

Duality of Roles: Work-Life Integration Faced by Faculty with Admin Strain in Pakistani HEIs: A Study with Grounded Theory Approach.

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Abstract: *This paper studies the lack of balance between the work and life for faculty members with additional administrative tasks in Pakistan's Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and the consequent problems and benefits of Work-Life Balance (WLB). The study analyses the consequences of the dual-role construct on personal wellness, professional self, and institutional impact. The semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 individuals in faculty positions from 2 universities in the country. The results obtained illustrate the interactions of the institutional climate, ambiguity conflicts, gender, and coping strategies. The study aims to add to the already existing body of knowledge around work-life balance and fragmented coping strategies on professional, personal, and institutional wellness. The four thematic conclusions reached include: (1) Conflict of Roles and Identity Dissolution, (2) Institutional Stagnation and Insufficient Assistance, (3) Culturally Imposed Gendered Roles and Societal Constraints, and (4) Coping Mechanisms and Endurance Driven Strategies. The developed theory suggests that achieving WLB is responsive to institutional responsiveness, individual agency, and socio-cultural context alignment. Faculty members suffer from emotional exhaustion and an eroded academic identity because of their overlapping roles, an outcome of poorly defined support structures and rigid administrative cultures. These tensions, though, can be reduced through strategic coping, peer support, and an active understanding of leadership. This study helps fill the gaps in organizational behavior and academic leadership by balancing WLB in the context of developing countries' HEIs. It builds on the literature by Channa on organizational support and work-family conflict, providing a unique perspective from Pakistan's academic system. Suggested actions such as policy change, proactive leadership, gender-sensitive institutional framework, and investment in digital networks are aimed towards availing gender equity. The findings highlight the urgency of tailored approaches to improve the wellbeing of the faculty in the context of the workplace, and the corresponding productivity of the institution.*

Keywords: Work-Life Balance, Higher Education Institutions, Faculty Dual Roles, Organizational Support, Role Conflict, Gendered Roles, Coping Strategies, Academic Leadership

Introduction

Context and Rationale

Increasing complexity and a greater focus on evaluation and accountability are defining characteristics of the contemporary academic environment. Faculty are often required to teach, conduct research, and administer all at the same time. (Slaughter et al., 2005; Altbach, 2025; AACSB, 2020). In AACSB accredited HEIs, administrative integration is a non-negotiable. It is part of governance and underpins strategic planning and accreditation compliance (AACSB, 2020, Stoten, 2022). Cultures such as

Pakistan are developing, and are marked by restrictive resources, hierarchies and socio-cultural expectations (Bhatti and Ali, 2020, Khan et al., 2023).

Balance between work and personal life (WLB) is a measure of the extent to which an individual is able to balance professional engagements and personal life. (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011) Faculty members born administrative responsibilities, the balance is usually thrown out of equilibrium because of excessive working hours, structural and role ambiguity, and organizational pressures. (Arif & Ilyas, 2013, Kinman & Jones, 2008) The absence of organizational structures that support WLB, together with socio-cultural norms is a big challenge to achieving WLB in Pakistani higher education institutions (Arif et al., 2017, Kumar et al., 2019).

Research Phenomenon

Although global academic discourse has increased focus on faculty wellbeing, empirical research on the ways faculty in developing countries manage dual roles is still scarce. Most research has a Western focus and ignores the fundamental issues confronting academics in Pakistan that include a rigid hierarchy, gendered roles, and restricted self-governance. Kumar, Channa, Bhutto (2017), Noor et al. (2024), and Al Qudah (2023) discuss these issues. This study illuminates the gap by understanding the experiences of faculty who work in AACSB accredited universities in Pakistan and undertake teaching, research, and various administrative tasks.

Research Objectives

- To understand the work-life balance challenges of faculty members who hold administrative positions.
- To determine the institutional and individual factors that act as facilitators and barriers to WLB.
- To construct a substantive theory that describes role intertwining of faculty members in Pakistani higher education institutions.

Significance of the Study

This research expands the current scholarship around academic leadership, work-life boundaries, and organizational behavior in the context of developing countries. It provides them with the tools necessary to create a more accessible and supportive work environment and provides university administrators, policy makers, and accreditation bodies with practical advice. The grounded theory can shape leadership and institutional policy shifts intended to improve faculty wellness and performance. It also attends to and incorporates Channa's work on Organizational Support, Job Crafting and Psychological Ownership (Naeem et al., 2021, 2019; Kumar, Channa, Maharvi, 2018).

Literature Review

Work-life Balance in Academia

WLB has begun to surface in academic spaces, especially with the adoption of corporate governance in universities which tend to overload faculty with administrative work (Altbach, 2025; Deem, 2001). Studies indicate that the absence of role autonomy, and work overload, are major drivers of burnout and job dissatisfaction in academic work (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Sirgy et al., 2001). Within the country, faculty members suffer more due to inflexible institutional structures, poor supportive frameworks, and socio cultural challenges (Arif & Ilyas, 2013; Arif et al., 2017).

Administrative Roles and Role Conflict

Faculty members with administrative duties encounter role conflict, which occurs when the expectations from one role cross paths with the responsibilities of another (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Goode, 1960). Such conflict results in strain on one's identity, dissatisfaction with the job, and poor outcomes (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In the case of AACSB accredited institutions, the administrative burdens are worsened by the need to accreditationally comply (AACSB, 2020). Institutional Support and

Flexibility Institutional support that encompasses flexible work schedules, mentor-protégé relationships, and work life balance wellness initiatives has been shown to alleviate work life conflict (Cogin, 2012; Rethinam & Ismail, 2008). Such support is greatly absent in Pakistan HEIs where faculty members highlight the lack of amenities, and the need for flexible working hours (Noor et al., 2017; Khan et al., 2023). Kumar et al., (2018) highlighted the importance of organizational support in boosting employee performance, indicating that the provision of such support, particularly for favorable WLB, is important.

Psychological Ownership and Transformational Leadership

Increased psychological ownership and autonomy among employees has been linked to transformational leadership (Bass & Riggio, 2006; Naeem et al., 2021). Within academic contexts, this form of leadership can help faculty accomplish the effective balance of the dual roles of teaching and research. Job crafting, that is, the ability to transform one's job to optimize one's strengths, is an important source of resilience (Work, 2001).

Cultural Barriers and Gendered Expectations

Women faculty have to deal with additional hurdles due to societal expectations of caregiving and domestic responsibilities (Arif et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2019; Bhatti and Ali, 2020). The lack of gender-sensitive policies and child care facilities increases the burden of stress. Research indicates that female faculty in Pakistan are more stressed and less satisfied with their jobs due to expectations related to gender roles (Bhatti et al., 2011; Al Qudah, 2023).

Career satisfaction and the Quality of Work Life

QWL has an important relationship with WLB and career satisfaction (Sirgy et al., 2001; Vitell et al., 2015). Perceptions of inequity that relate to promotion, workload equity, and allocated work hours adversely affect QWL (Arif & Ilyas, 2013; Arif et al., 2017). The preservation of QWL is a global issue and the Pakistani Higher Education Institutions are no exception (Yadav and Dabhade, 2014; Twenge, 2010).

Organizational Research: Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is concerned with developing a qualitative methodology to form a theory from data, not to test a theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2006). It is useful to describe highly intricate social phenomena: work-life balance, for instance, in which diverse elements interact in a fluid manner. Constructivist grounded theory focuses on the collaborative meaning-making process involving both the researcher and the participant (Charmaz, 2006).

Research Methodology

Research philosophy and design

This study utilizes a qualitative constructivist research design and framework (Charmaz, 2006). The logic and the focus for opting for this methodology is the shortage and under-theorized domains of work-life balance (WLB) for developing countries where institutions, cultures, and individuals coexist (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Birks & Mills, 2022).

The constructivist approach considers the researcher and the participant as actors of knowledge, and that sense is constructed around the context (Charmaz, 2006; Mills et al., 2006). The logic and focus indicates the necessity not to impose a structure to lived experiences, which the literature explains (or the lack of literature) is the case for dual-role faculty in Pakistani HEIs (Kumar et al., 2017; Arif et al., 2017).

The study focuses on the interpretivist approach. The faculty is in the interest of this study, as it focuses on how the faculty 'frames' the overlapping roles, and the different (or blurred) boundaries of work–

life. Contrary to a positivist mindset; this study, working, to a degree, in the context of the blind spots of reflexivity, subjectivity, and depth (Lincoln, 1985; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

Sampling Strategy

The choice of participants was purposively sampled following Patton's 2014 work regarding the insight phenomenon. The participants sampled 20 faculty members from 2 AACSB accredited institutions from Pakistan of various fields, genders, and stages of the career.

Inclusion criteria were:

- 2+ years of experience in teaching and admin.
- Works at AACSB accredited higher education institutions in Pakistan.
- An interest in participating in a recorded, in-depth interview.

Maximal heterogeneity was attained in terms of gender, academic rank, and institution type (public vs. private). This increased the transferability of the results and aided in the finding of cross-cutting themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018)

Participant Profile:

- 11 males and 9 females
- 7 senior administrators, (Dean, Director, etc.)
- 13 mid and early career faculty members with extra duties (committee, program leadership, etc.)
- Disciplines covered business, education, and engineering, as well as social sciences.

This WLB experience in various institutions and disciplines was useful to evaluate the influence of gender and hierarchy to the coping mechanisms, as well as perception and support in the institution.

Data Collection Procedures

Semi-structured interviews were done face to face in natural setting of the participants for a period of three months. Lengths of interviews was between to 45 to 75 minutes and audio recorded upon agreement of participants. Interview guides were prepared based on applicable literature and were pilot tested on two faculty members outside of the sample group.

Thematic areas of focus included:

- The experience of managing both an academic and administrative position.
- Institutional aid and hindrance perception.
- The Impact of the dual role on individual and professional identity wellbeing.
- Mechanisms and strategies of resilience.
- Socially constructed expectations and cultural contexts.

The interviews were based on a semi-structured format which Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) attribute to accommodating participants' need to be elaborate on their experiences and ensuring comparability across interviews.

During and after every interview, each participant was assigned an audio recording to write account notes which would serve to document observations, recorded participant expressions, and the interviewee's feedback. During the analysis phase, those transcription notes were used for higher levels of analysis.

Data Analysis

Analyzed to fit the comparative method, the data is based on the three levels of grounded theory and includes: open, axial, and selective (Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Charmaz, 2006).

- Open Coding: Examples such as “role conflict,” “emotional fatigue,” “peer support,” and “gendered expectations” required separate concepts and categories to be created in the form of line by line coding.
- Axial Coding: For example, “institutional rigidity” was linked to “identity fragmentation” and “coping through peer networks.” Patterns and causal linkages were identified through examining the relationships between categories.
- Selective Coding: Grounded theory was formed as other categories were integrated focusing around the center category “negotiating dual roles.”

Organizing and managing the data was done through the NVivo 12 software which allowed for systematic coding and retrieval. Memos throughout the process aided in managing emerging insights, theoretical integration, and analytic decisions following Birks and Mills (2022).

Methodological rigor was ensured through the application of the criteria of trustworthiness established by Lincoln and Guba in 1985.

- Credibility: Prolonged engagement, member checking and triangulation of data sources (interviews and field notes) were used to achieve this.
- Transferability: Enhanced this through thick description of context, participants and findings.
- Dependability: Kept an audit trail of coding decisions, memos and other methodological documentation.
- Confirmability: Enhancing corroboration with journaling and peer review minimizes researcher bias.

Likewise, engaging in the collaboration with the multiple institutions and the diverse sample population adds to the strength and broader impact of the result and its relevance to higher education institutions in Pakistan and the HEIs in the developing world.

Ethical Issues

Participants were sent information sheets and gave written informed consent before the start of the data collection.

The transcripts were coded and the data to be reported was password protected, which restricted access to people outside the research team. Participants were informed of the right to withdraw without any consequences from the study.

• Results and Discussion

These are the descriptive and detailed findings of the grounded theory analysis concerning the interviews with 20 faculty members of Pakistani AACSB accredited institutions. The findings were categorized into four main themes, which incorporate the stories of the participants and relevant literature.

Theme 1: Role Conflict and Identity Fragmentation.

Faculty members consistently described the tension between their academic and administrative roles. Many felt that administrative duties diluted their scholarly identity and disrupted their research productivity. “I spend more time in meetings and paperwork than in the classroom or library. It’s exhausting and disorienting.” — Participant 4.

This role conflict aligns with Katz and Kahn’s (1978) theory of role ambiguity and overload, where competing demands lead to psychological strain. “Pulled in a more than one direction” was a common refrain for participants, alongside the absence of any such pre-established performance (Goode, 1960;

Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). “There’s no clear boundary. I’m expected to be available for students, committees, and admin tasks—all at once.” — Participant 9,

Kumar et al., (2017) emphasized that supervisory support can buffer the negative effects of role conflict. However, in this study, such support was inconsistently available. Faculty often lacked formal role descriptions or workload balancing mechanisms, leading to identity fragmentation and burnout (Kinman & Jones, 2008; Sirgy et al., 2001).

This theme is the focus of study in emotional labor in the academics, where a faculty manages not just tasks, but also expectations and relationships (Hochschild, 1983; Ogbonna & Harris, 2004). In AACSB accredited institutions, where ‘do more with’ research and strategic engagement’ is a mantra, the stress is particularly acute (AACSB, 2020).

Theme 2: Support Gaps and Institutional Rigidity

The participants pointed out the system’s rigidity and the lack of any real support structures. There was a lack of wellness programs, administrative support, and flexible scheduling despite the AACSB accreditation and the strategic HRM and faculty development advocacy.

“Having AACSB accreditation means more paperwork and less support. There are global standards, and there are local constraints.” — Participant 13

This directly contradicts the belief that accreditation enhances faculty experience. AACSB standards, however, participate in governance and seek transparency in workload equity (AACSB, 2020). In Pakistan, these standards are poorly implemented in Higher Education Institutions (Stoten, 2022; Noor et al., 2024).

Organizational support enhances employee performance and wellbeing, a finding of Kumar, Channa, Maharvi (2018). In this case, however, faculty received little mentoring, counselling, or workload redistribution, and felt unsupported. Insufficient resources, as all of these, lead to heightened stress and diminished job satisfaction (Rethinam & Ismail, 2008; Vitell et al., 2015).

“Faculty goes HR unsupported. If you are burnt out, you either have to stay or resign.” — Participant 2

Institutional rigidity was clearly seen in the decision-making process. Faculty had no input in the assignment of administrative duties. The lack of autonomy prevents psychological ownership, an important constituent of job crafting of resilience (Naeem et al., 2021; Al Qudah, 2023).

In addition, the lack of streamlined administration processes and digital infrastructure was considered a barrier to effectiveness. Faculty members were more likely to spend more time working with manual systems which increased time and decreased productivity burdens (Yadav and Dabhade, 2014).

Theme 3: Cultural Barriers and Anticipated Roles

Working with male family members of the female faculty often created unique difficulties in managing time towards work and family. Poor cultural notions of caregiving, along with the lack of institutional empathy, created what is often referred to as a second shift.

“In my case, I have to work as a flawless mother, as well as a flawless administrator. Perfection is the only acceptable outcome.” — Participant 6

This is consistent with the work of Bhatti and Ali (2020) and Kumar et al (2019), which demonstrates that the work of social support functions to reduce the impact of organizational inequity on work family conflict, notably for women. Gendered expectations in Pakistani HEIs often prescribe informal norms that require the person, particularly a woman, to be reachable beyond working hours and turn up for routine functions (Arif et al., 2017; Al Qudah, 2023).

“The male counterparts are able to say no to work that is additional. I am not. It is considered

unacceptable. I lose my respect.” — Participant 17

The absence of policies such as non-existent childcare, zoning permits, and absence of gender responsive policies compounds the situation. It is well-documented that in Pakistan, female faculty work under a unique range of stress and low career satisfaction (Arif & Ilyas, 2013; Twenge, 2010).

Moreover, when it comes to struggling with balance, guilt and self-doubt take a toll on, which is emotionally draining and counterproductive judgment. The institutional focus on compliance and contracts is a form indifference to the plight (Ogbonna & Harris, 2004; Deem, 2001).

Theme 4: Resilience and Adaptive Coping

These adversities notwithstanding, faculty members exhibited resilience and used adaptive coping strategies. Boundary-setting and time management supported by peer encouragement emerged as dominant strategies for balance maintenance.

“I schedule two-hour blocks of absolute uninterrupted focus every morning for research. No emails and no meetings. It's sacred time.” — Participant 10

The informal peer support networks were vital for providing coping resources and emotional sustenance. Lunch meetings, collaborative rituals, and WhatsApp groups were effective in helping faculty in overcoming stress and isolation (Rothbard, 2001; Kelliher & Anderson, 2010).

“We’ve created a support circle. We share tips, vent frustrations, and sometimes just laugh it off.” — Participant 15

These strategies reflect the concept of job crafting, where employees reshape roles to fit their strengths and needs (Twenge, 2010; Naeem et al., 2021). Also, faculty leveraged digital tools to streamline administrative tasks and protect personal time. However, digitalization was uneven among institutions, with some lacking basic infrastructure or training (Al Qudah 2023; Yadav and Dabhade, 2014).

“I use scheduling apps and cloud storage to stay organised. But many colleagues still rely on paper files and manual logs.” — Participant 8

Those coping mechanisms, though, while providing short-term relief, cannot take the place of more fundamental change that needs to happen. Faculty articulated the importance of institutional acknowledgement of the dual roles that exist and the formal support structures provided (Cogin, 2012; Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Cross-Cutting Insights

Within every theme, one of the main insights was the gap between the institutions’ expectations and the faculty’s ability to meet them. AACSB accreditation, while aspirational, tends to impose global standards of practice on a context that is not country bound. Faculty are expected to work at international standards with little resources, support, autonomy, or Stoten, 2022; AACSB, 2020).

This creates a paradoxical disconnect: institutions pursue excellence while self-sabotaging the sources of that excellence—faculty. The grounded theory formulated in this paper argues that the WLB is a fluid negotiation defined by the intersection of:

- Institutional Responsiveness: Development of responsive policy frameworks, supportive management, and resource allocation.
- Individual Agency: The exercise of time management, boundary control, and peer relationship collaboration.
- Socio-Cultural Alignment: Practices sensitive to gender equity and culture.

This analytic prism enriches the literature on WLB in the context of HEIs in a developing country by incorporating structural, personal, and cultural elements. It also supports Kumar et al. (2018, 2020) case

that organisational assistance needs to be contextually sensitive and inclusive.

Findings and Conclusion

This grounded theory study is based on the lived experiences of faculty members in Pakistan's AACSB accredited Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) who, within a culturally complex and resource constrained environment, manage the dual-role of academic and administrative faculty. From the in-depth interviews and thematic analysis, four core themes emerged: Role Conflict and Identity Fragmentation, Rigid Structures and Absence of Support, Gender behavior, Coping and Resilience.

Role Conflict and Identity Fragmentation: Faculty experienced tension between scholarly and managerial identities, leading to emotional fatigue and reduced research productivity (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Kumar et al. 2017).

- Rigid Structures and Absence of Support: Although accredited by AACSB, Arif et al. (2017) and Kumar, Channa, Maharvi (2018) noted a lack of flexibility in institutional frameworks, supports, and digital systems, which increased stress and reduced control and autonomy.
- Gender behaviors and Cultural Barriers: Society and lack of institutional empathy placed undue burdens on female faculty members, which led to lower career satisfaction and greater emotional strain (Arif et al., 2017; Kumar et al., 2019).
- Coping and Resilience: Time management, peer support, and informal job crafting and 'revisioning' enhanced the ability to cope with challenges (Twenge, 2010; Naeem et al., 2021).

The theory we have grounded suggests that work-life balance (WLB) in higher educational institutions (HEIs) in Pakistan is the outcome of a structured negotiation of three interrelated elements:

- Institutional Impact: Policies of the HEIs with a focus on flexibility, advocacy of leaders, and available resources.
- Self-Advocacy: The skills of faculty members to control, boundary, schedule, and extend protection to themselves.
- Socio-Cultural Integration: The extent to which institutional practices are in line with the culture and expectations of the society concerning gender.

The proposed theory contributes to the understanding of WLB in developing countries and calls for bold change.

Theoretical Contributions

This study adds to the body of work in the areas of organisational behaviour, academic leadership, and HRM in a number of ways.

- It develops a context-sensitive model of WLB for faculty with administrative responsibilities and thus widens the application of ground theories in higher education.
- It provides an integrative framework around the institutional, individual, and cultural aspects of the challenges of the dual-role.
- It builds upon Kumar et al.(2018, 2019, 2020, 2021) and Naeem et al (2021) works through highlighting the interplay of organisational, psychological, and social factors comprising faculty wellbeing.
- It offers a counter-narrative to the assumptions underpinning global accreditation frameworks (e.g., AACSB) in the forms of local standards and practices vs aspirational benchmarks.

This study amplifies the faculty voice in Pakistan and helps shape the international conversation around academic work life balance, providing insights relevant to other higher education institutions in

developing countries.

Practical Implications

Policy Reforms in HEIs: Incorporating and addressing the mental and emotional aspect of staff wellbeing through the adoption of flexible work structures, minimisation of non-essential administrative work, and provision of support services like counselling, mentoring, and time-off policies is warranted. The policies of AACSB accredited institutions are required to steer their governance frameworks towards an HRM model that is both inclusive and sustainable (AACSB, 2020; Rethinam & Ismail, 2008).

High rates of burnout and role ambiguity can be controlled through guided work role structuring and role delineation. Formulated frameworks for role delineation and workload negotiation are also required.

The Dilemma of Transformational Leadership: In light of the necessity to support dual-role challenges, leadership training programs need to be tailored for academic leaders. Faculty need to be empowered through the provision of autonomy, complimented by frameworks for Recognition and Psychological Safety as advocated by Naeem et al. (2021).

Policy documents are required to frame the process for governance and address burnout and support the faculty through mentoring, delegation, and inclusive decision making. Policies in faculty leadership need to put burnout in the context of wellbeing.

The Need for Gender-sensitive Institutional Design: Childcare, parental leave and policies that include and address the gendered professional and domestic burdens are a need. The culture of the institution needs to be transformed to understand and support the special difficulty of women faculty in carrying out the professional and domestic roles (Kumar et al., 2019; Arif et al., 2017).

Structural forms of discrimination can be addressed through gender audits and inclusive HR practices. Evaluation systems should be able to provide tenure-track pathways without discrimination, while also taking into account caregiving responsibilities.

- Enhancing Networks Among Peers

Developing systems of informal peer assistance and mentoring has been shown to enhance resilience and collaboration. Institutions should develop and promote "communities of practice" where faculty can share coping practices, resources, and emotional support (Kelliher & Anderson, 2010; Rothbard, 2001).

These networks can also be used for collective advocacy and policy submission. Digital technologies should be used to sustain these networks across campuses.

- Digital Tools, Infrastructure, and Training

Targeted investment in digital tools and associated training can help alleviate the burden of administrative overhead. Scheduling software, cloud documentation, and virtual collaboration tools can help ease time constraints and enhance coordination (Al Qudah, 2023; Yadav and Dabhade, 2014).

However, digitalisation should be accompanied by the development of infrastructures to address equity and justice barriers. Institutions should provide faculty-focused training and ongoing technical assistance to ensure their digital tools are best utilized.

Research limitations and further avenues of study

Despite the in-depth analysis provided by the study, there is still the issue of the undersized sample and the small amount of geographic areas examined. A longitudinal approach to the study of dual-role experiences would be a valuable addition. A cross-country study of developing countries, or a study

contrasting AACSB and non-AACSB institutions would greatly enrich the understanding of WLB in the global academic context.

Further qualitative inquiries could strengthen the emerging theory, and consequently, the theory would have a greater claim to universal applicability. The relationship of gender, age, and academic discipline is another area which could yield valuable insights on WLB. Finally, and of equal importance, the emerging focus on faculty wellbeing and performance requires analysis of critically reflective leadership, institutional reform, and the effectiveness of people-centered transformations.

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