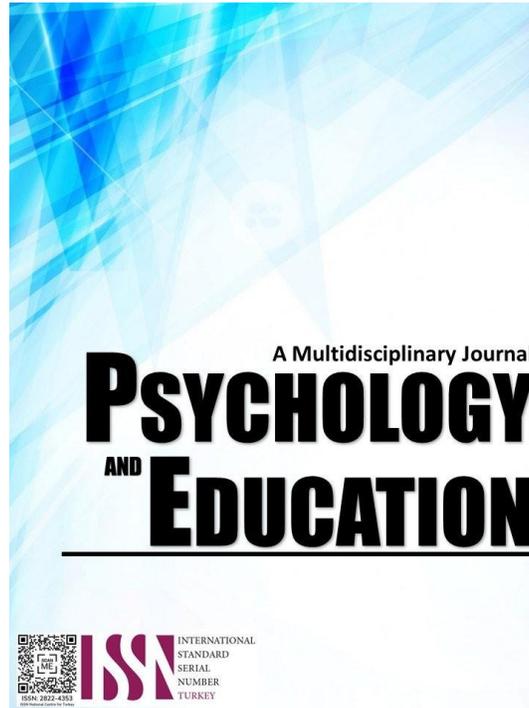


**THE PULSE OF THE PUBLIC OFFICE: A PHENOMENOGRAPHIC
STUDY ON CONCEPTIONS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE
AMONG DEPED NON-TEACHING EMPLOYEES**



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The Pulse of the Public Office: A Phenomenographic Study on Conceptions of Work-Life Balance Among DepEd Non-Teaching Employees

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Abstract

Work-life balance is a critical issue in public sector organizations, particularly in complex, demanding environments such as the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd). This phenomenographic study investigates the qualitatively different ways non-teaching personnel in DepEd conceptualize and experience work-life balance amid the bureaucratic context characterized by hierarchical supervision, standardized workload expectations, and evolving digital work practices. Eighteen purposively selected administrative employees from various DepEd regional and division offices in Luzon participated in the study by providing detailed written reflections through a structured interview guide. The analysis revealed five distinct conceptions of work-life balance: strict separation between work and personal life, which emphasizes clear boundaries and segmentation; role prioritization, involving ongoing negotiation and dynamic adjustment among competing work and family demands; integration and flexibility, reflecting a blended approach facilitated by modern communication technologies; reliance on social support systems, highlighting the importance of empathetic supervisors, collegial networks, and family assistance; and holistic well-being, a comprehensive perspective that views balance as nurturing physical, emotional, and psychological health. These findings highlight the complexity and diversity of work-life balance experiences among administrative personnel who must manage multiple roles in a bureaucratically constrained and digitally evolving work environment. The study underscores the importance of designing flexible and context-sensitive human resource policies and workplace interventions that acknowledge these varied experiences. In particular, supervisory training in empathetic leadership, the establishment of peer support mechanisms, comprehensive wellness programs, and clear digital boundary-setting policies are crucial strategies to support sustainable work-life integration. By providing rich, context-specific insights into an often-overlooked segment of the public education workforce, this study contributes to the broader discourse on work-life balance in public administration. It offers actionable recommendations to enhance employee well-being, job satisfaction, and service delivery effectiveness within DepEd. Tool.

Keywords: *work-life balance, phenomenography, Philippine Department of Education, non-teaching personnel, boundary management, public sector, employee well-being, digital work modalities*

Introduction

In the contemporary landscape of public administration, work-life balance has emerged as a critical concern, particularly for government employees working in sectors with significant societal impact. Among these, the education sector holds a uniquely influential position, shaping future generations and directly contributing to national development. Within the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd), the focus has often been placed on the teaching personnel as frontline agents of learning. However, non-teaching employees—comprising administrative, clerical, logistical, and operational staff—are equally essential to the delivery and sustainability of educational services. Despite their vital contributions, the lived experiences of these non-teaching personnel in balancing their professional and personal lives remain relatively understudied, especially from qualitative perspectives that capture the depth and complexity of their realities.

The organizational context within which these employees operate is distinctly bureaucratic. Hierarchical structures mark DepEd's administrative framework, stringent procedural requirements, and a culture of compliance. These systemic characteristics, while designed to ensure accountability and order, often translate into heavy workloads, strict deadlines, and limited autonomy. Consequently, non-teaching personnel frequently face pressures that extend beyond their official hours, compelling them to manage multifaceted tasks with fluctuating demands. The resultant strain affects not only their job performance but also their personal well-being and family life. This intersection of organizational expectations and individual capacities creates a fertile ground for exploring how employees conceptualize and manage work-life balance.

In addition to traditional bureaucratic pressures, the education sector is undergoing a significant transformation driven by digitalization and the growing use of technology in governance and service delivery. Non-teaching staff in DepEd are now expected to engage with electronic data management systems, online reporting platforms, and virtual communication tools. While these technological advances offer the potential for greater efficiency and flexibility, they also blur the conventional boundaries between work and personal time. The ease of access to work-related tasks through digital devices challenges employees' ability to disconnect and recharge. Furthermore, community engagement and public accountability initiatives require non-teaching personnel to extend their roles beyond office confines, adding layers of complexity to their work-life dynamic.

Existing research on work-life balance in the education sector has predominantly focused on teachers, with abundant literature

examining the stressors they face and the coping strategies they employ to manage classroom and community responsibilities. However, the administrative workforce, which underpins the educational system's functionality, remains relatively neglected. This imbalance in research focus risks overlooking the unique challenges non-teaching employees face, such as role ambiguity, invisibility, and a lack of formal organizational support tailored to their needs. The administrative roles involve intricate coordination, data management, and logistical planning that often demand meticulous attention and extended availability—factors that directly influence their ability to achieve a satisfactory work-life equilibrium.

Most studies on work-life balance in public organizations, including education, have employed quantitative methodologies that prioritize measurable outcomes such as job satisfaction, turnover intention, and work-family conflict scores. While these approaches yield valuable statistical insights, they tend to mask the rich, subjective variations in how employees personally experience and interpret the concept of balance. The complexity of human experiences around work-life integration calls for qualitative approaches that can reveal diverse meanings, strategies, and contextual factors shaping employees' perceptions. Addressing this methodological gap, the current study adopts phenomenography, a research tradition specialized in uncovering the qualitatively different ways people experience and conceptualize phenomena.

Phenomenography is particularly suited to exploring work-life balance because it moves beyond fixed definitions and embraces the multiplicity of individual understandings shaped by personal, organizational, and societal contexts. Through this lens, the study seeks to map out the range of conceptions held by DepEd non-teaching employees, identifying variations that might otherwise remain hidden. This approach enables a nuanced appreciation of how employees negotiate the demands of their multiple roles—professional, familial, social—and how they manage boundaries in an evolving work environment. The findings can thus contribute to theory by elaborating the complexity of work-life balance in public administration settings.

From a practical standpoint, illuminating the spectrum of work-life balance conceptions among non-teaching personnel holds significant implications for human resource management and organizational development within DepEd. By recognizing the diversity of employee experiences and needs, policymakers and administrators can design more flexible and responsive workplace interventions. Such initiatives might include tailored work arrangements, targeted support programs, and leadership development that emphasizes empathy and boundary respect. Improving the work-life balance of administrative staff not only enhances their job satisfaction and mental health but also positively impacts organizational commitment and service quality, thereby supporting the broader goals of public education.

The importance of this inquiry is underscored by the central role non-teaching employees play in the administration and governance of education in the Philippines. Their work enables teaching staff to focus on instructional tasks, ensures compliance with regulatory frameworks, and maintains operational continuity, all of which are essential for effective service delivery. As the education sector adapts to new challenges and expectations, sustaining the well-being and productivity of these employees becomes indispensable. Furthermore, given the government's commitments to workforce welfare and public service excellence, understanding and supporting the work-life integration of DepEd's non-teaching personnel aligns with national human resource development priorities.

In conclusion, this study aims to fill a significant gap in the literature by providing a detailed qualitative exploration of how non-teaching employees within DepEd conceptualize and experience work-life balance amid the complexities of bureaucratic public service and digital transformation. By doing so, it contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of employee well-being in public education administration and offers actionable insights for fostering supportive organizational cultures. Ultimately, the research aspires to advance both academic knowledge and practical strategies that enhance the welfare, motivation, and effectiveness of this essential but often invisible segment of the Philippine education workforce.

Research Objectives

This study aimed to explore and describe the range of qualitatively different ways in which non-teaching personnel of the Department of Education (DepEd) conceptualize and experience work-life balance within their unique organizational and personal contexts. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify and describe the various conceptions of work-life balance held by DepEd non-teaching employees, capturing the diversity in their lived experiences and meanings attached to balancing work and personal life.
2. Examine how organizational structures—such as hierarchical supervision, workload expectations, procedural norms—and role demands influence these conceptions of work-life balance.
3. Explore the boundary management strategies employed by non-teaching personnel to negotiate and integrate their work roles with personal and family responsibilities.
4. Develop an outcome space that organizes and illustrates the hierarchical relationships and variations among the different conceptions of work-life balance identified in this population.
5. Provide actionable insights and recommendations to inform DepEd's human resource policies, workplace support systems, and organizational reforms aimed at fostering sustainable work-life integration and enhancing employee well-being.

Literature Review

Work-life balance refers broadly to an individual's ability to effectively manage the competing demands of professional and personal life domains, sustaining satisfaction and well-being across both (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011). This construct has gained heightened relevance in organizational research due to evolving work environments and the increasing complexity of roles individuals occupy (Kossek, Pichler, Bodner, & Hammer, 2011). In public administration settings, especially, work-life balance is critical, as employees often face bureaucratic constraints and high service demands that complicate efforts to harmonize work and personal responsibilities (Kim & Glomb, 2014; Maertz, Boyar, & Pearson, 2012). Studies suggest that maintaining work-life balance in these contexts significantly influences employee engagement, productivity, and retention (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Vander Elst et al., 2016).

The public sector often presents structural challenges to work-life equilibrium due to hierarchical supervision, strict procedural norms, and extended work hours that encroach on non-work time (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Riccucci, 2005). Filipino government employees, in particular, report stressors including heavy workloads, inflexible schedules, and limited institutional support for flexible working arrangements (Corpuz, 2015; David, 2017). Non-teaching staff within the Philippine Department of Education (DepEd) perform critical but often overlooked functions such as record management, financial processing, and multi-agency coordination, which demand extended availability and rapid responsiveness (Llego, 2020; Reyes, 2019). These demands blur the boundaries between work and home, undermining opportunities for meaningful rest and family engagement (Villanueva et al., 2018; Salazar & Garcia, 2021).

Research on work-life balance in education has predominantly focused on teaching staff, who experience stressors related to classroom management, curriculum reforms, and community engagement (Ocampo & Barrot, 2016; Kim & Kavka, 2019). However, administrative personnel face distinct challenges, including role ambiguity, excessive workloads, and a lack of formal recognition, leading to parallel yet unique work-life conflicts (Singh, Gupta, & Kumar, 2018; Lo, 2021). The invisibility of administrative contributions often results in insufficient organizational support and exacerbates work-related stress (Smith & Ma, 2019; Kim et al., 2018). These factors indicate the need for a focused inquiry into the experiences of non-teaching staff, an area that remains underrepresented in the scholarly literature.

Role Theory provides a foundational lens for understanding work-life balance by emphasizing that individuals simultaneously fulfill multiple social roles, each accompanied by distinct expectations and obligations (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964). Role conflict and overload occur when demands from different roles are incompatible or exceed personal capacity, resulting in psychological strain (Goode, 1960; Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). Empirical research confirms that managing such role conflicts is a primary source of work-life imbalance among public employees (Kossek & Ozeki, 1998; Rothbard, 2001). Furthermore, the prioritization and negotiation of roles are shaped by both organizational context and individual coping strategies (Voydanoff, 2005; Grywacz & Carlson, 2007).

Complementary to Role Theory, Boundary Theory explores how individuals create, maintain, and manage boundaries between work and non-work domains (Clark, 2000). The continuum between segmentation (strict separation) and integration (blending) of work and personal roles influences employees' capacity to disengage from work and replenish resources during non-working time (Ashforth, Kreiner, & Fugate, 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Research indicates that boundary management preferences are influenced by individual differences, job characteristics, and organizational culture (Kossek et al., 2012; Derks, van Mierlo, & Schmitz, 2014). In bureaucratic environments like DepEd, where rigid rules and extended work demands prevail, opportunities for flexible boundary management may be limited (Rudolph, Rauvola, & Zacher, 2020).

The advent of digital communication technologies has introduced both opportunities and challenges for work-life balance. Smartphones, email, and virtual platforms enable greater flexibility and autonomy in work scheduling (Golden, 2015; Mazmanian, Orlikowski, & Yates, 2013). However, these technologies also foster 'always-on' work cultures that extend work demands into employees' personal lives, potentially undermining psychological detachment and increasing exhaustion (Derks et al., 2014; Chesley, 2014). In the context of DepEd non-teaching staff, who increasingly rely on e-governance and digital reporting, the impact of technology on work-life balance is significant and warrants further investigation (Llego, 2020; Reyes & Del Rosario, 2021).

Social support is consistently identified as a vital resource that mitigates work-life conflict and enhances employee well-being (Kossek et al., 2011; King, Karantzios, Casper, & Moen, 2013). Supervisor support, coworker assistance, and family encouragement contribute to effective boundary management and reduce stress (Lambert, Hogan, & Barton, 2012; Kim & Beehr, 2020). Cultural factors, including strong family orientation and community ties in the Philippines, further shape employees' reliance on social networks to negotiate work and personal demands (David, Okazaki, & Saw, 2014; Villanueva et al., 2018). The presence or absence of supportive environments critically influences the quality of work-life balance outcomes.

Work-life imbalance is linked to adverse organizational outcomes, including decreased job satisfaction, heightened turnover intentions, absenteeism, and reduced organizational commitment (Allen, Herst, Bruck, & Sutton, 2000; Haar et al., 2014). In educational settings, employees experiencing poor balance demonstrate increased burnout and diminished performance, affecting institutional effectiveness (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Therefore, fostering work-life integration is not only beneficial for individual well-being but also essential for sustaining organizational capacity and quality of service delivery (Llego, 2020; Kim & Beehr, 2020).

Policy interventions promoting flexible work arrangements, empathetic leadership, and comprehensive wellness programs have demonstrated efficacy in improving work-life balance in various sectors, including public administration (Thompson, Beauvais, & Lyness, 2015; Haar, Russo, Sune, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014). However, implementation in bureaucratic environments often faces challenges related to organizational inertia, cultural resistance, and resource constraints (Ricucci, 2005; Rainey, 2014). Tailoring such interventions to the specific context and needs of non-teaching staff in DepEd is crucial for meaningful impact (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Qualitative research methods, such as phenomenography, offer valuable insights into the subjective and varied experiences of work-life balance that quantitative measures may overlook (Marton & Booth, 1997; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). By exploring the different ways employees understand and enact balance, phenomenographic studies can inform nuanced and context-sensitive organizational policies (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2006; Svensson, 1997). However, such research remains limited within the public education administrative workforce, indicating a clear gap in the literature (Ashforth et al., 2000; Haar et al., 2014).

Given the evolving nature of public sector work, characterized by increasing digitization and complex role demands, an ongoing investigation into how DepEd non-teaching personnel conceptualize and negotiate work-life balance is essential. Such research not only contributes to academic theory but also informs human resource practices aimed at enhancing employee welfare, organizational commitment, and public service quality (Kim & Glomb, 2014; Vander Elst et al., 2016). Addressing this knowledge gap holds promise for advancing both scholarship and practice in public sector workforce management.

Work-life balance has also been examined through the lens of cultural values, which influence how individuals perceive and manage the boundaries between work and personal life. In collectivist cultures like the Philippines, family and community obligations often take precedence, shaping expectations around work engagement and personal time (David et al., 2014; Hofstede, 2016). This cultural context affects public sector employees' approaches to boundary management and their experiences of role conflict or enrichment (Triandis, 2018; Villanueva et al., 2018). Research indicates that strong family support networks can buffer the negative impacts of work stress but may also increase obligations outside work, complicating efforts to maintain balance (David & Rhee, 2020; Salvador, 2019).

The impact of gender on perceptions and experiences of work-life balance is another important area of inquiry. Studies consistently show that women, particularly those in caregiving roles, face disproportionate challenges in managing work and family demands, which may lead to higher levels of work-family conflict and stress (Allen, Johnson, Saboe, Cho, Dumani, & Evans, 2012; McCarthy et al., 2016). In the Philippine public sector, female employees often navigate complex role expectations shaped by traditional gender norms alongside professional responsibilities, influencing their boundary management strategies and work-life integration (Villanueva et al., 2018; Reyes, 2020). Efforts to develop gender-sensitive organizational policies have been linked with improved employee well-being and retention (Kossek et al., 2017; Haar et al., 2018).

Several scholars have examined how organizational culture and leadership style affect employees' work-life balance. Transformational leadership, characterized by empathy, support, and recognition of employee needs, has been positively correlated with greater work-life balance satisfaction and reduced burnout (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Schyns & Schilling, 2013). In contrast, authoritarian or transactional leadership styles common in bureaucratic settings may exacerbate stress and inhibit boundary flexibility (Ricucci, 2005; Witesman & Walters, 2017). The presence of supportive supervisors who understand work-life challenges is instrumental in facilitating flexible arrangements and fostering a positive work environment (Lambert et al., 2012; Kossek et al., 2011).

Job demands-resources (JD-R) theory provides a valuable framework for understanding how workplace factors contribute to work-life balance. High job demands, such as workload, emotional strain, and time pressure, increase the likelihood of work-family conflict, whereas job resources, including autonomy, social support, and opportunities for professional development, promote work engagement and balance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2006). Empirical evidence in public sector contexts demonstrates that increasing job resources can mitigate the adverse effects of job demands and improve employee well-being (Bakker, Albrecht, & Leiter, 2011; Mauno, Kinnunen, & Ruokolainen, 2007). For DepEd non-teaching personnel, enhancing resources such as supportive supervision and flexible work policies may be particularly beneficial (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Remote work and telecommuting have become prominent organizational practices influencing work-life balance, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic. While offering increased flexibility and autonomy, remote work also presents challenges such as blurred boundaries, intensified workloads, and potential isolation (Allen, Golden, & Shockley, 2015; Charalampous, Grant, Tramontano, & Michailidis, 2019). In public education administration, the shift to online platforms necessitated rapid adaptation, with mixed effects on employee work-life balance (Kenne et al., 2021; Reyes & Del Rosario, 2021). The effectiveness of remote work in supporting balance depends primarily on individual preferences, job roles, and organizational support systems (Gajendran & Harrison, 2007; Kossek, Thompson, & Lautsch, 2015).

The mental health implications of work-life imbalance are well-documented. Chronic stress resulting from unresolved work-family conflict contributes to anxiety, depression, and burnout, which in turn affect job performance and quality of life (Bakker et al., 2014; Schaufeli, 2017). Within educational institutions, burnout among administrative staff has been linked with high turnover rates and decreased institutional effectiveness (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017). Strategies to address these issues

include mindfulness training, resilience-building programs, and organizational interventions aimed at workload management and fostering supportive cultures (Lomas et al., 2017; Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011).

The importance of employee well-being as a driver of organizational success has increasingly been recognized in public administration research. Work-life balance is integral to well-being, which encompasses physical health, emotional resilience, and job satisfaction (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Vander Elst et al., 2016). Public organizations with high levels of employee well-being tend to report lower absenteeism, higher commitment, and better service quality (Kim & Glomb, 2014; Rainey, 2014). In the context of DepEd, promoting the well-being of non-teaching staff aligns with national priorities on workforce development and public service excellence (Llego, 2020; Reyes, 2019).

Empirical studies have shown that flexible work policies, including staggered hours, compressed workweeks, and telecommuting, are associated with improved work-life balance and organizational outcomes (Baltes, Briggs, Huff, Wright, & Neuman, 1999; Thompson et al., 2015). However, implementation in bureaucratic, resource-constrained environments such as the Philippine public sector is often inconsistent, hindered by cultural norms, leadership attitudes, and infrastructure limitations (Ricucci, 2005; David, 2017). Addressing these barriers requires systemic change and targeted interventions sensitive to the local context (Villanueva et al., 2018; Reyes, 2020).

Training and development programs focused on work-life balance awareness, boundary management, and stress reduction have demonstrated positive impacts on employee coping and job satisfaction (Kossek et al., 2011; Haar et al., 2014). Supervisor training to foster empathetic leadership and support for boundary respect is especially effective in promoting a healthy work environment (Lambert et al., 2012; Kim & Beehr, 2020). In the education sector, such programs contribute to reduced burnout and enhanced institutional performance (Ocampo & Barrot, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

Government initiatives aimed at promoting work-life balance among public employees include policy reforms for flexible work arrangements, wellness programs, and employee assistance services (Corpuz, 2015; Philippine Civil Service Commission, 2018). Monitoring and evaluation of these programs are essential for assessing their effectiveness and guiding improvements (David, 2017; Reyes, 2019). For DepEd, integrating work-life balance considerations into organizational planning can enhance workforce sustainability and the quality of service delivery (Llego, 2020; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Recent phenomenographic studies have contributed to understanding the qualitatively different ways employees experience work-life balance, highlighting the diversity of perceptions and strategies individuals adopt (Marton & Booth, 1997; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). These approaches reveal that work-life balance is not a uniform concept but varies across personal values, organizational contexts, and life circumstances (Ashforth et al., 2000; Svensson, 1997). Applying phenomenography in public sector research facilitates tailored interventions that reflect the complexity of employee experiences (Dall'Alba & Sandberg, 2006; Haar et al., 2014).

Addressing the work-life balance of DepEd non-teaching employees is particularly pressing given their critical role in supporting educational governance and administration. Improved balance can enhance their job satisfaction, reduce turnover, and promote more effective service delivery (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018). Furthermore, recognizing the diversity of their experiences through qualitative inquiry can inform more flexible, culturally sensitive, and sustainable human resource management practices (Kim & Glomb, 2014; David, 2017).

As digital transformation continues to reshape public sector work, ongoing research is needed to explore how evolving technologies influence work-life boundaries and employee well-being (Derks et al., 2014; Kenne et al., 2021). Integrating these insights with organizational policy and leadership development can support a workforce capable of meeting modern educational challenges while maintaining personal well-being (Llego, 2020; Reyes & Del Rosario, 2021). The present study contributes to this endeavor by examining the lived experiences and conceptions of work-life balance among DepEd non-teaching personnel, advancing both theory and practice.

The intersection of work-life balance with employee motivation and organizational commitment has been emphasized in numerous studies, highlighting that balanced employees are more likely to exhibit higher levels of engagement, loyalty, and discretionary effort (Allen et al., 2012; Haar et al., 2014). Public sector workers, including those in education administration, benefit from policies and workplace cultures that recognize the importance of holistic employee welfare, which in turn contributes to institutional stability and performance (Kim & Glomb, 2014; Rainey, 2014). For DepEd non-teaching staff, whose roles are often complex and less visible, prioritizing work-life balance can mitigate feelings of marginalization and promote a sense of belonging (Villanueva et al., 2018; Reyes, 2020).

Research on boundary management strategies reveals that employees actively negotiate their work and personal lives through various practices, including temporal adjustments, spatial separation, and cognitive reframing (Clark, 2000; Kossek et al., 2012). Some individuals prefer segmentation, clearly demarcating work from home life to reduce conflict and enhance recovery, while others adopt integration, blending roles to increase flexibility and responsiveness (Ashforth et al., 2000; Nippert-Eng, 1996). Organizational context, including managerial support and job design, influences the feasibility and effectiveness of these strategies (Derks et al., 2014; Rudnicka & Beagan, 2021). In rigid bureaucratic systems such as DepEd, segmentation may be constrained, requiring employees to develop adaptive integration approaches (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

The role of emotional labor in work-life balance is gaining increasing attention, particularly in education-related occupations. Non-teaching personnel often engage in emotional regulation and service-oriented behaviors that, while less visible than teaching duties, demand significant psychological effort (Hochschild, 2016; Kim et al., 2018). This emotional labor can contribute to exhaustion and work-life imbalance if not adequately supported (Brotheridge & Grandey, 2002; Grandey, 2003). Understanding how DepEd administrative staff manage these emotional demands alongside their professional and personal roles is critical for comprehensive work-life balance initiatives (Llego, 2020; Reyes, 2019).

Studies examining organizational justice and fairness perceptions indicate that employees who feel supported and fairly treated by their institutions experience lower work-family conflict and higher job satisfaction (Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Ng, 2001; Lambert et al., 2012). Procedural justice, in particular, influences acceptance of work demands and policies related to flexibility and boundary management (Greenberg, 1990; Kim & Beehr, 2020). For DepEd non-teaching employees, transparent and equitable human resource practices can strengthen trust and facilitate better work-life balance outcomes (Reyes, 2020; Villanueva et al., 2018).

The use of employee assistance programs (EAPs) and wellness initiatives in public organizations has shown promise in supporting work-life balance and mitigating stress-related issues (Attridge, 2019; Harnois & Gabriel, 2016). These programs provide counseling, stress management resources, and health promotion activities that enhance employees' coping capacities (Sonnentag, 2018; Lomas et al., 2017). However, awareness and utilization of such programs often remain low in bureaucratic environments, necessitating proactive organizational efforts to increase accessibility and relevance (Corpuz, 2015; Reyes, 2019). Tailoring EAPs to the specific needs of DepEd administrative staff may enhance their effectiveness and reach (Villanueva et al., 2018; Llego, 2020).

Job crafting, defined as employees' proactive efforts to modify their job demands and resources, has emerged as a valuable concept in work-life balance literature (Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001; Petrou, Demerouti, & Schaufeli, 2018). Through job crafting, workers adjust tasks, relationships, and cognitive appraisals to better align their roles with personal strengths and life circumstances (Tims, Bakker, & Derks, 2013; Slemp & Vella-Brodick, 2013). Encouraging job crafting within DepEd non-teaching personnel may empower them to create more manageable and meaningful work experiences that support work-life integration (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted traditional work arrangements, accelerating the adoption of telecommuting and flexible scheduling in public administration (Kenne et al., 2021; Chung et al., 2020). While these changes have facilitated greater work-life balance for some employees, others experienced increased work intensification, blurred boundaries, and challenges related to home-work environments (Galanti et al., 2021; Wang et al., 2021). In the context of DepEd, remote work for administrative staff presented both opportunities and challenges, underscoring the need for ongoing assessment and support to optimize work-life outcomes in hybrid and digital work settings (Llego, 2020; Reyes & Del Rosario, 2021).

Career development and advancement opportunities are also related to perceptions of work-life balance. Employees who perceive that their organization supports career growth alongside personal life balance report higher job satisfaction and commitment (Greenhaus, Collins, & Shaw, 2003; Ng & Sorensen, 2008). In public education administration, non-teaching staff often face limited upward mobility and recognition, which can exacerbate work-life tensions and reduce motivation (Singh et al., 2018; Lo, 2021). Addressing these issues through clear career pathways and developmental support can enhance employees' holistic work-life experiences (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Organizational climate plays a pivotal role in shaping employees' work-life balance. Climates that prioritize employee well-being, flexibility, and support are associated with lower work-family conflict and greater job satisfaction (Batt & Valcour, 2003; Haar et al., 2014). Conversely, climates emphasizing rigid productivity demands and control contribute to strain and imbalance (Ricucci, 2005; Wright & Grant, 2010). Within DepEd, fostering a climate that values work-life integration requires leadership commitment, policy alignment, and cultural change (Llego, 2020; Reyes, 2019).

The intersectionality of socio-demographic variables such as age, marital status, and educational attainment also influences work-life balance experiences (Voydanoff, 2005; Grzywacz & Bass, 2003). Older employees and those with family responsibilities often report heightened work-family conflict but may also develop more effective coping strategies over time (Haar, Russo, Suñe, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014; Shockley & Allen, 2013). Understanding these variations among DepEd non-teaching personnel allows for more targeted and equitable support interventions (Villanueva et al., 2018; Reyes, 2020).

Organizational communication is another key factor affecting work-life balance. Clear, transparent, and empathetic communication from leadership reduces ambiguity and stress, enabling employees to manage role expectations more effectively (Clampitt, DeKoch, & Cashman, 2000; Kim & Beehr, 2020). Within complex bureaucracies like DepEd, improving internal communication channels can enhance employee perceptions of support and facilitate boundary management (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Recent meta-analyses and systematic reviews emphasize the importance of multi-level approaches to work-life balance that integrate individual, organizational, and societal factors (Allen et al., 2016; Haar et al., 2014). These studies advocate for comprehensive interventions combining policy, culture, leadership, and personal strategies to foster sustainable work-life integration (Kossek et al., 2011; Dikkers et al., 2016). Such integrative frameworks are particularly relevant for public sector organizations confronting rapid change and complex role demands (Kim & Glomb, 2014; Ricucci, 2005).

In sum, the literature demonstrates that work-life balance is a dynamic, context-dependent phenomenon influenced by a constellation of personal, organizational, and societal factors. For Philippine DepEd non-teaching personnel, these influences are compounded by bureaucratic rigidity, cultural expectations, evolving digital work environments, and limited recognition. Advancing research that captures the nuanced lived experiences and conceptions of work-life balance in this group is essential for informing tailored human resource management strategies and fostering a sustainable, healthy workforce (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018). Phenomenographic inquiry offers a promising methodological approach to uncovering these diverse perspectives and supporting evidence-based organizational change (Marton & Booth, 1997; Larsson & Holmström, 2007).

Employee engagement is increasingly recognized as a vital outcome connected to effective work-life balance practices. Research indicates that employees who perceive a harmonious balance between work and personal life exhibit higher levels of motivation, commitment, and discretionary effort, which in turn contribute positively to organizational performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017; Saks, 2006). Within public administration, the engagement of non-teaching personnel is crucial for ensuring smooth operations and service delivery, particularly in large institutions such as the Department of Education (DepEd) (Kim & Glomb, 2014; Wright & Grant, 2010). Studies underscore the importance of cultivating a supportive work environment that facilitates work-life balance to boost engagement and reduce turnover intentions (Halbesleben, 2010; Kahn, 1990).

In analyzing work-life balance, the job characteristics model offers insights into how job design influences employees' experiences and satisfaction. Characteristics such as task variety, autonomy, and feedback are linked to increased motivation and better work-life integration (Hackman & Oldham, 1976; Humphrey, Nahrgang, & Morgeson, 2007). Public sector jobs, often constrained by bureaucratic procedures, may limit autonomy and flexibility, posing challenges for employees seeking balance (Ricucci, 2005; Maertz et al., 2012). Enhancing job characteristics within DepEd's administrative roles could promote greater employee control and reduce work-life conflict (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

The increasing importance of psychological detachment from work as a recovery mechanism has been well established in recent literature. Psychological detachment, defined as mentally disengaging from work during non-working hours, is essential for reducing stress and replenishing personal resources (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2015; Cropley & Millward Purvis, 2003). Employees in rigid or high-demand environments, such as DepEd's bureaucratic offices, may find detachment difficult, especially with the pervasiveness of digital connectivity (Derks et al., 2014; Sonnetag, 2018). Facilitating detachment through organizational policies and leadership support is critical for sustaining work-life balance and preventing burnout (Sonnetag & Fritz, 2015; Lomas et al., 2017).

Research also highlights the role of boundary crossing and segmentation preferences in managing work-life interplay. Employees employ different strategies, ranging from strict domain separation to flexible blending based on personal and contextual factors (Clark, 2000; Kossek et al., 2012). The effectiveness of these strategies depends on organizational support and cultural acceptance, which may be limited in bureaucratic public agencies (Reyes, 2019; Rudnicka & Beagan, 2021). In the Philippine context, socio-cultural values further shape these preferences, as familial obligations and community expectations interact with professional demands (David et al., 2014; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Technology's dual role as both an enabler and stressor in work-life balance is extensively documented. Digital tools provide flexibility but also facilitate work intrusions into personal time, creating tension between accessibility and overwork (Golden, 2015; Mazmanian et al., 2013). The "right to disconnect" has emerged as a policy consideration aimed at protecting employees from excessive after-hours work demands (Degryse, 2016; European Parliament, 2019). For DepEd non-teaching personnel, balancing digital work expectations with personal boundaries requires organizational guidance and cultural change (Llego, 2020; Reyes & Del Rosario, 2021).

Family-supportive supervisory behaviors (FSSB) have been identified as a critical factor in promoting work-life balance. Supervisors who demonstrate understanding, flexibility, and emotional support enable employees to manage work and family demands more effectively (Hammer et al., 2009; Kossek et al., 2011). In public sector organizations, training supervisors in FSSB can mitigate work-family conflict and improve job satisfaction (Lambert et al., 2012; Kim & Beehr, 2020). Encouraging such behaviors within DepEd's administrative leadership can enhance employee morale and retention (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Workplace flexibility, encompassing temporal, spatial, and procedural dimensions, is widely associated with positive work-life outcomes (Hill, Erickson, Holmes, & Ferris, 2010; Allen, Johnson, Kiburz, & Shockley, 2013). Flexible schedules allow employees to align work hours with personal needs, reducing conflict and enhancing well-being (Thompson et al., 2015; Haar et al., 2014). Nonetheless, implementing flexibility faces barriers in hierarchical public institutions due to concerns about accountability and service continuity (Ricucci, 2005; Rainey, 2014). Designing context-appropriate flexible work policies is therefore essential for organizations like DepEd (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Organizational support theory suggests that employees develop global beliefs regarding the extent to which their organization values their contributions and cares about their well-being (Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchison, & Sowa, 1986). Perceived organizational support (POS) has been linked to reduced work-family conflict and increased work-life balance satisfaction (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Lapierre et al., 2016). In the public education sector, fostering high POS through inclusive policies and responsive leadership is key to retaining motivated non-teaching staff (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Reyes, 2019).

The concept of work-life enrichment extends the traditional focus on conflict by recognizing positive interactions in which experiences

in one role improve the quality of life in the other (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Wayne, Musisca, & Fleeson, 2004). Employees who experience enrichment report higher satisfaction and better mental health (Carlson, Kacmar, & Williams, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Facilitating enrichment among DepEd non-teaching personnel through supportive environments and role resources can enhance their holistic work-life integration (Llego, 2020; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Perceptions of organizational justice also influence work-life outcomes. Employees who perceive fairness in decision-making and resource allocation tend to report lower stress and better balance (Colquitt et al., 2001; Lambert et al., 2012). Public sector organizations with transparent and equitable processes can foster trust and employee engagement, thereby supporting work-life initiatives (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Reyes, 2019).

Health promotion and wellness programs are increasingly recognized as effective interventions to support work-life balance. These programs address physical, emotional, and psychological well-being, reducing burnout and improving productivity (Harnois & Gabriel, 2016; Lomas et al., 2017). In government agencies, comprehensive wellness initiatives must be culturally sensitive and accessible to sustain impact (Corpuz, 2015; Villanueva et al., 2018).

The role of mindfulness and resilience training in enhancing employees' coping with work-life stress has gained empirical support (Lomas et al., 2017; Keng, Smoski, & Robins, 2011). Such interventions promote psychological detachment and emotional regulation, key factors in maintaining balance (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015; Grossman et al., 2004). For public sector workers, integrating mindfulness into organizational development can contribute to healthier work environments (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Finally, ongoing research underscores the need for multi-level approaches that integrate individual, team, organizational, and societal perspectives to address work-life balance effectively (Allen et al., 2016; Haar et al., 2014). Public sector organizations face particular challenges due to the complexity of governance structures and cultural expectations, requiring tailored, evidence-based strategies to support their diverse workforces (Ricucci, 2005; Kim & Glomb, 2014). The present study responds to this call by investigating the varied conceptions of work-life balance among DepEd non-teaching personnel, contributing to a more nuanced understanding that can inform policy and practice.

Work-life balance is further complicated by organizational change and reform processes, which often introduce uncertainty and additional workload, thereby impacting employees' ability to maintain equilibrium (Lewis, 2019; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). In the public sector, reforms such as decentralization and digitalization, while intended to improve efficiency, may increase demands on staff, particularly those in administrative roles (Ricucci, 2005; Rainey, 2014). These changes require employees to adapt rapidly to new technologies and procedures, often without adequate training or resources, exacerbating stress and work-life conflict (Llego, 2020; Reyes, 2019).

The concept of psychological capital, encompassing hope, optimism, resilience, and self-efficacy, has emerged as a critical personal resource facilitating work-life balance (Luthans, Youssef, & Avolio, 2007; Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011). Employees with higher psychological capital tend to exhibit better coping strategies and maintain healthier boundaries between work and personal life (Avey et al., 2011; Youssef & Luthans, 2012). Cultivating psychological capital through organizational development initiatives can strengthen DepEd non-teaching personnel's capacity to navigate complex role demands and sustain well-being (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Social exchange theory explains that employees' perceptions of reciprocal support from their organization influence their work-life balance and commitment levels (Blau, 1964; Cropanzano & Mitchell, 2005). When public sector employees feel that their organization values and supports their well-being, they are more likely to invest effort and maintain positive work-life integration (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). This theoretical perspective underscores the importance of perceived organizational support in DepEd's efforts to improve the welfare of non-teaching staff (Kim & Beehr, 2020; Reyes, 2019).

Job satisfaction remains a central outcome associated with effective work-life balance. Numerous studies have confirmed that employees reporting greater harmony between work and personal life also demonstrate higher job satisfaction, which is critical for motivation and retention (Judge, Boudreau, & Bretz, 1994; Haar et al., 2014). Public education administrators with balanced lives show increased engagement and reduced burnout, contributing to better organizational performance (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2017).

The theory of planned behavior has been applied to understand employees' intentions to engage in work-life balance behaviors, highlighting attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control as predictors of such intentions (Ajzen, 1991; Grzywacz & Carlson, 2007). In public organizations, fostering positive attitudes and supportive norms around work-life initiatives can enhance employees' proactive efforts to achieve balance (Thompson et al., 2015; Reyes, 2019).

Cross-cultural studies have shown significant variation in work-life balance expectations and practices, suggesting that interventions must be culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate (Haar, Russo, Sune, & Ollier-Malaterre, 2014; Mescher, Schuitema, & Hoogendoorn, 2019). The Filipino cultural emphasis on familial responsibility and interpersonal relationships shapes employees' negotiation of work and life roles in ways that differ from Western contexts (David et al., 2014; Villanueva et al., 2018). Recognizing these cultural dimensions is vital for effective policy and program design in DepEd (Reyes, 2020; Llego, 2020).

The growing emphasis on employee voice and participation in decision-making processes has implications for work-life balance. Empowering employees to contribute to the design of work schedules, policies, and resource allocation enhances their control over role demands and boundary management (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004; Kim & Beehr, 2020). Within DepEd, encouraging participative governance can strengthen alignment between organizational practices and the needs of non-teaching staff (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

The phenomenon of role spillover, where stress or satisfaction in one domain affects the other, is well documented (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Grzywacz & Marks, 2000). Negative spillover increases work-family conflict, while positive spillover supports enrichment and resilience (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Wayne et al., 2004). DepEd employees' experiences of spillover inform targeted interventions to mitigate conflict and promote enrichment (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Training in time management and prioritization skills has been identified as an effective individual-level strategy to improve work-life balance (Aeon & Aguinis, 2017; Macan, 1994). Providing such training for non-teaching staff enhances their ability to manage workloads and boundaries, reducing stress and improving performance (Reyes, 2019; Llego, 2020).

Public sector organizations have begun integrating digital wellbeing programs to address the challenges posed by constant connectivity (Nosek et al., 2021; Ferguson, 2020). These programs educate employees on managing technology use and encourage boundary-setting to protect personal time (Derks et al., 2014; Kenne et al., 2021). Adopting such initiatives within DepEd could alleviate digital encroachment on personal life (Reyes & Del Rosario, 2021).

The balance between work and life is also influenced by national-level economic and social policies, including labor laws, social security, and family support programs (ILO, 2019; Philippine Statistics Authority, 2021). Supportive policies create enabling environments that facilitate work-life balance for public employees (David, 2017; Corpuz, 2015). Understanding this macro-level context is important when designing organizational interventions in DepEd (Reyes, 2019; Villanueva et al., 2018).

Research emphasizes the importance of continuous monitoring and evaluation of work-life balance initiatives to ensure effectiveness and adapt to changing employee needs (Allen et al., 2016; Haar et al., 2014). Data-driven approaches allow organizations to refine policies and target resources strategically (Reyes, 2019; Llego, 2020).

Finally, qualitative studies using phenomenographic and phenomenological methods enrich understanding by capturing employees' lived experiences and the meanings they attach to work-life balance (Marton & Booth, 1997; Larsson & Holmström, 2007). These approaches are valuable for uncovering the diversity of conceptions within heterogeneous workforces such as DepEd's non-teaching personnel (Ashforth et al., 2000; Svensson, 1997). The present study contributes to this growing body of knowledge by exploring these conceptions in depth, informing tailored interventions that enhance employee well-being and public service delivery.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenographic qualitative research design, which is particularly suited for capturing the varied ways in which individuals experience and understand complex social phenomena. Phenomenography enables the identification and systematic description of qualitatively distinct conceptions of work-life balance held by non-teaching personnel in DepEd, thereby illuminating the diversity and structure of these experiences. The qualitative nature of phenomenography also facilitated a rich, contextually grounded understanding of resource management, grounded in participants' lived experiences. This focus on variation rather than quantification makes phenomenography an effective tool for informing policies and practices sensitive to the diversity of frontline realities. Through this design, the study sought to develop an outcome space that organizes the different conceptions into meaningful categories, providing insights into how resource management challenges are understood and addressed across DepEd division offices.

Participants

Eighteen non-teaching employees from various DepEd regional and division offices across Luzon were purposively sampled for this study. Selection criteria included a minimum of three years of public service experience to ensure familiarity with organizational processes, active involvement in administrative duties, and willingness to participate in reflective written interviews. Efforts were made to ensure diverse representation across age, gender, role, and office location to capture a broad spectrum of perspectives.

Instrument

Data collection used a researcher-developed written interview guide consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit rich, detailed accounts of participants' experiences, perceptions, and strategies for managing work-life balance. Example prompts included: "How do you personally define work-life balance in your daily routine?" and "What challenges do you encounter in managing your work and personal life responsibilities?"

Procedure

Data collection for this study was conducted primarily through written interviews to accommodate the schedules and availability of the



DepEd division office staff participants. The researcher commenced the data collection process by electronically distributing the written interview guide to the purposively selected participants in July 2025. Participants were given a two-week timeframe to submit their responses, providing ample opportunity to reflect on the questions and articulate their experiences in depth. Throughout this period, the researcher maintained communication with the participants, monitoring submissions and identifying responses that required further clarification or elaboration. To address these needs, follow-up correspondence was conducted via email, and, when necessary, virtual meetings were arranged to facilitate richer data collection and ensure a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives. Ethical considerations were rigorously observed during the data gathering phase. Prior to participation, informed consent was secured from each participant. Additionally, the confidentiality of all responses was strictly maintained, and participants' autonomy and right to withdraw were respected at all times.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the phenomenographic approach as outlined by Marton and Booth (1997), which focuses on identifying and describing the qualitatively different ways individuals experience a particular phenomenon. The analysis began with repeated, thorough readings of each participant's written responses to gain a deep understanding of the content and context. Significant statements and meanings related to work-life balance were highlighted and extracted.

Subsequently, the researcher systematically compared these statements across participants to identify similarities and differences in how work-life balance was conceptualized. Through this comparative process, preliminary descriptive categories emerged, each representing a distinct way of experiencing or understanding the phenomenon. These categories were refined iteratively by examining their boundaries and ensuring they were internally coherent yet distinctly different from each other.

Following the establishment of categories, the researcher articulated the essence of each, capturing the core meaning and features that characterize that particular conception of work-life balance. The final analytical step involved constructing an outcome space, a hierarchical and relational model that illustrates the structure and interrelationships among the identified categories. This outcome space provides a comprehensive visual and conceptual representation of the spectrum of work-life balance conceptions held by DepEd non-teaching employees.

To enhance the rigor and trustworthiness of the analysis, peer debriefing sessions were conducted with qualitative research experts to challenge interpretations and confirm the validity of categories. Additionally, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary findings with select participants and inviting their feedback to ensure the interpretations resonated with their experiences.

Results and Discussion

The analysis revealed five distinct conceptions of work-life balance among DepEd non-teaching employees. These are summarized below and discussed with illustrative quotations and integrated with the literature.

Table 1. *Distinct Conceptions of Work-Life Balance among DepEd Non-Teaching Personnel, Forming an Outcome Space that Reveals the Hierarchical and Relational Structure of these Understandings*

| Category No. | Conception of Work-Life Balance | Description |
|--------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 1 | Strict Separation | Maintaining clear boundaries to prevent overlap of work and personal life |
| 2 | Role Prioritization | Managing competing demands by prioritizing roles according to urgency and importance |
| 3 | Integration and Flexibility | Blending work and personal roles with adaptable boundaries |
| 4 | Support Systems and Coping | Utilizing social support and coping strategies to manage work-life demands |
| 5 | Holistic Well-Being | Pursuing overall physical, emotional, and psychological wellness across life domains |

The analysis of the data revealed five qualitatively different conceptions of work-life balance among non-teaching personnel of the Department of Education, highlighting the varied and complex ways these employees navigate the intersection of their professional and personal lives. The first conception—work-life balance as strict separation—reflects a preference for clear boundaries, where work responsibilities are confined to designated hours and personal life remains untouched by work demands. This segmentation strategy is well supported by boundary theory, which suggests that individuals may protect personal time to preserve psychological detachment and reduce stress (Ashforth et al., 2000; Clark, 2000). However, the participants also acknowledged the practical difficulties of maintaining such rigid separations due to unpredictable workloads and emergency tasks, which is consistent with prior findings that bureaucratic structures often impose inflexible demands that encroach on personal time (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Corpuz, 2015).

The second conception—role prioritization—reveals an adaptive approach where individuals constantly negotiate and reallocate attention among competing roles depending on urgency and significance. This dynamic balancing act aligns with role theory, which recognizes that role conflict emerges when demands exceed available resources, requiring individuals to make conscious decisions about which roles take precedence (Kahn et al., 1964; Goode, 1960). Participants' narratives about temporarily setting aside work obligations for family emergencies echo existing studies highlighting the fluidity and trade-offs inherent in managing multiple roles (Singh et al., 2018; Ocampo & Barrot, 2016). This approach underscores the tension between work expectations and personal responsibilities that many public sector employees face.

The third conception—work-life balance as integration and flexibility—reflects a more contemporary understanding shaped by the pervasive use of digital technologies and evolving work arrangements. Participants who embraced this view described blending work and personal activities, such as responding to work emails during off-hours or handling family matters during work breaks. This integrated boundary management has been linked to increased flexibility and autonomy but also to the risk of role blurring and work-family interference (Derks et al., 2014; Golden, 2015). The participants' experiences mirror the challenges highlighted in literature regarding the “always-on” culture enabled by digital tools, which may complicate psychological detachment and recovery (Sonnentag & Fritz, 2015).

The fourth conception emphasizes the critical role of social support systems, both within the workplace and at home, in facilitating work-life balance. Participants underscored the importance of understanding supervisors, supportive colleagues, and family members who share responsibilities or provide emotional encouragement. This finding corroborates research showing that social support acts as a buffer against work-family conflict and reduces burnout by providing resources that help individuals cope with role demands (Kossek et al., 2011; Hammer et al., 2009). The prominence of this conception in the study highlights that work-life balance is not solely an individual challenge but a collective one, reliant on relational and organizational factors.

The fifth and most holistic conception views work-life balance as a continuous, multidimensional process of nurturing physical, emotional, and psychological well-being. Participants expressed that balance encompasses more than managing time—it involves sustaining quality of life to perform effectively across all domains. This resonates with the work-life enrichment framework, which posits that positive experiences in one role can enhance well-being in others (Greenhaus & Powell, 2006; Carlson et al., 2000). This conception aligns with contemporary calls for wellness-oriented organizational policies that support holistic employee health rather than merely addressing work demands (Lomas et al., 2017; Kim & Beehr, 2020).

The diversity of conceptions uncovered in this study reflects the complexity of work-life balance as both a personal and organizational phenomenon. It affirms prior arguments that balance cannot be defined or managed uniformly, as individual preferences, job characteristics, and organizational culture interact to shape how employees experience and approach this challenge (Kalliath & Brough, 2008; Haar et al., 2014). In DepEd's bureaucratic context, where formal procedures and hierarchical supervision are prominent, these findings highlight the tension between standardized work expectations and the need for flexibility to accommodate individual boundary management styles.

Further, the study underscores the significant impact of digitalization on work-life boundaries. While technology can empower employees with flexibility, it can also extend work hours and increase the pressure to remain connected beyond official duties (Derks et al., 2014; Mazmanian et al., 2013). DepEd's gradual adoption of e-governance and online reporting may thus necessitate organizational guidelines that help employees maintain healthy boundaries in a digitally mediated work environment.

The emphasis on social support systems in the participants' conceptions aligns with organizational support theory, which links perceived organizational support to reduced stress and improved work-life outcomes (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Training supervisors to exhibit family-supportive behaviors and fostering a supportive workplace culture could therefore be pivotal in enhancing employees' ability to manage work-life demands (Hammer et al., 2009; Kim & Beehr, 2020).

The holistic well-being conception suggests the value of comprehensive wellness programs that address physical health, mental resilience, and emotional well-being. Public sector organizations like DepEd could benefit from adopting integrated employee wellness initiatives to sustain workforce health and productivity (Harnois & Gabriel, 2016; Lomas et al., 2017). Such programs may not only reduce burnout but also enhance job satisfaction and organizational commitment, key drivers of public service effectiveness.

Overall, this study contributes rich, context-specific insights into the experiences of a vital yet understudied segment of the Philippine public education workforce. It invites policymakers and administrators to design nuanced, flexible, and supportive work-life balance interventions that respect diverse employee needs and the evolving realities of digital work.

Conclusions

This phenomenographic inquiry has uncovered a spectrum of qualitatively distinct conceptions of work-life balance among non-teaching personnel in the Department of Education. The findings reveal that employees experience and understand work-life balance in diverse ways, ranging from strict separation of work and personal life to holistic well-being that integrates physical, emotional, and psychological health. The interplay of organizational structures, role demands, digital work modalities, and individual boundary management strategies shapes these conceptions.

The study affirms that work-life balance is not a singular, fixed state but a multifaceted, dynamic phenomenon contingent on both external conditions and internal sensemaking. It underscores the reality that bureaucratic work environments, like those in DepEd, impose structural constraints that can challenge employees' efforts to manage competing roles effectively. However, employees actively negotiate these constraints using a variety of boundary management strategies and rely heavily on social support systems to maintain balance.

Furthermore, the digital transformation of public service presents both opportunities and challenges for work-life integration. While

technology can enhance flexibility, it also risks eroding boundaries and increasing work-related intrusion into personal time. These findings highlight the critical need for organizational policies and leadership practices that support employees in managing these complexities in ways that align with their diverse preferences and circumstances.

Overall, this research contributes valuable knowledge to the limited body of qualitative studies on administrative staff in public education. It provides a nuanced understanding that can inform human resource policies and workplace interventions aimed at promoting sustainable work-life balance, enhancing employee well-being, and ultimately improving the effectiveness of public education delivery in the Philippines.

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to DepEd leadership and human resource policymakers to foster a supportive work environment that promotes work-life balance among non-teaching personnel: **Develop and Implement Flexible Work Policies.** Introduce flexible working arrangements, such as staggered shifts, compressed workweeks, and remote work opportunities, where operationally feasible. These options should accommodate both employees who prefer precise work-life segmentation and those who favor integration. **Enhance Supervisory Training.** Provide training programs for supervisors and managers to develop empathetic leadership skills, with a focus on recognizing and supporting employees' work-life boundary management needs. **Encourage supervisors to foster open communication and understanding regarding work-life challenges.** **Strengthen Social Support Structures.** Establish formal peer support groups, mentoring systems, and employee assistance programs to build a culture of shared coping and collective resilience within offices. Facilitate regular team-building and wellness activities that encourage collaboration and mutual support.

Promote Holistic Wellness Programs. Design and implement comprehensive wellness initiatives that address physical health, mental resilience, stress management, and emotional well-being. Such programs should be tailored to the specific needs of non-teaching personnel and include accessible resources and activities. **Create Clear Digital Work Boundaries.** Formulate guidelines and policies that help employees manage digital work demands effectively, including expectations around after-hours communication, email response times, and use of digital tools. **Promote digital literacy and awareness about maintaining psychological detachment from work.** **Institutionalize Feedback Mechanisms.** Develop platforms for ongoing dialogue where employees can share their work-life balance experiences and provide input on policies and workplace practices. Use this feedback to refine and adapt human resource strategies continuously.

Encourage Further Research. Support longitudinal and mixed-method studies to explore the evolving nature of work-life balance in the public education sector, assess the impact of implemented interventions, and examine specific factors affecting different employee groups. By adopting these recommendations, DepEd can create a more supportive and flexible organizational culture that acknowledges the diverse realities of its non-teaching workforce, enhancing employee satisfaction, retention, and overall public service effectiveness.

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