Addressing the Wellbeing of Administrative Employees in Church Schools in Malta: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract: Studying human resources is a great way to take care and invest in your work organisation, the economy, society, and the wellbeing of the workers. All leaders and managers work hard and try hard to create a working environment and support their employees by trying to invest in them and safeguarding their work-life balance. This healthy environment will lead to more working ideas, refine job satisfaction, and increase productivity and wellbeing. This focuses on administrative employees’ wellbeing in Church schools in Malta. Individuals working in the education sector in different levels of school administration participated and their responses may be beneficial to improve their wellbeing at work. Administrative employees play an important part in every school. Through this study, various factors were discussed such as their motivations, needs, work-life balance, and their daily challenges. This study shows that policymakers and leaders in Church schools or colleges must keep on investing in their employees by supporting them through meeting their needs and to sustain their motivation. It is vital to continue supporting them in their workload, their working processes, training, and initiatives and by being creative and maintaining a healthy working environment. This study addresses the importance of being part of a team to instil a healthy working environment where employers are inspired by their employees’ skills and by investing in their work-life balance. Stakeholders in Church schools and in the education sector, including managers and policymakers, need to address the needs of administrative employees in order to invest in the success in their organisations.

Keywords: administrative employee wellbeing; work-life balance; motivation; job satisfaction; teamwork; healthy working environment

Background

Introduction to Employee Wellbeing

To create a healthy work environment a lot of care must be shown in order to sustain the individual needs for all employees. Employers recognise that wellbeing goes beyond benefits such as retirement plans and health insurances. All work organisations have the duty to motivate their managers and employees, to be engaged in their work, and protect them from unhealthy and unsafe practices. This research intends to address the literature gap relating to whether Church schools in Malta are really addressing the needs of employees, if they are helping them in their careers and their long-term positions, and if employees have been in the same position for a long time.
Administrative Employee Wellbeing in Church Schools

I selected the wellbeing of administrative employees in Church schools as the subject of focus because I have been working in the administration sector of a Catholic school for a long time. Studying human resources is a great way to take care of and invest in your work organisation, the economy, society, and the wellbeing of workers. All managers and leaders work hard and strive to have employees in a place where they want to work, and where the ultimate purpose is happiness and health. I believe that managers and leaders invest in their employees to promote the place of work and to fulfil the mission and purpose as well as to achieve happiness at work.

Research Questions and Research Objectives

The following are the research questions:
1. How is the management investing in their administrators to promote their wellbeing, such as
2. training, support, monitoring, and providing feedback to all employees?
3. What measures can be taken for administrative employees to instil work processes that are efficient and which contribute to their wellbeing?

The following are the research objectives for this study:
1. To understand how employees can contribute to promote change in their work environment so as to provide a better wellbeing to educational administrators.
2. To recommend what actions can be taken by employees to instil work processes that are efficient and which contribute to their wellbeing.
3. To examine how administrative employees are being recognised and appreciated in Church schools.

Healthy Working Environment

Throughout these long years working in administration, I have learnt how we can approach people management in different ways and achieve great results. I believe in demonstrating trust, empathy, caring, and managing people with positive intent. It is always vital that managers know the way to connect their skills, promote ideas, identify, and address wellbeing to the people around them. Managers and leaders can promote a healthy working environment which can lead to more working ideas, consequently increasing productivity, lowering staff absenteeism, and refining job satisfaction and staff retention rates (Michell 2018).

The recent publication of a Research Report by the UK Department of Education on school and college staff wellbeing suggest that “further empirical evidence is required to draw meaningful conclusions, comparing the factors impacting staff wellbeing” (Cooper Gibson Research 2019: 55). This study also proposes a number of measures which require further exploration such as wellbeing initiatives and programmes that are being promoted especially with respect to administrative staff in Church schools.

With this study, the researcher will be able to understand some of the managers’ potential issues and management strategies related to wellbeing. From this study, the education sector will benefit from this research to promote, identify, and address wellbeing issues of administrative staff.
Administrative Employee Motivation

The education sector in Malta has a lot of administrative employees in various Church schools and colleges in Malta. The Malta Public Service offers various career opportunities, support, and guidance for all its employees. I will look into this huge important sector in our society by studying the administrative workers’ motivations, needs, and training and comparing the changes and strategies in their work with human resource theories. The critical factor will be to focus on the wellbeing issues related to their place of work (The Malta Public Service 2020).

Employees’ wellbeing and health is an essential resource for every successful company. A happy workforce is a productive workforce. Every employee’s wellbeing is a fundamental concern that all companies should strive to address and adopt, ensuring that their employees are happy, motivated and smart (Great Place to Work For All 2017).

Administrative Work and Wellbeing

This study’s focus is about the administrative employees’ work and wellbeing. With this in mind, proposal and study the researcher would like to observe and concentrate on administrative employees’ wellbeing to emphasise the importance to recognise the vital work that is continuously progressing. Modern management theories tend to focus more on the behaviours and efficiency of workers and the processes employed in the organisation.

The researcher will be conducting face-to-face interviews if permitted or online interviews because of the COVID-19 pandemic to six chosen participants who are working in the junior and senior schools. These participants will be made up of two heads of schools, two assistant heads, and two secretaries. By using the qualitative approach through interviews, the researcher can understand, study, and forward the employees’ comments and desires. Sharing of working experiences, changes at work, remuneration and work processes will help the education sector understand the employees’ opinions, motivations, and if they are really happy at work.

Through this research study, I would like to point out to policymakers that administrative employees are leaders who help any organisation to achieve its goals efficiently and effectively and concentrate on building relationships with their employees in order to increase productivity to meet global demands.

Literature Review

Wellbeing, engagement, and motivation of employees play an important impact on every employer and employee in order to achieve positive outcomes. In every business, employee wellbeing is about enhancing employees’ health, not only taking care of their wellbeing but having employees feel comfortable and satisfied with their working environment that shows support, especially when required. Nevertheless, the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has emphasised more than ever before employee wellbeing as being crucial for every successful business. Workplaces have changed from a very busy office environment to an online office, highlighting the need to understand and show support in the work-life balance of employees by adapting wellbeing strategies.
Addressing the Wellbeing of Administrative Employees in Church Schools in Malta: A Qualitative Study

**Figure 1: Literature map**

**Policies and Strategies**

In 2016, Eurofound published a study: ‘Sustainable work throughout the life course: National policies and strategies’ focused on policies to improve and accomplish viable work in 10 EU Member States (Budginaité 2016). National policies were targeted to support possible sustainable work in these countries and how policies are being applied and if they are combined into a consistent framework and to check if they correspond to or are complementary or contradictory. Different areas of support were discussed such as the types of jobs, the working environment, and the employees’ personal needs. Employees who are supported by their employers and companies are more pro-active and this allows them to keep on working after the pension age. In this study, employees from Sweden, Netherlands, and Belgium were the best model countries which uphold a positive working experience. Other countries, such as Germany, have other criteria including a good notion of the best quality of work; Poland has a well-balanced working attitude; Lithuania has good quality employment; and, finally, Finland showed good quality of life.

**Workplace Culture**

Most employees believe that their work is not only a job but that there is a connection with the need to stay within the organisation because there is a high level of trust, work pride, and performance culture (Belias 2014).

With the increase of mobility of workers around the globe, workplaces are experiencing multiculturalism which cannot be ignored when discussing employees’ wellbeing. Every year in Australia, a multicultural celebration called ‘Harmony Day’ is celebrated on the 21st of March to acclaim the rich cultural diversity and to give a message of belonging for everyone. These events encourage all employees in their place of work to represent the idea of inclusion, respect, a sense of belonging, and can be really beneficial to incorporate diversity and inclusion as part of regular employee training (Australian Women Online 2022). These positive celebration events promote character, personality, drives employee engagement, and retention and affects performance (Harmony 2022).
Addressing the Challenges

Online Solution

Employee wellbeing is a priority and challenge for every workplace, making it more meaningful for the employees. Significant pressure during the COVID-19 pandemic was experienced in the education sector as work and training had to be shifted online especially during lockdown periods. During the pandemic, colleges and their administrative staff had to immediately shift to online work and online communication between all the employees in the college and effective communication between parents and the college. This created stressful moments on administrative employees as they had to quickly adapt using online work and quick decision-making had to be done and applied so that normal schooling tutoring could continue smoothly.

High Salaries and Packages

In some organisations, administrators are usually influenced by higher salaries and good packages. Countries in the European Union have benefited through funds for their workers and used them to combine and launch well-being coaching, the best mental health support, and counselling. Workers need to know that if they need help it is there for them to access it (EU StartUps 2021). Administrative employees are continuously looking for a better wage as their wage is lower than the average €37,606 in Malta. On the other hand, average wage of administrative grades is €24,095 annually. Moreover, the highest wage in a church school is of €18,000 which is half the average wage in Malta. The highest paid career wages are in business and management, having an average wage of €51,047 and shipping and aviation with an average wage of €47,477.

Encouraging Continuous Learning

Administrative managers can inspire and promote a positive and profound learning culture in a team or group. When identifying areas of improvement and weaknesses, colleges can use these instances as learning prospects. Future positive and planned focused approaches are much needed nowadays and employers need to involve all their employees both in the planning and decision process as they will feel part of the ongoing processes and do not search for other jobs.

Promoting a continuous learning working environment at work triggers more happiness and satisfaction at work. Employers have to invest in their upskilling by providing them professional resources, time to engage in training, work in teams, offering supervision when needed, and teaching them how to implement their new learnings in their job. On the other hand, the employer needs to let go and forward projects to their employees as this will create a sense of loyalty and motivation.

Abraham Maslow’s Theory and Work-Life Balance

Giving attention to the employees needs at work is an important aspect in learning more about the wellbeing being provided at the place of work (Hesketh and Cooper 2018). Motivation and employee engagement are vital elements in making sure employees feel appreciated and valued in their work. Various research is done on employees’ motivation to investigate and see what the main factors which influence employees are (Kanfer 2012). Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1942) is very effective and one can help one understand the links between administrative staff’s motivation, employee engagement, and their self-actualisation (Kaufman 2018).
Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs theory is still significant, vital, and relevant in contemporary businesses and organisations that seeks success and excellence. Through Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, employers and employees can be guided, motivated, and help them to perform more efficiently and effectively (De Simone 2014). The main principle is that people have fundamental needs which they seek to fulfil through work, including the needs for survival, social needs, individual needs, and self-actualisation needs. It is vital that an organisation motivates its employees as suggested through Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs and as explained in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stages</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Actualisation</strong></td>
<td>Fulfilment and happiness at work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-Esteem</strong></td>
<td>Employees are recognised for their outstanding influence in work projects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Belonging</strong></td>
<td>The importance of team formation, training, management and celebrating project achievements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Safety</strong></td>
<td>The organisation has to make sure that employees are in a safe environment with the appropriate tools and measures are in compliance to the legislation and occupational standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physiological</strong></td>
<td>Contribution of wages and salaries for all the employees.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 1: Stages of Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs*

This research will explore how this theory can shed light on the employees’ satisfaction ratings at work and how employees handle their work and life balance (Scott-Jackson and Mayo 2018).

Managing a work-life balance is surely a very stressful and a difficult task for every family, and every manager who takes care of his employees has to go a step further and make sure that the company is reaching out not only to its employees’ production but their work-life balance. Companies are upholding and introducing continuous family-friendly measures and flexible working arrangements which go beyond the working environment.

As stated in the Manual of the Work-Life Balance Measures (Government of Malta 2021), the Public Service strives to be the ideal employer in safeguarding all employees' benefits and needs. It outlines a lot of opportunities and methods that are of assistance to the employees, for example paid leave for families in need or unpaid leave for family reasons. There is still a significant change with the comparison of females and males who have managerial positions and have care responsibilities. A survey which was conducted in 2018 states that most managerial posts were taken by men, 69.9%, with the remaining 30.1% being taken by females; on the other hand, in the administrative field, 63.3% were females and 36.7% were males (Labour Force Survey 2018).

In Malta, 6.5% of administrative employees between 18-64 years old have used family-friendly measures as stated in an NSO survey in 2018 (Labour Force Survey 2018), 73.5% of whom were females and 26.5% were male. On the other hand, this reports affirms that 60.2% did not make use of formal care services, such as making use of childcare services. Families were not using these services because individual care was arranged between the families.

*Gender Equality*

Gender equality can be achieved by every company when it is attained by addressing it holistically throughout all the working levels and areas and sustained by ongoing
development goals. Companies that embrace this fundamental human right in their companies have an essential base for a successful and a good working environment. Hence, it is essential that employees working in schools have the required support and services so that they will not have to change their job because of their family needs. NSO Statistics show that in 2018 there were 8,121 non-teaching staff, which was an increase of 1.6% when compared to the previous academic year. Female employees represented 73.4% of the total of the non-teaching staff (NSO 2021). This table proves that more women choose such stereotypical work, for example clerical work rather than male-dominated job sectors, for example craft and related trade workers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Occupations</th>
<th>Men</th>
<th>Women</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary occupations</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant and machine operators, assemblers</td>
<td>61.8%</td>
<td>38.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Craft and related trade workers</td>
<td>91.5%</td>
<td>8.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service and sales workers</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clerical support workers</td>
<td>36.7%</td>
<td>63.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technicians and associate professionals</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professionals</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
<td>57.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managers</td>
<td>69.9%</td>
<td>30.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 2: Occupation by Gender (NSO 2021)*

The equal contribution of women and men in every decision-making level is a necessity for inclusive, gender-reactive administration systems. When an institution goes against gender gaps there will be more business development, more confidence in the employees. A gender gap study designated by the European Parliament’s Policy Department, which included fifteen EU countries, studied this gap, and the roles, challenges and abilities in the administrative sector (Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs 2021).

**Challenges for Employees**

Nevertheless, gender imbalance, respect, and inequalities are still a challenge in contemporary organisations. An ILO survey revealed that there are still many people who believe it is unacceptable for a woman to have a job outside the home, especially if their children are still young (ILO 2022). Another example of the gender gap is the difference of pay between individuals who are working the same job. Even though there is an increase in progress, it is still a problem within the European Union, as the gender gap is 14.1% and has only decreased these last 9 years by 2%. Women earn 86 euro cents for every 1 euro men earn, hence women need to work 2 extra months to make up for this difference. As stated in the EU Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025, policy objectives and actions are there to carry out a gender-equal Europe for all individuals to have equal opportunities to succeed and can likewise take part and be a model for society and for later generations (European Commission 2021).

**Job Satisfaction**

All employees who form part of the administrative section have to be valued and shown that their ideas and involvement in the organisation are listened to and implemented
where possible. Organisations cannot afford to wait for annual performance evaluations to give a positive feedback to its employees. It is essential that employees are engaged with their supervisors and communication plays an important part in everyday running of the colleges. Employee performance and feedback are part of the job’s satisfaction which all organisations have to keep on investigating and working on their employees’ wellbeing, especially taking measures to protect their health and general wellbeing.

Job satisfaction has a strong bond with work engagement and at the same time influences the different levels of motivation. Employees who are highly involved in work strategies and decision-making are more proactive, and feel more challenged and satisfied with their work performance.

Another important factor is how employers and employees behave towards new institutional strategies or new process changes (Brown and Osborne 2005). New strategies and changes can have an impact on the wellbeing of employees and their managers.

Mental Health

The first challenge of public health in the World Health Organisation is mental disorders which affects 25% of people every year. This challenge has introduced a European Mental Health Action Plan to focus on ideas and projects as well as actual actions to strengthen mental health and wellbeing. The wellbeing of every employee is the focus of every employer and policies are discussed and set up to decrease any risks and increase metal wellbeing. Hence, education institutes should have values and a vision for their employees, for example by facilitating situations where the employee wants to keep on studying. Organisations and employers should go beyond offering individual help for their employees by taking in the consideration family friendly measures. Motivational activities are introduced for employers to reduce psychosocial and job-related stress by introducing and implementing basic programmes to stimulate and encourage well-being in the workplace (The European Mental Health Action Plan 2015).

Happy and productive employees will take some time to move from one job to another especially if they are valued and supported. All employees want and expect growth opportunities and if the company does not offer any growth opportunities, the employee will be frustrated and dissatisfied. Employees who are not happy at work create a very difficult work scenario and sometimes can cause problems to the company.

Compensation per Hour of Employees in EU Countries

Compensation is a very important factor for all employees as it reveals their motivation and satisfaction at work, their job performances and the amount and quality of work among employees, the society and their families. Compensation packages have to be planned by the companies beforehand and are usually done through direct payments or bonuses or indirect payments such as health insurances. The consistent average of compensation per hour of employees in European Union countries was that of €23 in 2016. In Brussels and Luxembourg, the hourly compensation was €44, but in three localities in Bulgaria and Romania it was €4 per hour. At the same time, Germany, United Kingdom, Italy, Spain, and Greece had a high rate of hour compensation (Eurostat 2016).

Training and Leadership Skills

In Church schools no training or leadership skills courses are introduced for school secretaries. Courses are only offered for assistant heads and heads of schools. Companies have to invest in their employees and train their managers to understand other employees’
strengths, goals, and expertise, especially mentoring new staff which are working and studying. Administrative employees in colleges in Malta do not have rotation jobs but are employed and usually keep on studying or stay in the same position and do not change jobs because of their comfort zone or reach retirement. Administrative employees who want to further their studies in colleges find it very difficult to leave the job for a short period of time because some employers do not uphold job rotation. Job rotation was introduced in 2003 as an EU Act and the intention of this working rotation is to foster companies to upskill their workers while on the other hand giving other opportunities for new staff to achieve substantial working experience and nurture a team experience (Job Rotation Scheme 2021).

Communication Between Employees

Even though most workplaces offer support, training, and well-being programmes, people are working harder, have busy lifestyles, and also have financial strains and sometimes even work long hours. This puts more pressure on any employee's performance at work, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic because employees could communicate properly and effectively. There is less physical participation and at times administrative employees are left alone in decision-making. This is a personal and individual choice and institutions are very much aware of these uncomfortable situations which create stress and tension in their working environment. Administrative employees on all levels need to share experiences with other colleagues because stressful workplace environments affect life at home and effect performance at work. An example of this is that of administrative employees working in Church schools or in other government institutions who are rarely asked or offered a free health check at the workplace.

Another important factor is appraisals or performance rating reports which every employer and employee would expect to have and, on the other hand, the employee can definitely give so much positive and concrete feedback to address and implement new or upgrade policies.

Working Conditions, Changes and Processes

Employees are the backbone of every organisation and both managers and employees have to find ways to support each other, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is essential that employees do not wait for their employers to instil change in their work processes because this will affect their daily workforce and wellbeing.

Church school administrators do not have enough resources or support facilities when it comes to employees who want to keep on working after their maternity leave. This causes a lot of stress both on the employer and on the employees as they daily have to send their children to a childcare centre as their place of work does not provide this service. On the other hand, another stressful factor is that administrative employees who want to further their studies are not given a choice to study during morning sessions but after work as it is very difficult to find replacements at work.

Conclusion

Every organisation is constantly looking out to employ the best employees in all sections and levels and is responsible for taking care of them in their working environment. The Institute for Public Services (IPS) carries out training for its managers and non-managers. Training is continuously given even to employees who are working from home or are on parental leave (Manual of Work-Life Balance Measures 2020). The government has provided funds for training all individuals to upgrade their certificates and have a better
chance of identifying work opportunities. This training is usually done after working hours and this creates more worries for the employees to balance work with family arrangements. Administrative employees in colleges rarely have the option to attend a course or training during working hours as employers do not have a replacement.

Expectations both from the employer and employees are high and are an expense for the company. Workplace training and health programmes should be realistic and planning should be done together to involve the employees. Nowadays, administrative individuals are not easy to find and SM teams in a college environment are constantly looking out for people to employ. Administrative employees should be encouraged to share their working experiences in colleges through other schools or institutes both in Malta and abroad as resources, policies, experiences, and ongoing programmes can be shared and compared.

In all administrative levels there is a great need to improve wellbeing strategies and implementations in supporting college employees. Administrators who have leading roles in colleges should have all the support they can get not only through training but by making sure that they too can have the required support, training, and breaks when needed and will allocate time to train other staff who can take their decisions when they are not present at school. Moreover, other colleges can be an asset in the sharing of resources, especially nowadays, when school budgets are so tight and a lot of expenditure is spent on COVID-19 measures. Nevertheless, college management can invest, plan, and use European funding for its administrative employees to maintain for their ongoing learning and changing process and development.

**Research Methodology**

*Research Onion*

Saunders (2016) stated that each layer of the Research Onion defines the research process.

*Figure 6: The Research Onion (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill 2016)*
Research Philosophy

Research philosophy represents a method of beliefs and theories regarding “the development of the knowledge and nature of knowledge as stated by Saunders et al. (2009:124). In this study, I adopted an interpretivism approach to get knowledge from the workers’ experience and identify factors which could be helpful for the administrative employees. A clear positive view of the administrative employees working in Church schools was tested and data was gathered for compulsory schools. Using such a grounded theory approach, I classified this information and provided facts, which led to recommendations which were an asset and beneficial for all managers who strive daily to make sure that the wellbeing of their employees is taken care of (Saunders 2009).

Research Approach

An inductive approach to reason out, provide meanings, searched for common patterns from the administrative employees' observations and from the data collected identified relationships and related to Abraham Maslow's Theory (Business Research Methodology 2022). This inductive approach conveys observations from the chosen applicants, and from these observations patterns were portrayed and then compared to theory.

Administrative employees were the main participants who identified gaps which were not being adhered to at work. A qualitative methodology was taken through six interviews from different schools to examine the wellbeing of this cohort of employees. An inductive approach was utilised to understand what actions were taken and made conclusions which were derived from the qualitative research. This approach was being chosen because it gave the research a unique depth of understanding which validated a theory based on human experiences. A qualitative approach was more suitable when interviewing a small group and analysing their responses through the qualitative methodology. The chosen participants who were interviewed were asked the same questions and from their responses I derived if they had different needs and working circumstances, even though they worked in different levels. Moreover, I explored and compared their results in the light of Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs Theory. From their experiences, I built and focused on how investigating factors affected their engagement, common demands, and innovation processes (Creswell 2014).

Research Strategy

The researcher used interpretivism as the philosophy of this research study to understand and explain the administrative employees’ different desires and needs in relation to their wellbeing at work. The researcher focused on this qualitative research through interviews to comprehend the significance of their behaviours, their social relationships with other people, and their beliefs and actions in their similar working environment (Rey 2018). Hence, the researcher conducted one-to-one semi-structured interviews to learn more about their working processes, their needs, well-being, and happiness in their working environment (Kern, Waters et al. 2014). Moreover, the researcher challenged common administrative policies or assumptions which have been in the administrative system and which could be of assistance to change or modify working situations or policies which need to be more effective (Rubin and Rubin 2012).

Data Collection Methods

The data was collected through qualitative interviews applying the mono method. The mono method provided the required data and drew conclusions and recommendations
about the topic which was undertaken in this research study. I used this primary data from interviews and carried out individual face-to-face or online interviews, depending on the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic. I asked the same questions to all the chosen participants which included open-ended questions. These interviews took approximately one hour and were done once and were recorded. Furthermore, I wrote handwritten notes to make sure that all important information was recorded.

Time Horizon

A cross-sectional time horizon was used for this qualitative research in the collection of the primary data due to time limitations. Otherwise, a longer period of time would have been required for the survey to register the effect of changes in a wider timeframe.

Techniques and Procedures

Semi-Structured Interviews

I conducted semi-structured interviews with each experienced administrative participant. These chosen employees were notified beforehand that all interviews would be recorded and a letter requesting permission from the Church school authorities was issued and sent to all the chosen participants. The interviews included questions such as the type and number of years of employment, opportunities, conditions of work, training, career progression, wellbeing issues, work-life balance, mental health, and appraisals. This data was important as I established reliability and validity of the research by measuring and assessing the quality of the overall responses through comparison with secondary sources found in the literature review.

The chosen administrative employees gave consent to the semi-structured interviews to freely express their personal views which made for a sound and comparable qualitative data.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Semi-Structured Interviews

As stated by Rubin et al. (2012), an advantage of semi-structured interviews is that it is vital for qualitative data as it is first-hand, reliable, and comparable information which involves direct opinions from—in this case—administrative employees. Another advantage was that there were no distractions during these face-to-face interviews and I went into detail using open-ended questions to clarify, rephrase, or elaborate if needed.

A disadvantage of these interviews was that when conducting open-ended questions, it was more time-consuming as the chosen participants took more time to answer, especially if they were sensitive issues for them. The chosen participants could have disclosed personal issues and the time to analyse them required more time to process and arrived to conclusions. There was also a risk of bias, which could have directed the participant to give responses that I was expecting. On the other hand, I was careful not to show my personal emotions, lead or share experiences during all interviews as this could have interfered with the participants’ responses.

Sampling Strategy

In this study, the non-random sampling technique was used to extract detailed information about the employees’ needs and as such purposive sampling was adopted for this research study. This sampling method meant gaining better results and present research results when qualitative responses were gathered because this sampling method had the ability
to gather a wide range of information on the subject. Interview questions included a mix of close-ended and open-ended questions to observe their opinions, share their knowledge, and suggestions with other employees. I also intended apply convenience sampling in selecting the participants as these were conveniently chosen out of the population that I had contact with. The participants comprised two heads of school, two assistant heads of school, and two secretaries (Hatry et al 2015).

**Qualitative Data Analysis and Coding**

I used thematic analysis and identified, analysed, and reported patterns which were documented in the collected data. I adopted the approach recommended by Braun and Clarke's (2016) approach to follow the following procedures such as reading and familiarisation with the data, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing the themes, defining, and naming the themes, and writing up the analytic narrative and data extracts, as well as contextualising the analysis in relation to existing literature (Byrne 2021).

Primary data was collected from the interviews which were then transcribed, analysed, and organised to convey findings with the various informative and inferential statistics to be then uploaded to the MAXQDA software. I used this software and found factors such as stress at work and lack of resources at work. A line coding technique was used and I studied each transcript, and created codes from the responses. Coded segments were grouped into coded categories which indicated the employees’ experiences, working processes, and their working conditions. With this information, the MAXQDA software was used to enable the process and create a structured coding system.

![Figure 8: Coding using MAXQDA Software](image)

For this study, I aimed to find significant elements in the needs and desires of the AE and understood what could lead to a better understanding of the employees’ needs. I explored,
described and explained these needs and presented conclusions and presentations from the results of the study (MAXQDA, 2022). The guidelines followed (Charmaz 2006) were data collection, comparison, and analysis, which were undertaken simultaneously after each interview. I have created memos while utilising MAXQDA software for data analysis which allowed for analysing the data promptly and to generate ideas.

**Limitations**

The risk of bias was considered as I knew most of the chosen participants through their administrative work I kept a clear focus throughout the interviews not to ask personal questions. All participants were sharing their personal experience and had one hour to answer all the interview questions.

Another factor was that conducting face-to-face interviews was time-consuming and costly as the interviews had to be individually transcribed and analysed. Different interviewers could interpret the interview questions in various ways.

**Analysis of Results**

Qualitative studies and data helps organisations and their managers to comprehend their employees and customers because this kind of research goes beyond figures, concentrating instead on the complexity of individual opinions and experiences. This research is built on a thematic analysis approach based on the selected topics which address the research questions. Data was collected and significant themes through these interviews were drawn up from the literature review and were used to outline the field research as stated in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Defining AE’s WB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Understanding the needs of the employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. What factors influence their daily work routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Challenges, initiatives, and support</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Stress at work</td>
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<td>6. Work processes and continuous training</td>
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<td>7. Appraisals and gender equality</td>
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<td>8. Investing in your employees</td>
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</table>

**Table 4: Themes from the interviews**

I studied, analysed, and compared the similarities and variances of the data gathered from the secretaries, assistant heads, and the heads of schools. Important key findings of this analysis, together with the primary data collected, addressed the research objectives of this study. Information and facts were compiled and processed to find out more about the about the how and why in relation to the wellbeing of AE (MAXQDA 2022).
Definition of Administrative Employees’ Wellbeing

Happiness, positivity, psychological, and social wellbeing are key factors in this research study mainly focusing on AE in Church schools. These elements are essential criteria as they inspire and affect the wellbeing of these employees at work. All the interviewees expressed and highlighted the importance of employee wellbeing as it entails different aspects of health including physical, mental, and emotional health.
Employee Wellbeing Factors

All participants indicated that wellbeing is an essential factor and, besides the professional aspects of every individual, it was frequently mentioned that we are all different people, with different characters, needs, and different stories or baggage. Personal working relationships in a happy working environment and a good work-life balance serves to help workers be happier at work and to allow everyone to contribute towards creating an atmosphere of collaboration.

Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs can also be applied by work organisations to improve employee needs by getting to know one’s employees and achieving fulfilment in their needs. In this study, the participants who were secretaries, assistant heads, and heads of schools were all coming from different church schools, working in different levels of administration, having diverse years of experience, and having similar tasks in administration. They all have their employees’ wellbeing at heart and try and have a happy and communicative working environment.

All participants expressed the importance of the school’s responsibility when supporting staff wellbeing and how beneficial it is to have a healthy workplace. Church schools invest and have to keep on investing more to have a good mental health culture amongst their employees and hold on to the culture community atmosphere. Another aspect mentioned by the respondents is the significance of teamwork which contributes to a positive and optimistic atmosphere at the workplace.

Understanding the Needs of Administrative Employees

Administrative employees are often resourceful persons with bright personalities who accomplish a high level of performance and carry out various tasks during their normal working days. The participants in this study explained factors which influence their wellbeing at work and their continuous ordinary needs. A vital factor mentioned by participants is time management, especially when meeting a variety of demands which are made through daily requests made by teachers, students, parents, and ancillary staff. Some examples of AE needs which were mentioned in the interview were:

- The piling up of work and deadlines which are not reached because of important issues or student/staff demands that come up and have to be dealt with;
- No communication is present with different administrative levels as this creates tension between employees;
- Unclear decision making among SM and the non-clear communication of tasks leads to confusion and uncertainty;
- The turnover of staff which indicates that more time has to be taken to get used to the normal school routine as every school has its own strategies and ethos.

Administrative Employees Challenges, Initiatives and Support

Even though all the participants stated that they work in a healthy working environment, challenges are a common factor which are encountered through various situations. Common challenges were expressed as seen below in Figure 12:
These chosen participants were asked if AE took initiatives. The secretaries, assistant heads, and heads of schools all had positive responses and said that either the staff took continuous initiatives or sometimes they suggested projects or changes in their work processes which were always accepted by senior school management.

Administrative employees play an essential part in every school or college, especially during the pandemic and more work was uploaded to keep the school running smoothly. Communication through technology played an important part as the administrative sector had to make sure that all students and teachers were on board on all school portals and were accessible for all activities. Nevertheless, this set aside individual boundaries and all responses from the interviews showed that emails were sent at all times during the day and at night. When boundaries are forgotten, support strategies have to be implemented in all levels of the administrative sector.

**Stress Factors and Work-Life Balance**

Stress among employees is a threat to all organisations and is a very challenging concept and it is important to recognise the signs of stress or distress in others and take action. During these interviews all the participants showed their worries in accordance with different working situations which generated stress, as shown in Table 5:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Secretaries</th>
<th>Workload and complaints from parents.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lack or unclear communication.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No training is done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No appraisals are done.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No increase in pay and no job opportunities.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistant Heads</th>
<th>Bad judgement from the head of school.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No feedback especially if new on the job.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Various activities at the same time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No work-life balance and burnout.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heads of School</th>
<th>Continuous deadlines and emails.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Warning the staff on matters which were against the Code of School.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student problems and traumas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent involvement in school issues and decisions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No work-life balance, increase in anxiety and burnout.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 5: Table of common stresses*
Abraham Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs Theory denotes that every individual is motivated by needs pursuing different levels of needs in a hierarchy order, beginning with basic needs and finishing with the self-actualisation. If a person does not progress in the five levels of the hierarchy, personal stress will be induced; hence it is very important for all the leaders of every organisation to identify what is threatening or sometimes lacking to resolve the employees’ stress.

Work Process, Decision-Taking, and Training

Work Processes and Decision-making

All assistant heads and heads of school showed that work processes were working well and were also changed where needed. In the case of the secretaries, they are trusted with several communication messages, for example with parents’ issues, and are consulted and left free to change any working processes that are entailed in their work. Even the assistant heads are always involved in the general working processes and they are encouraged to start new projects. Both heads of school emphasised that when some employees come up with suggestions for new projects there is always more creativity and consensus because they feel a sense of belonging to the project and this enhances teamwork among the staff. In this regard, Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is taking place as the staff is identifying itself with a project, which is a human need through which they connect together, feel like they belong to a group and feel good about the work done (Its Psychology 2022).

Training

Secretaries do not have any training at all and both interviews suggested that training should be introduced concerning how to deal with difficult phone calls, how to support a parent, and training on reinforcement of soft skills. As for the SM, team training is done with the rest of the teachers and sometimes even a two-day programme abroad, which is not enough.

Appraisals and Gender Equality

Appraisals

The heads of school stated that they all have individual meetings with their staff once a year and all the staff is free to speak to them when required. Appraisals are usually done after the probationary period but otherwise there are no official appraisals done. The secretaries deal directly with the staff and the SM staff and have feedback all the time.

Gender Equality

Although significant progress has been made in connection to gender equality, there are still embedded inequalities. The participation of women in employment is on the increase but is still low, with around 62% compared 75% for men on a global level, with approximately 32% of women who are employed across Europe working part-time (EIGE 2022).

In all the interviews, the respondents agreed that they view the person from a holistic perspective. All church schools work towards a community environment which is complementary, respectful, mutual, and edifying. Respondents stated that there is still an imbalance of gender in church schools as there are more women working in female schools than men.
Investing in Administrative Employees

Employees in any organisation need to be valued and taken care of, and this entails time and money. In all responses from the interviews, there were common considerations, for example that church schools do invest in their employees but that it is not enough. Investing in AE has to go beyond wages, training, and job conditions but takes a step further and focuses on the holistic well-being of the employee and the work-life balance. All individuals have a personal life and it is vital for all employees to feel a sense of belonging and that they are taken care of while finding support if needed. Senior management teams can invest more in bridging relationships between the AE and the staff and this requires a plan and strategy as time needs to be allocated. Moreover, social activities can be planned after school which include the family members of staff.

However, it is important that whatever investment is made with the AE is adequate while keeping in mind that different needs have to be accommodated, with investment programmes or initiatives ideally catering for different levels. An example of this is that the secretary’s needs, for instance, are different from those of an assistant head’s needs as they are dealing with different working methods and situations. It is crucial that an effective wellbeing strategy, which would be implemented well and evaluated, be set up to prevent difficulties and last-minute procedures which would further support employees who need to take some time off.

Administrative staff are constantly working on organisational structures to reach their deadlines but this can be a deterrent because of the constant bureaucracy which is still very significant in Church schools. Senior management teams need to go through their processes and control systems to facilitate the workload further. In all levels of school management, employees need to feel that they have reached their potential at work, and, as stated in Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, ultimately their self-actualisation.

Conclusion

The main findings for addressing the wellbeing of the administrative employees in Church schools were discussed in order to associate and compare them with the research objectives. This was done through the six chosen participants from different Church schools, comprising two secretaries, two assistant heads, and two heads of school, both in the junior and in the senior schools.

Figure 14: Indicators for the Wellbeing of AE in Church Schools
Major Findings

All the interviewees expressed their feelings and personal experiences and stated that although originally it was not their intention to spend their career working in a Church school, they remained working in this educational sector as they found it rewarding and they do not have any regrets about their decision. All individuals are dedicated to their roles and responsibilities within the school. They have an important role in the leadership of the school, implementing management styles and ensuring teamwork in their own levels of administration. This study concludes that all the chosen participants who work in different administrative sections of the school speak very highly of their positions at work and there are in a happy working environment and form part of a happy workforce. This indicates a high level of job satisfaction among the participants of this study. Furthermore, they all expressed their concern about their wages, especially in relation to the extra hours worked which are not compensated. They also highlighted that their workload is always on the increase owing to various factors such as capacity building, development of operations, and introducing new quality standards in schools. Secretaries particularly remarked that Church schools do not have career advancement possibilities and that although their responsibility and role in the school have become more managerial in nature, there is no commensurate form of career progression in this grade.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are aimed to support AE who have different roles in Church schools and to improve their wellbeing at the workplace. This study furthers understanding on some potential issues and how the education sector can benefit from this to best ensure the wellbeing of their administrative employees.

Capacity Building of Students and Staff

All respondents stated that there is always a plan of the day and all said that the work was done during the day, depending on priorities and their deadlines. Unfortunately, when the SM team has a crisis or a difficult situation that needs immediate action, all the work that is planned during the day will have to be put aside or done later at home. The SM team will work on this situation and pressure is put on the secretaries’ office as they have to catch up with assistant heads’ duties. Certain Church schools are adding up more classes per year, adding more assistant heads of schools, teachers, and learning support educators, but they are not increasing administrative staff, especially in the secretaries’ office.

Capacity building in schools entails a lot of planning which is done through the SM teams. However, school secretaries are rarely consulted on efficiency processes or when there is guidance needed for parents. The recommendation being made is that more secretarial staff is recruited for the church schools to be able to cope with the workload, increase efficiency, and reduce the stress level at work for secretaries. Another recommendation is that an HR manager be recruited in church schools as this will facilitate people in school who have to deal with recruitment, administration, and the wellbeing of all the staff working in the school. Creating the role of an HR manager can also be part of creating an opportunity of career progression for the secretarial staff who can be trained and qualified to fulfil this role within the school.

Sharing of Ideas, Work Processes, and Implementations Between Other Church Schools

Teachers do share their ideas and work when they are involved in projects done between schools, but when it comes to administrative level there are few opportunities and
occasions when these are shared. Secretaries are never given the chance to share good working processes with other schools as they are never organised, even though they might share the parents’ portal online. It is vital for secretaries to share ideas, working processes, and initiatives as this will of benefit both for the school and for their personal wellbeing. As a result of this study, it is being recommended that Church schools create a forum for secretarial staff so that they can share good practices and find ways to support each other in the fulfilment of their role and responsibility within the schools.

**Professional Support Service Within the School**

The heads of schools and assistant heads expressed a desire to be helped in helping out students and their parents who are going through difficult times by having an in-house social worker and counsellor who can support them, as well as the SMT who sometimes struggle to cope with the tension and does not know if they are dealing with these increasing situations in the right way. These difficult situations can either encourage the SMT to keep a growing mind-set and tackle common situations like bullying, conditioning, and culture problems among students. However, the respondents mentioned that a plan is set up to have a day of reflection by taking a day off to unwind in such situations, and above all, introduce team or individual exercises to share worries and good practices. Hence, this study is recommending that helping professionals such as social workers, youth workers, counsellors, and psychologists are recruited full-time as part of student services within the school. This is more viable when there is a large population of students in a school. In this way, the supporting professionals can intervene more promptly as they are present within the school premises and work hand in hand with the SMT. The professional support services can also offer support to the SMT, teaching, and ancillary staff. This measure will contribute to increasing the resources aimed at the wellbeing of the school population and will introduce an interdisciplinary professional approach to the educational process happening in the school, contributing to a better learning environment.

**More Opportunities for Administrative Staff**

Even though opportunities such as courses are provided, it is very difficult for assistant heads and heads of schools to attend as they are not replaced when they are not present at school. Most of the time they are still contacted and have online discussions and this is not fair for the employee who is not at school. On the other hand, secretaries do not have opportunities as, generally, in Church schools, there is only one full-timer and a part-timer, depending on the capacity of the school. It is important that the school invests in its employees and has planned goals which would be rightly measured. Training for SMT is conducted on a regular basis but any other training has to be done after school. This especially applies to administrative staff as at a secretarial level they cannot attend a day programme because there are no replacements. As suggested above, creating the role of an HR Manager and introducing a professional support service within the school will help in relieving certain administrative responsibilities from the head of schools and the assistant heads. Another role that can be introduced in the school is the Master of Discipline and Curriculum Coordinator which will reduce current load of the SMT. This will give them more time to concentrate on other tasks within their job description thereby allowing them to be more available for training.

**Helpful Programmes and Apps**

A major concern relating to the safety of the school children is the provision of staff before and after school, especially when supervising young children. This is a challenge to the administration of the school which always find it difficult to find and replace the staff required to supervise the school children before and after school. This challenge can be
solved by introducing an app between the SM team and all staff to facilitate communication and to manage the roster of their staff. An example of this is that, when a teacher is sick, a message is automatically uploaded on the app to finds another teacher to replace them in that cover of supervision. The assistant head in charge, the teacher who is sick, and the teacher who will carry out the replacement will all be informed at the same time. This will increase the efficiency of communication and relieves the administrative staff from tasks which take their time to address.

Figure 15: The Use of Apps in a School

Another example is student transport which is an increasing problem especially if children are sick or are still not on the van. This app can be shared between the SMT and all the van or bus drivers who would immediately know who should be present on the bus. As these apps are costly, the heads of church schools can agree to develop these apps and the operating system can be shared between the schools which will help in the cost reduction of developing such management apps.

Supporting Erasmus Projects and Other Projects

All projects entail a lot of time and commitment from all the employees and the major drawback is work that is required in project management when applying and implementing Erasmus+ projects. AE have to work on different projects at the same time and, in the meantime, continue their normal day-to-day activities. These situations increase tension and stress and it is important that projects are shared and worked on in a team. Evaluations and feedback for such EU projects require mentors for employees involved in projects to guide and advise them as to what they need to know to successfully manage and complete the project. When constructive and effective feedback is given, employees’ skills are highlighted and confidence is built through experience. This is encouraging for staff to participate more in the opportunities that are available, such as the Erasmus+ programme. This study is recommending that as part of the career progression of secretaries, one can consider the introduction of a new post of Project Coordinator which will enhance career progression for the secretarial grades.

Employees’ Work-Life Balance

Nowadays, it is the norm to check one’s phone, tablet, or laptop throughout the day. The COVID-19 pandemic has not helped as everything had to be online and it affected people’s lives at home with members of their family. This changed the boundaries between one’s personal life and the workplace. All the respondents agreed on the concept of learning how to switch off when not at work. Work-life balance plays an important part in all employees’
daily lives and they are conscious of the increase in working expectations. The secretariat of Church schools needs to implement target measures to promote wellbeing so as to have happier employees who are happier at home with their families too.

This study is recommending that further research be done addressing the needs of teachers and learning support educators who work hand in hand with the administrative staff to understand and study their wellbeing needs and work-life balance. In this particular research study, one has to consider the work practices that were changed because of the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic and how such new practices affected the work-life balance of employees in schools.

Conclusion

From this research on the wellbeing of administrative employees, the research question can shed light for educational policymakers, leaders and other administrative employees as to how they can benefit by investing and taking care of their employees' wellbeing. Moreover, this research has contributed more to the research gap and can help managers to invest more in their employees to promote employee wellbeing and create a healthy working environment in schools.

It is vital to approach people management in new and creative ways and achieve positive outcomes by showing trust, empathy, care, and manage people with an optimistic intent. The school management needs to address the wellbeing of administrative employees by introducing new methods, tasks, and managerial roles which enhance the wellbeing of employees and improve the management of the school. By taking action as recommended in this study, the school management approach is modernised to improve the quality standards in the school and enhance the wellbeing of the school community.

When action is taken to improve the overall wellbeing of administrative workers in a school, this study shows that people can ultimately be appreciated and recognised for their efforts and dedication at the workplace. Recognition of administrative employees plays an important part in the life of a school and the school management approach towards these employees is crucial in improving the overall performance of a school.

As stated by Maya Angelou, “People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel” (Maya Angelou, 2014)
References


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