head. The participant was coded as Manoy.

P2 is a 46-year-old female and is married. She served three years as an instructor and has been continuously serving the institution for 16 years as a program head. The participant was coded as Manay.

P3 is a 27-year-old female and single. She has served the institution as a program head for 7 years. The participant was coded as Ate.

P4 is a 32-year-old male and single. He has been continuously serving the institution for 7 years as a program head. The participant was coded as Kuya.

P5 is a 35-year-old female and was married. She is continuously serving the school for 13 years. The participant was coded as Ante.

The Case of Manoy

Manoy is a 48-year-old male and already married. He has been continuously serving the institution for 16 years as a program head.

Table 1. *Challenges, coping strategies, and insights in the work-life balance of Manoy*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Theme</i>
<i>Challenges</i>	
Decisions got affected by emotions	Impaired Decision-Making
Problems at home being brought up at work	
Got influenced by emotions whenever at work	Decline in Health
Thoughts of physical health affected primarily with too much immersion to work	
Fear of getting sick because of work	
<i>Coping Strategies</i>	
Had a family to talk with about work and problems	Communicate Effectively
Shared ideas and updates about work to the family	
Perceived going to classes as an opportunity to do walk exercises	Find Time to Exercise
Did walking around the subdivision	
Found time to walk at least once a week	Take Breaks with Family
Felt solace and comfortability in giving time with family	
Made time to go to church every Sunday	Encourage Hobbies
Got reconnected with family and friends	
Trail riding on a motorcycle	Clear Work Priorities
Having a long ride as an outlet for stress	
Met friend occasionally for 'bonding time'	Time Management
Welcomed issues and concern and even problems, workplace, or at home as normal	
Faced and solved issues and problems at work	Prioritizing Health
Not minding issues derived from persons with 'crab mentality' and backstabbers at work	
Finished tasks on time	Lead by Example
Set time for paperwork, consultations and other related tasks	
Organized tasks to be done in the following week	Reconsider Priorities
<i>Insights</i>	
Considered health as a core balancing work and family	Practice of Self-Compassion
To become healthy always as a primary goal	
An opportunity to become mature	
Weighed situations evenly and looked at things in a macro perspective	
Higher positions come with great responsibility and accountability	
Considering planning things after retirement including having savings	
Setting priorities like time with family, friends and colleagues	
Not taking the role too seriously and by not going beyond what is expected of one to do	
Learned how to manage not being burn-out with work	

Challenges Experienced by Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Impaired Decision-Making

Decision-making is a process of making choices. Emotions can significantly disrupt and complicate the decision-making process by clouding judgment and causing people to make decisions that lack reason, logic, or rationality. Bringing personal matters, like home problems, into the workplace can cause individuals to lose focus on their jobs and tasks. When people are being influenced by emotions while working, whether from stress, frustration, or excitement, they may act impulsively instead of taking time to think through the best decision. This form of emotional influence has the power to greatly affect and complicate the decision-making process since it makes it extremely challenging to objectively think through choices, forecasting potential outcomes, or make objective decisions that are supportive of one's long-term aspirations and goals. Emotional labor and stress from overlapping responsibilities often impair decision-making and clarity in academic leadership roles (De Guzman et al., 2022; Burke & Noumair, 2020).

It really affected much. Because sometimes uhhh.. Whatever uhm..problems quote and quote that i might encounter in at home i-i-i-i brought here in my work so sometimes in my decision making in my uhhh.. Dealing with the clientele uhhh.. Na aapektuhan yun

Decline in Health

Continuous exposure to work can also heavily impact physical well-being since the stress of long hours, excessive pressure, and insufficient rest breaks down the body's immune system. The threat of illness caused by work usually arises because of the awareness that the demands of the job are wearing down one's well-being, which in turn causes anxiety and stress to further erode health. This vicious cycle can lead to a deterioration in overall physical health, which is evidenced by chronic fatigue, compromised immunity, insomnia, and more severe conditions such as cardiovascular disease or gastrointestinal problems. This combination of overwork, accompanied by the constant dread of illness, can escalate stress levels that fuel further physical deterioration (Nurlaili et al., 2021; De Guzman et al., 2022; Tan et al., 2023).

I have this fear that maybe the same thing will happen to me if I would be more engrossed in my work and not give attention to my health.

Coping Strategies of the Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Communicate Effectively

Having a family to discuss work and issues with offers a caring outlet where one is able to share their thoughts, worries, and experiences, which is essential for emotional health. Sharing information and news regarding work allows an individual to gain insight, get feedback, and even learn solutions to challenges they might not have thought of. Open communication reinforces relationships and provides emotional stability, which plays a vital role in resilience (Claessens & van Tartwijk, 2021; De Guzman et al., 2022).

Ahh Good that I have my family. With me that ahh.. I could have talk to my wife and my children. It ahh.. really helps a lot.

Find Time to Exercise

Perceiving going to classes as an opportunity to do walk exercises suggests that the individual was mindful of making use of available moments to stay active. Regular walking, even in small amounts, has been shown to relieve stress and improve physical well-being, especially among academic leaders with busy schedules (De Guzman et al., 2022).

Aside from walking up and down ahh. I see to it that uhhh at least thrice a week i could have a brisk walking uhh.. Inside the subdivision so that's the strategy perhaps I could uhh..ahh share especially for those who are so busy in their work.

Take Breaks with Family

Spending time with family and loved ones offers emotional relief and supports mental well-being. These breaks are not only restorative but vital in reinforcing personal relationships, as supported by family-centered coping frameworks (De Guzman et al., 2022; Lee & Boon, 2021).

I see to it that uhh.. I spend time with my family and another strategy, because in the family uhm..you can find..you can find uhm..peace, real peace di ba? -you can find uhhh yo-you are comfortable with the family.

Encourage Hobbies

Accentuating hobbies like motorcycle riding promotes a healthy mental well-being by offering adventure, relaxation, and meaningful social interactions which all contribute to reduced stress and enhanced life satisfaction. It serves as a valuable outlet for stress and offers a break from daily pressures. Manoy stated that engaging in long rides not only offers physical activity but also serves as a mental escape, allowing him to have a clear mind and to be recharged.

Accentuating hobbies like motorcycle riding promotes a healthy mental state. Engaging in leisure activities supports stress release and improves life satisfaction, as personal interests often serve as coping outlets for overwhelmed leaders (Nurlaili et al., 2021).

I have this hobby that uhh.. every- not every weekend if i have these these chance every Sunday I used to ride my uhh.. motorcycle I am really a ahh.. a fan of of and uhh long rides and even uhh even climbing ung ung trail ride yah.. yah.. that is my outlet of my my stress soo..

Clear Work Priorities

Having an adaptive mindset to see problems as opportunities for growth rather than obstacles is important to survive in life. Facing and solving issues at work shows a commitment to stay focused on the core responsibilities, to prioritize tasks efficiently, and to address challenges in constructive way.

Having an adaptive mindset to view problems as growth opportunities enables leaders to maintain mental clarity. Ignoring toxic workplace behaviors and staying focused on key duties enhances mental strength and job performance (Tan et al., 2023).

If there is this problem? I- yes i-ne encounter ko as normal. Ok. Yeah i did not dwell too much and uhh.. I welcome i welcome issues and concern and even problem, work place, or at home because i consider them as at normal. Uhh.. We should have to uhh face all of those if you want to solve those issues and problems you have to face them. We should not be uhh.. Ano going away from them.

Time Management

Being able to finish tasks on time demonstrates a strong work ethic and the ability to meet deadlines. It further reflects an awareness of proper management of schedule to avoid unnecessary stress.

Effective time management avoids burnout. Intentionally scheduling paperwork and consultations allows academic leaders to preserve energy for other areas of life (García-Morales et al., 2022).

Now, I tend to give balance for time, work, family, and friends.

Insights of Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Prioritizing Health

Giving value to health as the core aspect of managing work and family means recognizing it as the foundation for performing well in both areas. Leaders who prioritize their physical and mental well-being are more equipped to manage stress and remain effective (Williams & van der Westhuizen, 2021; De Guzman et al., 2022).

Manoy considered health as a primary goal. He made intentional decisions about exercise, diet, and rest because he understood that maintaining physical health and mental well-being is not just a personal benefit but a key to thrive in all aspects of life.

Among the three, my main priority is really the health. I have accepted that already. Sometimes, I am thankful that I could do walking once or twice a week which was so different compare to my previous experience when I was still not a dean.

Lead by Example

Dealing situations maturely and having a macro perspective shows that the individual recognizes the broader implications of their actions, which is essential for effective leadership. Manoy weighted situations evenly which demonstrate thoughtfulness and fairness that inspired others to approach challenges with the same level of consideration. As higher positions often involved greater responsibility, their actions, decisions, and attitudes may influence the team, fostering a culture of responsibility, accountability, and respect. Maturely handling difficult situations helps foster a healthy organizational culture. Leaders who model balance and emotional maturity often positively influence their teams (Delos Santos & Balderas, 2020).

I see to it to weigh the situation and not be affected easily. That is why whenever you have problem, it helps a lot. I accept it and find solution to solve it. It taught me a lot.

Reconsider Priorities

Planning things after retirement is necessary. Manoy reflected a long-term vision where he saw financial security as essential for a comfortable and stress-free future. This foresight had helped him reassess his priorities and ensure that time and resources are allocated wisely.

Planning life after retirement and focusing on long-term well-being—both financial and emotional—help leaders redirect energy to what truly matters. This kind of forward-thinking promotes intentional living (Nurlaili et al., 2021).

You need to prepare. Like ten years or fifteen years from now, you need to prepare of what you will do after retirement. I am now in that stage. I realized that I need to save because I wanted to see myself to be financially stable at the age of 61 or 62 because I am too generous. But I changed my perspective because as what they have said, the more that we age, the more that we limit our activities, even in finances.

Practice of Self-Compassion

Manoy learned to not take the role too seriously, and refrained from going beyond what is expected. He recognized the importance of setting boundaries and not overcommitting, which is an essential part of practicing self-compassion. Practicing this mindset helps prevent overexertion and the tendency to internalize excessive pressure that would help achieve a healthier balance between work and personal life.

Avoiding over-commitment and recognizing one's limits are essential acts of self-compassion. Leaders who internalize this mindset are less prone to burnout and more emotionally resilient (García-Morales et al., 2022).

Just do not take the responsibilities of a program director too seriously. What I mean is, you need to stick on the duties and responsibilities assigned to you. Do not go beyond what is required.

The Case of Manay

Manay is a 46-year-old female and was married. She served three years as an instructor and has been continuously serving the institution for 16 years as a program head.

Table 2. *Challenges, coping strategies, and insights in the work-life balance of Manay*

Challenges	Clustered Themes	Emergent Theme
High turnover of faculty members		Turnover Rate
Faculty members leaving the institution		
Misunderstood by colleagues		Being Misunderstood
Assumed not catering nor listening to the suggestions of workmates		
Problems taking good care of a sickly mother		Family Problems
Got emotional when minding the concerns of the family		
Coping Strategies		

Consulted colleagues regarding the actions and decisions made	Foster Supportive Work Environment
Let members decide and intervene only when problems occurred	
Found time to spend quality time with family	Take Breaks with Family
Went out for a trip with family every Sunday	
Put God in the center of everything	Seeking Religious Support
Having trust to God	
Not bringing problems at the school nor at the office	Clear Work Priorities
Never got to work nor the giving of service affected	
Considered facing problems positively	Functional-Problem Solving
Treated problems and struggles to learn something	
Perceived experiences of losing something to gain something	
Used time at work to finish and comply with the tasks and gave time for the family	Time Management
Arrived to work ahead of schedule	
<i>Insights</i>	
To treat problems always positively	Practice of Self-Compassion
Look at problems with solutions	
Be more sensitive and emphatic with the faculty and colleagues	Lead by Example
To get considerate with the actions of the colleagues	
Being cautious with the words to utter	Fostering Thoughtful Communication
Treat problems calmly	
Good words can result in positive outcome	
To be calm on how to treat colleagues	

Challenges Experienced by Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Turnover Rate

Turnover rate is a form of dissatisfaction in the working condition. The possible reasons are no scope for career development, poor compensation, or a bad organizational culture. The recurrent faculty departures may cause an interrupted continuity on teaching, research work, and institutional functioning in general. Manay mentioned that her faculty members left the institution which could lead to recruitment and training costs, reduced quality of education, and institutional reputation. In academic contexts, high turnover is often linked to burnout, organizational strain, and poor support structures (De Guzman et al., 2022; Burke & Noumair, 2020).

Because before, 5 years ago, the turnover rate of my faculty members is very high. No one wanted to stay here. Most of them really wanted to leave. So basically, I lose my faculty members.

Being Misunderstood

Being misunderstood by colleagues could lead to a feeling of isolation, frustration, or even resentment, as the person may feel that their efforts are not recognized or valued. This situation could create a communication gap, where intentions may be misinterpreted, and could strain relationships within the team. Being misunderstood often stems from a lack of clear communication, differing expectations, or cultural differences that may hinder collaboration and teamwork (Lee & Boon, 2021; Claessens & van Tartwijk, 2021).

Yes, I ask her. But the impact for her is that, I am authoritative.

Family Problems

Problems are always present everywhere—even in families. Manay mentioned that she experienced these family problems which caused her to become emotional. She encountered issues in taking care of her elderly, sickly mother—both physically and emotionally exhausting. Filipino academic leaders frequently report emotional strain when balancing caregiving responsibilities at home and leadership roles at work (De Guzman et al., 2022; Lazaro & Manzano, 2021).

I now have a problem with my elderly mother who is now 87 years old. She is sickly which made very disturbed and emotional.

Coping Strategies of the Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Foster Supportive Work Environment

Showing trust in the team's abilities could help build confidence. By stepping in only when issues arise, leaders promote autonomy and mutual respect. Encouraging participatory decision-making has been found to reduce role overload and strengthen team morale (Tan et al., 2023; García-Morales et al., 2022).

As she consults her colleagues regarding the actions and decisions, she demonstrates a collaborative approach, where her colleagues would feel that their input is valued. This would further nurture a sense of inclusivity and mutual respect, allowing her colleagues to feel heard and empowered.

I let my faculty decide. I let them make decisions. If in case, that they may encounter problems on their decisions, that is the time that I would intervene. So, I wanted them to realize that they have the freedom to make decisions. That is my way of empowering them to

become better and to do what do they think to become best for their students.

Take Breaks with Family

Spending quality time with family is an effort to prioritize personal connections despite a busy schedule. Manay's Sunday trips reflect an understanding of rest as a vital strategy for balance. As highlighted in Southeast Asian contexts, family-centered breaks help recharge energy and relieve stress (De Guzman et al., 2022; Lee & Boon, 2021).

You can spend time with your family whenever you are available. It only happens during Saturday and Sunday. On Sundays we go to church, and I make sure that I go to an outing with my children.

Seeking Religious Support

Putting God at the center underscores reliance on faith for resilience and emotional strength. Spiritual practices have been shown to support psychological well-being and foster purpose during professional hardship (Burke & Noumair, 2020; De Guzman et al., 2022). Manay seeks religious support to find a sense of purpose, calmness, and emotional stability, especially when she is in the midst of encountering uncertainties. It strengthens her and relieves her stress, adversity, and gives her wisdom in making difficult decisions in her life.

I really put God at the center of my life. Because when God is there in you, you can balance the adversities in your life.

Clear Work Priorities

Maintaining a strong boundary between personal and professional life is critical to effective functioning. Manay's ability to set this separation reflects emotional maturity and professionalism. Emotional compartmentalization is a known coping strategy among educational leaders (Williams & van der Westhuizen, 2021; García-Morales et al., 2022).

In arriving here, I really make sure to disregard my problems at home, I focus on my work. Yes, I am really like that, because if you are affected by your problems, you may express it to your students or colleagues. But I do not do that. Actually, they do not know my struggles, they will just know it after few months.

Functional-Problem Solving

Having an optimistic attitude enables constructive responses to stress. Functional problem-solving is central to leadership resilience and often associated with post-crisis growth in academic settings (Claessens & van Tartwijk, 2021; De Guzman et al., 2022). She even viewed experiences of losing something to gain something which highlights the balance in functional problem-solving. She acknowledges that sacrifice and setbacks may be necessary to achieve long-term success.

I am an optimistic kind of person. Whatever problem may come, I take it positively.

Time Management

Effective time use allows for productivity without personal sacrifice. Manay's ability to complete tasks during work hours reflects time discipline—a trait correlated with lower burnout rates among program heads (García-Morales et al., 2022; Nurlaili et al., 2021). Through this, she does not only maintain productivity but also allow herself to have time for her family. This strategy allowed her to complete her tasks on the designated work hours, leaving her personal time free for meaningful family interactions. Additionally, arriving at work ahead of schedule underscored her proactive attitude towards

When I am at work, I really maximize to do my tasks, while when I am at home, I assure that my time is for my family. I mean, I use my time at work for work, and at home for my family

Insights of Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Practice Self-Compassion

Manay's reflection on problem-solving as a mindset shift supports what scholars identify as self-compassion—treating oneself kindly during setbacks. Leaders who engage in reflective reframing are better equipped for sustained roles (García-Morales et al., 2022; De Guzman et al., 2022). Instead of dwelling on the negative aspects of challenges, she focused on finding practical solutions, offering herself patience and grace in the process.

Sir, because if you have problem at work or in your family and you focused on it and not on the solutions, you will really consider it as a big deal. But if you will think for a solution and possible reasons why it happened, your attention will be diverted and you will be able to take the problem lightly.

Lead by Example

Sensitivity and empathy create psychologically safe environments. Manay's modeling of calm leadership builds team trust, which is essential for collaborative culture and effective conflict resolution (Delos Santos & Balderas, 2020).

Additionally, she considers being considerate among the actions of her colleagues to reinforce the idea of leading by example. It is a way of encouraging others to act similarly. She believed that when leaders show consideration, it would foster a work environment where everyone would feel valued, heard, and respected that could enhance their teamwork, morale, and productivity.

When you are calm, you can penetrate more the hearts of your people. It is like the words that you share to them would really touch their hearts which does not happen when you deal with them aggressively.

Fostering Thoughtful Communication

Careful language use and calm delivery are part of mindful communication practices. Program heads who communicate respectfully foster collaboration and prevent misinterpretations (Lee & Boon, 2021; Williams & van der Westhuizen, 2021).

Manay knew that good words could lead to positive outcomes, fostering trust and cooperation. She is convinced that how she treats her colleagues would encourage a respectful and supportive work environment. It is one of the best ways in improving collaboration and relationships.

I became sensitive. So, I really choose my words because when I know that when I can utter hurtful words to them, I cannot undo it anymore, it would penetrate their hearts. I am already in that part, that is why I am very careful of the words that I say.

The Case of Ate

Ate is a 27-year-old female and single. She has been continuously serving the institution as a program head for 7 years.

Table 3. Challenges, coping strategies, and insights in the work-life balance of Ate

Clustered Themes	Emergent Theme
<i>Challenges</i>	
Too focused with work on beating with the deadlines	Multitasking
Attended graduate school classes during weekends and working on office reports at the same time	
Difficulty in dealing with people and immediate heads	Work Environment
Challenged with the work environment with heads	
<i>Coping Strategies</i>	
Found time to relax and rest	Take Breaks
Never forget to enjoy when time allows	Encourage Hobbies
Learned to cook as a new hobby	
Found time to bond with friends occasionally	Clear Work Priorities
Classified tasks as to what to do first and next	
Set priorities with related tasks and avoid multitasking	Time Management
Separated work life and personal life.	
Minded tasks during office hours and not bringing paper works at home	
Set goals and schedules to finish tasks within the time frame	Practice of Self-Compassion
<i>Insights</i>	
Dealing stress takes time to process and to overcome	
Still consider to be productive despite the stressful environment	Prioritizing Health
To really learned lessons from the mistakes before	
Protect one's peace	
Never to sacrifice health	
Value health first and find time to sleep	

Challenges Experienced by Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Multitasking

Juggling act between various duties is what they call as multitasking. Ate was too focused on work to beat deadlines. She demonstrated strong time management skills. Yet, it requires an ability of careful prioritization to switch between tasks ensuring that the quality or attention to detail would not be sacrificed. She even elaborated this skill by attending to graduate school classes during weekends while simultaneously working on office reports. According to De Guzman et al. (2022), multitasking among academic leaders, particularly those pursuing graduate studies, often demands advanced time management and strong personal discipline to avoid burnout and maintain productivity.

Before, I experienced to sleep at 12 AM when I was still schooling. It is usually Friday that I sleep at 12 AM and I attended my Masteral classes at 7AM during Saturday. Most often, I only have 1 hour of sleep since I wake up at 1 AM to take a bath and prepare myself since I will still travel to Davao. I still even work during the travel to make sure that I will be productive and beat deadlines.

Work-Environment

Communication gaps, differing expectations, and various learning styles make dealing with people and immediate heads challenging.

These challenges made Ate stressed, making it hard for her to collaborate effectively. Additionally, being challenged with the work environment with heads is a loop hole in the potential issues in leadership or management that would possibly affect the overall work culture.

A positive and supportive work environment is essential for fostering collaboration, engagement, and productivity. Work strain often stems not from workload itself, but from toxic dynamics or unresolved conflicts, which directly impact leader performance and emotional well-being (Claessens & van Tartwijk, 2021; De Guzman et al., 2022).

Working environment is a challenge because you will really struggle if you do not know how to deal with the people. Although the workload is just easy, but if you do not know how to deal with the working environment, or if it is really toxic, then you cannot really do your work rightly.

Coping Strategies of the Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Take Breaks

Relaxing or resting is a form of self-care because it allows individuals to recharge amidst a busy schedule. These breaks allowed Ate to recover physically and mentally, preventing burnout and improving overall performance. Taking breaks is one of the essential strategies highlighted by academic leaders to sustain long-term engagement without collapsing under chronic stress (De Guzman et al., 2022).

If you already felt burdened in working, then rest. Give yourself a time to relax until you will feel good, then you may continue working.

Encourage Hobbies

Encouraging hobbies could create opportunities for self-expression, relaxation, and personal growth, enriching Ate's life outside of work and fostering a well-rounded, fulfilling lifestyle. Hobbies like cooking or social outings serve as effective mental resets that help leaders maintain emotional balance and a sense of identity beyond their professional roles (Nurlaili et al., 2021).

If there are occasions, I and my friends could decide to go for an outing although it is not part of our calendar schedule. Then, when I am at home, I could still cook.

Clear Work Priorities

Having the skill to classify tasks based on urgency and importance is vital for staying focused. By setting priorities and grouping related tasks, Ate avoided cognitive overload. This aligns with Burke and Noumair's (2020) finding that leaders who practice task segmentation and boundary-setting manage stress more effectively and maintain better performance.

You need to separate work life and your personal life. It is like a separation of the state and the government, so do not really bring your work at home.

Time Management

Creating specific objectives and adhering to structured timelines helped Ate finish tasks without bringing work home. De Guzman et al. (2022) highlighted that academic leaders who manage time well are less prone to emotional fatigue and are more capable of maintaining their work-life boundaries.

It is almost three years that I started leaving my tasks at work. If I could not finish my task and it is already 5 PM, I really leave my tasks because home is really for rest.

Insights of Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Practice of Self-Compassion

Dealing with stress requires patience and kindness toward oneself. Ate acknowledged the importance of not rushing healing and not blaming oneself for imperfections. Self-compassion is a protective factor against burnout and emotional exhaustion in leadership roles (García-Morales et al., 2022).

Protect your peace, that is my mantra. First, you really need to consider your peace. If the position is not peaceful at all, or if you do cannot handle it, then find a way. I am not saying that you should resign immediately, find a way to control it. You need to learn how to handle it.

Prioritizing Health

Valuing health as non-negotiable was central to Ate's work-life decisions. Adequate sleep and rest were prioritized even during intense schedules, reflecting awareness that performance depends on health. Williams and van der Westhuizen (2021) argued that sustainable leadership requires viewing physical and emotional health as a leadership asset, not a personal luxury.

As I have shared when I travel to Davao. Like, I do not want to sacrifice my health.

The Case of Kuya

Kuya is a 32-year-old male and single. He has been continuously serving the institution for 7 years as a program head.

Table 4. *Challenges, coping strategies, and insights in the work-life balance of Kuya*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Theme</i>
<i>Challenges</i>	
Too focused with work on beating with the deadlines	
Attended graduate school classes during weekends and working on office reports at the same time	Multitasking
Difficulty in dealing with people and immediate heads	Work Environment
Challenged with the work environment with heads	
<i>Coping Strategies</i>	
Found time to relax and rest	Take Breaks
Never forget to enjoy when time allows	
Learned to cook as a new hobby	Encourage Hobbies
Found time to bond with friends occasionally	
Classified tasks as to what to do first and next	Clear Work Priorities
Set priorities with related tasks and avoid multitasking	
Separated work life and personal life	
Minded tasks during office hours and not bringing paper works at home	Time Management
Set goals and schedules to finish tasks within the time frame	
<i>Insights</i>	
Dealing stress takes time to process and to overcome	Practice of Self-Compassion
Still consider to be productive despite the stressful environment	
To really learned lessons from the mistakes before	
Protect one's peace	
Never to sacrifice health	Prioritizing Health
Value health first and find time to sleep	

Challenges Experienced by Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Failed Commitments

Failed appearance on planned commitments and meetings with friends often led to the impression of not taking appointments seriously due to other priorities, making friends feel neglected and undervalued. When prioritizing work commitments became more important, the struggle showed, forcing arranged plans with friends to get cancelled. According to De Guzman et al. (2022), program heads often experience guilt and emotional strain when professional demands interfere with personal time, resulting in missed opportunities that can affect social connections and personal well-being. These unmet obligations highlighted the necessity for improved time management, defined priorities, and a greater focus on preserving significant personal connections.

I was able to say 'yes' to my friends—like when they invite me to join them or hang out, I was able to say yes. And then all of a sudden, there would be emergency meetings or unexpected activities at school or, you know, at CHED, something like that. I kind of struggle to inform my friends about it.

Lack of Confidence

Hesitations when accepting an offered job were a sign of being unsure of their abilities to handle a leadership role. This precariousness was exacerbated by self-doubt and fear of not meeting expectations. As reported by García-Morales et al. (2022), this lack of self-assurance is common among newly promoted academic leaders, who often experience imposter syndrome and fear of failure. These feelings may deteriorate one's leadership capacity and decision-making under pressure.

I really have my doubts in accepting this position because you know, I really can't find myself as a person who is handling a program. Maybe because I don't really have that confidence with me, with myself na kaya ko.

Work Adjustments

One's responsibilities as a department head vastly differed from those of faculty members. The shift from teaching to leadership created additional burdens and adjustments that were often overwhelming. As De Guzman et al. (2022) found, program heads encounter difficulties maintaining their pre-leadership routines such as exercise or hobbies, contributing to stress and reduced self-care. The struggle to adjust with work and balanced priorities just emphasized how difficult it was to manage responsibilities added while still working on existing obligations. It might be challenging for the individual to find the time and energy when the new leadership roles and previous responsibilities both collided, resulted to being stretched too thin. Lack of attention to personal hobbies because of these newly found responsibilities and its demands, might cause lesser room for personal interests and self-care. Lack of balance between these responsibilities and self-care would lead to stress and burnout if not acknowledged.

I can really say that it's too far, too far from my previous ahhh...life simply because when I was still a plain- ahhm.. teacher in junior high school, I have a lot of time in terms of, you know, my own personal life. I have a lot of time to do Zumba. That's really my- somehow I am known for that, doing Zumba in the malls.

Coping Strategies of the Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Take Breaks with Family

Allocated time for family activities reflected a deliberate effort to bond and recover from workplace pressures. This aligns with Nurlaili et al. (2021), who emphasized that frequent family engagement helps academic leaders maintain emotional balance and enhance well-being. Movies watched didn't only offer breaks from being pressured from work and responsibilities, but also served as an important moment, creating shared memories of togetherness. A time with family spent every Sunday strengthened this idea, emphasizing how significant it was to set aside some time and dedicate some of it each week connected with love ones. Be it through activities like eating, conversations, or hiking. Devoted time bonding with family helped strengthened relationships, reduced stress, and promoted overall well-being.

There are times when I really set a schedule, like, okay, I'll have a movie marathon with my family. Because to tell you honestly, I know that they're really the ones most affected.

Communicate Effectively

Refused invitations weren't a sign of impoliteness, but it demonstrated the ability to communicate and learned about one's limits in a respectful and considerate way, both were essential personally and professionally. Declined invitations without offending required a balanced honesty and tact, making sure that the relationship built didn't break, ensuring that they understood the intentions behind it. The importance of setting boundaries, included saying no, further emphasized how accepted cases of the need to decline was one of them. Saying "no" respectfully reflects the importance of boundary-setting and assertive communication. Claessens and van Tartwijk (2021) explained that effective communication helps protect leaders' emotional bandwidth and prevents social strain.

Because of this position, I had able to accept, I had able to internalize, I had able to have the reality that there are really times that you need to say no.

Clear Work Priorities

Writing task lists and distinguishing urgent work illustrate strong organizational skills. De Guzman et al. (2022) reported that task structuring helps reduce cognitive burden, increase focus, and ensure timely completion of work without sacrificing quality. Compliance in completing the duties according to the urgency further brought out the essence of proper prioritization. Concentrated on what was needed to be done, the most urgent or the most critical, it allowed one to make better use of available time and avoided last-minute pinches or unwinding work. It also helped met deadlines while simultaneously relieved anxiety by slicing big chunks into smaller, manageable ones.

The most effective strategy for me is, uhm... I write down what I need to do within the week—what my priorities are and what are of less priority.

Time Management

More time to managed various tasks and the advantaged of being single in status suggested, that being the latter could provide flexibility and less complicated personal commitments, which could be geared to focused more on managed responsibilities and pursued personal goals. Freed from the often-constraining demands of scheduled related to family obligations or relationships duties, singles were able to freely allocate their time across various work-related activities as well as efforts devoted to personal development.

Furthermore, setting a timeline through a planner or calendar notes using mobile phones emphasized the need for organized tasks and effective time management. The use of planners and digital tools like tablets or phones to manage time shows how leaders sustain efficiency amid competing demands. According to Tan et al. (2023), digital planning tools are critical for balancing institutional work with personal development among academic leaders.

I really have a planner, I have my phone, and I have my tablet—those three, so that whatever is on hand, I get reminded.

Insights of Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Lead by Example

Becoming mature in decision-making indicated an individual's development of the ability to make considered, responsible choices, particularly when confronted with a problem. A matured leader was not impulsive, but examined the consequences of their decisions for herself and others, exhibited wisdom and insight. This maturity in decision-making served as an example for others, demonstrated the significance of being careful and contemplative in leadership situations.

Additionally, understanding that every day was an opportunity to learn and improve aligned with the concept of leading by example.

It exhibited a continuous improvement mindset and openness to new ideas, which inspired those around them to followed suit. By embodying a dedication to growth and learning, the individual not only improved themselves but also motivated others to adopt these principles. This ongoing personal development and willingness to learn, especially in leadership roles, promoted an environment in which people were encouraged to grow, accepted responsibility, and led with maturity.

Maturity wise, this position helped me to..to be mature in terms of decision making, I see it as an opportunity in terms of you know balancing my time, both in the purpose of your study, work, and personal life balance no.

Task as a Learning Opportunity

Viewing of work as bread and butter demonstrated a realization of work's importance in provided financial security, but it also implied a mindset in which work was valued beyond simply generating money. It was viewed as a means of personal and professional development, where obstacles overcame and abilities acquired contributed to one's entire evolution.

Seeing work as an opportunity to progress supported this mindset, encouraged people to view tasks, no matter how mundane or complex, as stepping to self-improvement and skilled development. Williams and van der Westhuizen (2021) stressed that academic leaders who view work as a personal growth opportunity perform better and exhibit higher resilience.

I don't want to somehow give disappointments to the management simply because this institution really helped me to become who I am right now.

Reconsider Priorities

Understanding one's priorities is having a clear grasp of what was genuinely important, whether it was family, job, health, or personal development, which allowed people to stay, focused and avoided distractions. Delos Santos and Balderas (2020) noted that Filipino educational leaders often reassess priorities to align work with family obligations and financial goals.

Learning to make more practical selections represented a change toward grounded choices that took into account current circumstances as well as long-term ambitions. Individuals could make better informed and sustainable decisions by regularly reevaluated and revised priorities, ensuring that their activities were both purposeful and realistic.

But again, I'm working not just for money. That's part. Practically speaking, we're working for money because we need that. We have bills, we have someone to help, most especially our family.

The Case of Ante

Ante is a 35-year-old female and is married. She has continuously served the school for 13 years.

Table 5. *Challenges, coping strategies, and insights in the work-life balance of Ante*

<i>Clustered Themes</i>	<i>Emergent Theme</i>
<i>Challenges</i>	
Had to attend to the medications of the son	Family Problems
Stood as a single parent in the absence of the husband	
Being misunderstood by relatives who demanded for one's time	
Priorities and necessities take for granted	Failed Commitments
Unable to attend to the concerns of the son	
Had to take good care of the family members and attended to the concerns of the work during approved leave	Multitasking
Took updates regarding work and attending to post graduate school studies	
<i>Coping Strategies</i>	
Found time to bond with the son and enough sleep	Take Breaks with Family
Skipped trips to spend time with the child	Foster a Supportive Work Environment
Shared experiences with people who also understand one's situation	
Motivations from workmates who shared strategies about the work	Develop Emotional Awareness
Learned to manage and change moods when needed	
Shifted the mood immediately when arriving at work or at home	Seeking Religious Support
Being emotionally stable	
Ask guidance and protection from God	Time Management
When seemed helpless, miracles happen when one prays	
Required to have time management	Practice of Self-Compassion
Proper time management by not bringing work at home	
<i>Insights</i>	
Learned to practice how to manage the situation fully	Practice of Self-Compassion
Turn difficulty to motivation to accomplish tasks and pursue higher degree	
Pushed through for the better future of the son	Reconsider Priorities
Invested in learning to earn a living for a growing family	

Challenges Experienced by Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Family Problems

Understanding and addressing family problems requires recognizing the deep emotional impact these issues can have on personal well-being and productivity. Ante acknowledged these challenges instead of suppressing them. As De Guzman et al. (2022) observed, many academic leaders struggle with caregiving duties that intersect with professional roles, often resulting in emotional exhaustion if not addressed. Open communication, empathy, and seeking external support helped Ante ease tensions and strengthen family bonds. Proactively dealing with family difficulties also allowed her to compartmentalize her obligations more successfully.

I stand as a somewhat like a single parent because my husband also works away from us.

Failed Commitments

Recognizing failed commitments is not yielding, it is moving in the direction of accountability and growth. Scheduled reflection on the reasons for failed commitments let Ante identify patterns such as overcommitting or shifting priorities. According to Tan et al. (2023), conflicting schedules and institutional pressures frequently hinder program heads from honoring personal commitments, leading to emotional distress and guilt. Embracing these failures enabled her to transform emotional strain into resilience and motivation.

Some of my necessities are actually taken for granted, like having time for my son. Sometimes, I arrive home and he's already asleep, then when I leave home, he's still asleep.

Multitasking

In a world that moves at a fast pace, multitasking may feel like a necessity. Balancing too many things at once—even with preparation—often leads to mistakes and overwhelm. Claessens and van Tartwijk (2021) noted that multitasking under pressure reduces productivity and increases burnout among academic administrators. Ante's awareness of her limitations helped her realign focus with purpose and care.

I need to file a leave, then even when you are in the hospital, some concerns will be uh still uhm reach to you via phone calls or even text because those were also important.

Coping Strategies of the Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Take Breaks with Family

Spending time with family is one of the most important resets from daily pressures. As Nurlaili et al. (2021) emphasized, family-centered routines help academic leaders reduce emotional strain and reaffirm personal values over institutional demands. Ante's choice to prioritize time with her son reflects this restorative effect.

That's why I prefer not to go when may outings especially during holidays that i prefer to stay with my son.

Foster a Supportive Work Environment

A healthy workplace environment improves emotional well-being and organizational success. According to De Guzman et al. (2022), institutional support and peer understanding significantly ease work-related pressure among program heads. Ante's experience confirms that feeling heard and encouraged at work makes stress more manageable.

It's good that there's people like that whom you can share your experience and they can also understand your situation. They do not demotivate you, rather they motivate you in fact.

Develop Emotional Awareness

Being emotionally aware—understanding how feelings influence behavior—strengthens relationships and decision-making. Burke and Noumair (2020) pointed out that emotionally mature leaders better navigate complex workplace dynamics, leading to calmer and more thoughtful management. Ante's growth in this area helped her stabilize and refocus.

*When i arrive home, it's good – i can change my mood, i can shift immediately. Unlike before, i think i am now more emotionally stable than before *chuckles*.*

Seeking Religious Support

Faith offers comfort and clarity during personal and professional trials. Delos Santos and Balderas (2020) observed that Filipino academic leaders often rely on spiritual practices to maintain inner peace and resilience in leadership. Ante's prayers grounded her, especially during uncertain or emotionally draining moments.

You have to ask guidance and then protection from God whenever things turn out to be for you to be there, you seem to be helpless. So I only ask that to help me and there are many miracle- not just an ordinary thing but for you it means a lot

Time Management

Managing tasks efficiently and avoiding spillover into personal time is key to work-life balance. As De Guzman et al. (2022) stressed, time management skills allow program heads to perform effectively at work while preserving space for self-care and family. Ante's discipline in completing tasks during work hours protected her mental health.

I do not bring work at home because i know what to prioritize. I know what to prioritize so I... I don't have to work; I don't have to bring my work in the office at home because I have to do it in here.

Insights of Program Heads on Work-life Balance

Practice of Self-Compassion

Learning to be kind to yourself during tough times is an important skill. Self-compassion encourages leaders to remain resilient without self-blame. García-Morales et al. (2022) found that those who acknowledge struggles with grace, rather than self-criticism, are more capable of maintaining emotional strength under pressure. Ante exemplified this by choosing calm over overexertion.

Again, I do not stress myself too much.

Reconsider Priorities

Reevaluating priorities helps align daily choices with long-term goals. Williams and van der Westhuizen (2021) emphasized that goal reorientation—especially driven by family or economic motivation—is a powerful source of purpose for academic leaders. Ante's focus on completing her degree illustrates her pursuit of growth for her family's future. By shifting focus towards long-term goals, people can stay motivated, even when short-term challenges arise, knowing that the sacrifices made now will lead to a brighter future.

A good investment for me that at the same time I'm learning. Who knows after 3 years or 4 years I could finish because God will permit (inaudible) I could finish my... my... degree. So what motivates me is because of that reason, economic reason.

Conclusions

The findings underscore the vital role institutions must play in supporting academic program heads in managing work-life balance. Given the emotional and physical challenges highlighted, it is essential for organizations to implement wellness programs that include stress management workshops, mental health services, and initiatives promoting physical activity. Moreover, time management training and policies that support healthy work boundaries—such as discouraging after-hours work—can help leaders manage multiple demands without compromising their well-being. Fostering a supportive culture through open communication, peer mentoring, and leadership development programs that emphasize emotional intelligence and resilience further empowers program heads to maintain effectiveness while preventing burnout.

Future research should examine the long-term impact of coping strategies such as time management, emotional regulation, and boundary setting on leaders' well-being and job performance. Comparative studies across different institutional types and demographic variables can provide deeper insight into how context shapes coping effectiveness. Additionally, researchers are encouraged to design and evaluate structured interventions focused on emotional intelligence and resilience to enhance leadership sustainability. Overall, this study revealed that program heads face significant pressures that affect their health, decision-making, and professional relationships. Through strategies like self-care and prioritizing health, they manage to cope; however, institutional support remains critical. Schools must invest in wellness initiatives and leadership support systems to help program heads balance their professional duties with personal well-being, ensuring both effective leadership and institutional success.

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Affiliations and Corresponding Information

Hubert Von V. Bachicha, LPT

Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges – Philippines

Noe P. Garcia, PhD, RGC, LPT

Ramon Magsaysay Memorial Colleges – Philippines