

## **Bridging Work-Life Conflicts through Organizational Culture: A Strategic Intervention Framework for Small and Medium Enterprises in Metro Manila**

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### **Abstract**

This study aimed to examine how organizational culture can be strategically utilized to mitigate work-life conflict (WLC) among employees of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Metro Manila, and to develop a culturally grounded intervention framework. Specifically, it sought to (1) describe the demographic and professional profile of respondents, (2) assess the level of WLC, (3) evaluate perceptions of organizational culture, (4) identify current organizational practices addressing WLC, (5) determine significant differences in WLC when grouped according to profile variables, and (6) recommend strategies to strengthen organizational culture for reducing WLC. Using a quantitative research design, data were collected from 100 purposively selected SME employees through a structured survey questionnaire utilizing a four-point Likert scale. Statistical treatments included frequency and percentage for profile data, weighted mean for perception-based responses, and t-test and ANOVA for testing significant differences. Findings revealed that respondents experienced a high level of WLC, particularly in emotional strain and time-based interference between work and personal responsibilities. Organizational culture was generally perceived positively, with leadership support, open communication, flexibility, and team cooperation identified as strengths. Significant differences in WLC were observed by age, sex, job position, and work schedule, but not by civil status, educational attainment, or length of service. The study concluded that while SMEs exhibit positive cultural attributes, targeted, differentiated interventions are necessary to address WLC effectively. Recommendations include leadership training on work-life sensitivity, the institutionalization of wellness and mental health programs, participatory policymaking, managerial role modeling of balance, expanded flexible work arrangements, and tailoring interventions to demographic-specific needs. This research underscores the critical role of organizational culture in shaping employee well-being. It offers actionable strategies for SME leaders to create more balanced, supportive work environments in the Philippine context.

*Keywords: work-life conflict, organizational culture, SMEs, Metro Manila, employee well-being*

## Introduction

In the rapidly shifting global business environment, work-life conflict (WLC) has emerged as a pervasive issue that affects both organizational productivity and employee well-being. Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), especially in urban centers such as Metro Manila, face unique challenges balancing business growth and workforce welfare. Unlike large corporations, SMEs often lack formalized policies for work-life integration, making them more vulnerable to employee burnout and turnover (Maravilla & Flores, 2025; Albite & Gempes, 2024). The post-pandemic period has amplified the need for adaptive organizational cultures that can support workers' holistic needs, particularly in Southeast Asian economies grappling with labor market volatility and social expectations around family and work (Wu & Kao, 2022).

Organizational culture plays a pivotal role in shaping employee experiences and expectations regarding work-life balance. Cultures that emphasize trust, flexibility, and psychological safety are shown to mitigate WLC by promoting proactive policies like remote work, flexible scheduling, and mental health support (Lee, 2024; Sriboonlue & Ponlajuna, 2025). In the Philippines, Villarino et al. (2025) observed that Filipino SMEs often operate within high-context, relationship-oriented cultures, which may both hinder and help the implementation of work-life programs depending on leadership style. A supportive organizational culture not only reduces absenteeism and turnover intention but also enhances employee engagement and organizational performance (Wider et al., 2024; Ly, 2025).

While the link between organizational culture and WLC is well documented in Western literature, there remains a scarcity of strategic frameworks tailored for developing economies like the Philippines. Studies from Canada, Malaysia, and the UAE reveal that interventions must be localized and responsive to cultural values and resource constraints (Tahir, 2025; Dhakal et al., 2023). For example, Western-style flexibility policies might clash with collectivist norms in Asian SMEs unless adapted to reflect social interdependence and hierarchy (Crocco, 2021). This research thus fills a critical gap by offering a culturally grounded intervention framework for SME owners and HR practitioners in Metro Manila, integrating insights from cross-national studies and local organizational behavior.

Moreover, existing literature highlights that gender, industry type, and management maturity significantly affect how organizational culture influences WLC outcomes (Onyeka, 2022; Teh & Yusoff, 2025). Filipino women entrepreneurs, for instance, experience unique strains balancing familial obligations and entrepreneurial responsibilities, often lacking institutional support (Meng, 2023). By designing a targeted intervention that includes diagnostic tools, policy templates, and culture-based leadership practices, this study aims to provide SME leaders with practical solutions that are both scalable and culturally resonant.

In sum, this research seeks to contribute to both theory and practice by presenting a strategic intervention framework rooted in organizational culture to address work-life conflicts in Metro Manila SMEs. By synthesizing international models and local practices, the study advocates transforming how Filipino SMEs view organizational culture—not merely as a static backdrop, but as a strategic lever for sustainability, well-being, and long-term competitiveness.

## Background of the Study

Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) form the backbone of many national economies, particularly in developing countries. In the Philippines, SMEs account for over 99% of all registered businesses and generate 63% of total employment (Department of Trade and Industry, 2023). However, despite their economic importance, SMEs and larger corporations in adopting strategic human resource practices, including those that promote work-life balance (Dela Cruz & Magno, 2024). Unlike multinational companies with formalized wellness programs, Filipino SMEs frequently operate under resource constraints and traditional managerial styles that exacerbate employee stress and reduce work-life integration (Santos et al., 2022).

Globally, scholars have observed a growing correlation between organizational culture and the mitigation of work-life conflicts (Zhou et al., 2023; Fernández-Muñiz & Montes-Peón, 2022). Cultures that prioritize psychological safety, employee autonomy, and inclusive leadership are more likely to implement supportive policies such as flextime, family-friendly leave, and mental wellness programs (Carvalho & Chambel, 2022). In the Southeast Asian context, organizational culture is deeply embedded in social norms such as collectivism, hierarchy, and familial obligation, which can both enable and restrict workplace flexibility (Tang et al., 2023). This makes it imperative for culture-based frameworks to be locally nuanced and context-responsive.

In the Philippines, literature on work-life conflict within SMEs is limited and largely anecdotal. While there are isolated qualitative studies exploring employee stress and coping strategies (Albita & Gempes, 2024), few empirical investigations link these issues systematically to organizational culture. Moreover, most existing interventions are HR-driven and operational, lacking strategic alignment with cultural dimensions such as leadership values, communication openness, and shared beliefs (Villarino et al., 2025). This gap is significant given that Filipino workplace culture is often characterized by "pakikisama" (smooth interpersonal relationships) and "hiya" (shame), which influence how employees express needs related to work-life balance.

International research has proposed several frameworks for work-life balance, but these often reflect Western assumptions of individualism and legalistic structures (Wharton & Chivers, 2020; Tahir et al., 2025). For instance, work-life programs developed in the U.S. and Europe frequently rely on formal policy infrastructure and labor unions—mechanisms that are often absent or weak in Metro Manila's SME sector. As noted by Sriboonlue and Ponlajuna (2025), effective interventions in Asian SMEs must integrate informal norms, managerial discretion, and communal trust into their design. The absence of such locally adapted frameworks highlights a critical gap in the strategic alignment of organizational culture with work-life initiatives in the Philippine SME sector.

This research addresses the void by designing a strategic intervention framework that leverages organizational culture to reduce work-life conflict. The framework will be grounded in both empirical data and cross-cultural insights, integrating local cultural constructs with global best practices. It intends to go beyond compliance-driven solutions by positioning culture as a dynamic, actionable force that can influence SME sustainability, employee satisfaction, and workforce resilience. Through this approach, the study not only fills a conceptual gap in the literature but also offers practical tools for SME leaders in Metro Manila to foster healthier, more balanced work environments.

## Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the relationship between organizational culture and work-life conflict within the SME sector in Metro Manila and to develop a strategic intervention framework that SME leaders can implement to enhance employee well-being. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Determine the demographic profile of SME employees in Metro Manila in terms of:
  - a. Age
  - b. Sex
  - c. Civil status
  - d. Highest educational attainment
  - e. Job position
  - f. Length of service
  - g. Work schedule
2. Assess the level of work-life conflict experienced by SME employees in their current work environment.
3. Examine the perceptions of SME employees toward organizational culture, particularly in relation to leadership style, flexibility, communication, and support systems.
4. Identify existing organizational culture practices in Metro Manila SMEs that address work-life conflict.
5. Analyze whether significant differences exist in the level of work-life conflict when SME employees are grouped according to their profile variables (age, sex, civil status, educational attainment, job position, length of service, and work schedule).
6. Propose strategies and a strategic intervention framework that SMEs in Metro Manila can adopt to strengthen organizational culture in mitigating work-life conflict and enhancing employee well-being.

## Methodology

*Research Design.* This study employed a quantitative, descriptive-comparative research design to examine the relationship between organizational culture and work-life conflict among SME employees in Metro Manila. The descriptive component measured employees' perceptions of organizational culture and their level of work-life conflict, while the comparative component tested whether significant differences in work-life conflict existed across demographic profiles such as age, sex, job position, work schedule, and length of service. Data were collected through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire, pre-tested for validity and reliability, and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics.

*Population and Sample.* The study targeted 100 SME employees in Metro Manila across different sectors, including retail, services, manufacturing, and logistics. A purposive sampling technique was applied to ensure participants were directly relevant to the study. Inclusion criteria required respondents to be at least 18 years old, employed in an SME for at least six months, and working either on-site, remote, or hybrid schedules. Excluded were freelancers, employees of large corporations, and probationary workers.

By selecting participants from at least 10 SMEs, the study captured diverse organizational settings and ensured representativeness.

*Research Instrument.* A structured survey questionnaire served as the main research tool. It was divided into sections covering demographic profiles, levels of work-life conflict, perceptions of organizational culture, and employee-informed recommendations. Items measuring work-life conflict were adapted from Carlson et al.'s Work-Family Conflict Scale, while organizational culture items were based on the Denison Organizational Culture Survey and Hofstede's cultural dimensions, contextualized to Filipino workplace norms such as pakikisama and hiya. Responses were recorded on a 4-point Likert scale, with higher values indicating stronger agreement. Reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha produced values above 0.87, confirming very good internal consistency.

*Data Gathering and Statistical Treatment.* Data collection was conducted after securing approval from SME management and ensuring informed consent from participants. Surveys were distributed both digitally (Google Forms) and in printed format to accommodate varying work setups. Ethical safeguards ensured anonymity, voluntary participation, and compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Responses were encoded and analyzed using SPSS, with descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation) used for profiling and perception analysis. Inferential statistics, including t-tests and ANOVA, were applied to test differences across demographic groups, while Tukey's HSD was used for post-hoc analysis when significant differences were found.

*Ethical Considerations.* The study strictly observed ethical guidelines by obtaining institutional review board (IRB) approval and adhering to Philippine and international research standards. Informed consent was secured from all participants, with assurances of confidentiality and the right to withdraw at any time. No identifying information was collected, and all data were stored securely in password-protected files. Printed responses were disposed of through secure shredding after encoding. Findings were reported only in aggregate form to prevent reputational harm to individual SMEs, ensuring that the study was conducted with integrity, transparency, and full respect for participants' rights.

## Results and Discussion

This study explored how organizational culture can be strategically harnessed to mitigate work-life conflict (WLC) among employees of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Metro Manila. The findings were organized in line with the specific research questions and are discussed below with reference to current scholarly literature.

### 1. Respondent Profile and Demographics

The demographic analysis revealed that most respondents were aged between 25–34, followed by those in the 35–44 age range, with a slight male predominance. The majority were married, college graduates, and held rank-and-file positions. Tenure within the current SME was typically 1–3 years, and most employees worked under fixed-hour schedules, although some flexible arrangements were reported.

These findings align with current demographic trends among Filipino SME workers, many of whom fall within the millennial and young adult cohorts and are employed in operational roles (Department of Trade and Industry, 2023; Wider, Jiang, & Udang, 2024). The prevalence of fixed schedules reflects persistent traditional management practices in SMEs, despite growing advocacy for flexible work models in the region (Dhakal, Nankervis, & Burgess, 2023).

## **2. Levels and Nature of Work-Life Conflict (WLC)**

The respondents strongly agreed that work responsibilities interfere with personal life. The most pronounced concern was emotional exhaustion at home due to work-related stress, followed by the frequent need to sacrifice personal time to meet job demands. Time-based and strain-based conflicts were more prevalent than behavior-based conflicts.

These findings mirror those of Allen, Cho, and Meier (2021), who emphasized the salience of time- and strain-based conflicts in environments where job expectations are rigid, and work boundaries are unclear. Similarly, Dela Cruz and Magno (2024) found that Metro Manila SME employees commonly report fatigue and emotional spillover, particularly in industries where job security is low and workload demands are high.

## **3. Perceived Organizational Culture**

Respondents reported a generally positive perception of organizational culture, marked by open communication, flexible responses to employee needs, and a high regard for employee well-being. Leadership support and peer cooperation also emerged as key strengths.

These findings are consistent with Zhou, Liu, and Wang (2023), who emphasized the positive relationship between supportive cultures and employee well-being. Denison and Mishra (2021) further argue that such cultural traits enhance organizational effectiveness by promoting employee engagement and loyalty. Furthermore, the presence of flexible practices indicates a shift toward more agile and empathetic management structures in Philippine SMEs, which aligns with global trends (Sriboonlue & Ponlajuna, 2025).

## **4. Organizational Culture Practices Addressing WLC**

Respondents agreed that their SMEs employed WLC-mitigating practices such as flexible work hours, non-punitive leave policies, and respect for personal boundaries. Managerial attentiveness to work-life concerns was particularly appreciated. However, informal support mechanisms like shift-swapping were less favorably rated, indicating a need for more formalized and equitable policies.

This aligns with Albite and Gempes (2024), who noted that while Filipino SME managers often demonstrate interpersonal compassion, structural supports such as formal policies remain underdeveloped. Ardianti (2023) highlights that informal coping mechanisms, while helpful in the short term, can create inconsistencies in support across employee groups. Hence, institutionalizing these supports can foster organizational fairness and sustainability (Fernández-Muñiz & Montes-Peón, 2022).

## 5. Variations in WLC Based on Employee Profile

Statistical analyses revealed significant differences in WLC based on age, sex, job position, and work schedule. Younger employees, women, those in rank-and-file roles, and workers under rigid schedules reported significantly higher WLC levels. In contrast, civil status, education level, and length of service did not significantly influence WLC perceptions.

These results echo findings by Wharton and Chivers (2020), who argued that demographic factors, especially gender and position, profoundly shape WLC experiences, often due to inequities in workload and access to flexibility. Women continue to shoulder disproportionate family responsibilities, exacerbating work-life strain (Carvalho & Chambel, 2022). Similarly, rank-and-file employees often lack bargaining power to negotiate flexible arrangements, heightening their vulnerability to WLC (Onyeka, 2022).

## 6. Recommended Strategies for Improving Organizational Culture and Reducing WLC

Respondents strongly supported several strategies to enhance organizational culture and mitigate WLC. Among the most favored were leadership training on work-life sensitivity, implementation of wellness and mental health programs, participatory policymaking, and the modeling of healthy work-life balance by senior leaders. While flexible arrangements were valued, they were slightly deprioritized compared to relational and structural interventions.

These priorities suggest a deep awareness among SME employees that leadership behavior and organizational empathy are pivotal in shaping work-life outcomes. Studies by Gempes and Albite (2024), Carvajal (2024), and Ly (2025) support this, noting that leadership modeling and mental health sensitivity significantly enhance employee resilience and retention. Moreover, the emphasis on participatory governance echoes calls for culturally responsive HR strategies within Southeast Asian SMEs (Crocco, 2021; Tahir, Yusoff, & Hashim, 2025).

## 7. Strategic Intervention Framework for Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) in Metro Manila

### *Purpose of the Framework*

This Strategic Intervention Framework is designed to guide SME leaders and managers in Metro Manila in strengthening organizational culture to effectively mitigate work-life conflict (WLC) among employees. Drawing from the study's findings, the framework addresses the critical areas where organizational culture, leadership, and employee support intersect, while considering the demographic and structural factors influencing WLC. It aligns with Philippine socio-cultural norms, operational realities of SMEs, and best practices from global literature.

### *Framework Overview*

The framework is built on three integrated levels:

1. *Macro-Cultural Foundation* (Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions) – Embedding Filipino cultural values such as *pakikisama* (harmonious relationships), *hiya* (propriety), and respect for hierarchy into leadership and organizational policies.

2. *Organizational Support Mechanisms* (Organizational Support Theory) – Strengthening formal and informal support systems that directly address employee well-being and flexibility needs.
3. *Employee Work-Life Navigation* (Work-Family Border Theory) – Empowering employees to manage boundaries between work and personal life through structural and behavioral interventions.

### *Implementation Phases*

#### Phase 1 – Assessment & Planning (Months 1–2)

1. Conduct organizational culture audit and employee WLC survey.
2. Identify high-risk demographic groups based on statistical findings (e.g., women, rank-and-file, rigid schedules).

#### Phase 2 – Capacity Building (Months 3–5)

1. Train leaders on work-life sensitivity and boundary management.
2. Establish employee participation channels for policy input.

#### Phase 3 – Policy & Program Rollout (Months 6–12)

1. Launch wellness programs, flexible arrangements, and role-modeling initiatives.
2. Pilot demographic-specific interventions and formalized informal practices.

#### Phase 4 – Monitoring & Evaluation (Ongoing)

1. Use quarterly WLC perception surveys to assess impact.
2. Adjust interventions based on feedback and changing business conditions.

### *Expected Impact*

By implementing this framework, SMEs in Metro Manila can expect:

- a) Reduced emotional strain and time-based interference for employees.
- b) Increased organizational commitment and reduced turnover.
- c) Enhanced trust, communication, and mutual support across teams.
- d) A resilient organizational culture capable of sustaining employee well-being even during operational challenges.

### **Conclusions**

Based on the results of this study, several conclusions can be drawn regarding the role of organizational culture in mitigating work-life conflict (WLC) among SME employees in Metro Manila.

First, the demographic and professional profile of the respondents reveals a diverse workforce, with varying age groups, educational backgrounds, job positions, and work schedules. This diversity underscores the need for tailored organizational interventions rather than a one-size-fits-all approach, as different groups experience and respond to work-life challenges in distinct ways.

Second, SME employees generally experience a high level of work-life conflict, particularly in the form of emotional strain and time-based interference between work and personal life. This suggests that, despite the presence of positive workplace practices, the demands of SME operations continue to exert significant pressure on employees' ability to maintain balance.

Third, the organizational culture of the SMEs studied is perceived positively, with employees strongly agreeing that leadership support, flexibility, open communication, and team cooperation are present. However, these strengths have not entirely prevented WLC, indicating that culture alone—without targeted interventions—may not fully address the problem.

Fourth, existing organizational culture practices such as flexible scheduling, managerial listening, and respect for personal boundaries are recognized by employees as helpful in mitigating WLC. Nonetheless, some practices, such as informal coping mechanisms, remain inconsistent and may benefit from formalization to ensure equitable access across the workforce.

Fifth, statistical analysis reveals that WLC levels differ significantly according to age, sex, job position, and work schedule, while civil status, educational attainment, and length of service do not yield significant differences. This highlights that structural and role-related factors may exert a stronger influence on WLC than personal life circumstances alone.

Finally, the study concludes that effective strategies to strengthen organizational culture and reduce WLC should focus on leadership development with work-life sensitivity, provision of wellness and mental health programs, participatory policymaking, managerial role-modeling of balance, and the gradual expansion of flexible work arrangements. These strategies should be implemented with consideration for the demographic differences that influence how WLC is experienced, ensuring that interventions are both inclusive and contextually grounded within the realities of Metro Manila SMEs.

## **Recommendations**

In light of the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are proposed to strengthen organizational culture and reduce work-life conflict (WLC) among employees of SMEs in Metro Manila.

First, SME leaders and managers should undergo leadership training that integrates work-life sensitivity. This training should equip leaders with the skills to recognize signs of employee burnout, manage workloads equitably, and foster a culture of respect for personal boundaries. Leadership behaviors have been shown to directly shape employee perceptions of organizational support and influence WLC levels.

Second, SMEs should institutionalize wellness and mental health programs that address both preventive and responsive needs. These programs could include stress management workshops, access to counseling services, and wellness activities designed to help employees recharge and maintain resilience. The study's findings show strong employee support for such initiatives, reflecting a growing awareness of mental well-being as a key driver of productivity.

Third, participatory policy-making should be adopted in the design and implementation of work-life balance initiatives. Involving employees in policy discussions ensures that interventions are grounded in their lived realities and increases the likelihood of employee buy-in. Mechanisms such as focus group discussions, employee committees, or regular surveys could be used to gather input before implementing new work arrangements or leave policies.

Fourth, managers should model work-life balance through their own behavior. This includes avoiding after-hours communications unless necessary, taking regular breaks, and using leave entitlements. When managers visibly uphold these practices, it normalizes balance-oriented behaviors across the organization and encourages employees to do the same without fear of reprisal.

Fifth, SMEs should expand flexible work arrangements where operationally feasible. For roles that require physical presence, staggered shifts, compressed workweeks, or occasional remote days can provide employees with greater control over their schedules. This is particularly relevant for younger employees, women, and those in rank-and-file positions, who were found to experience higher WLC.

Lastly, future SME interventions should be tailored to demographic differences revealed in the study. For instance, employees with rigid work schedules may need more structural flexibility, while those in managerial roles may benefit more from delegation and workload distribution strategies. By aligning interventions with specific needs, SMEs can ensure more equitable and effective WLC mitigation.

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