

The Service Paradox: Assessing Workplace Stressors and Morale in the OHRMO During PRIME-HRM Transition

Lovie Grace Mer G. Gabion¹; Queensly A. Alava²

^{1,2} Master in Public Administration Student, College of Management, Northern Iloilo State University, Iloilo, Philippines

Publication Date: 2026/05/16

Abstract: This study investigates the "Service Paradox" within the Office of the Human Resource Management Officer (OHRMO) of the Iloilo Provincial Government during its transition toward PRIME-HRM Maturity Level 3. The Service Paradox describes a phenomenon where HR practitioners, as architects of organizational wellness for others, often neglect their own internal stressors. Grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, the research assesses how high-stakes compliance and administrative pressures impact personnel morale.

Utilizing a descriptive quantitative design and a total enumeration (census) of the 32 OHRMO personnel, the study identified primary workplace stressors and calculated mean morale levels using a 5-point Likert scale. Results reveal that "Tight Deadlines" and "Technical Challenges" are the primary stressors, exacerbated by "Technical Debt", the psychological stress of using legacy manual systems to meet modern digital mandates, and "Structural Fatigue" caused by rigorous Civil Service Commission (CSC) audit windows.

Findings indicate a complex morale landscape: while personnel report high levels of pride and feel their contributions are valued, there is significant evidence of burnout and exhaustion due to current workload volumes. The study concludes that while institutional commitment remains strong, the transition has introduced significant structural strain. These results provide a diagnostic data set for office re-structuring, workload redistribution, and targeted wellness interventions to foster a culture of psychological safety.

How to Cite: Lovie Grace Mer G. Gabion; Queensly A. Alava (2026) The Service Paradox: Assessing Workplace Stressors and Morale in the OHRMO During PRIME-HRM Transition. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(5), 317-320. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26may136>

I. INTRODUCTION

In Philippine local governance, the Office of the Human Resource Management Officer (OHRMO) acts as the primary gateway for human capital development, managing core systems such as recruitment, performance management, and rewards. However, these practitioners often experience a "service paradox": while they serve as the architects of employee wellness and recognition for thousands of provincial employees, their own internal stressors frequently remain unexamined.

The OHRMO is currently undergoing a transition toward PRIME-HRM Maturity Level 3, which requires mass digitization, standardization of processes, and rigorous audit compliance. This study is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Model, which posits that occupational stress occurs when job demands, such as strict Civil Service Commission (CSC) deadlines, exceed available job resources like technical infrastructure. Specific challenges identified in this transition include "Technical Debt" (the stress of using legacy manual systems to meet modern digital requirements) and "Structural Fatigue" caused by the 5-to-6-month "Action Planning" windows mandated by the CSC.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a Descriptive Quantitative Design to capture a cross-sectional "snapshot" of the Office of the Human Resource Management Officer (OHRMO) environment during the peak of the PRIME-HRM Maturity Level 3 transition

A Total Enumeration (Census) sampling method was employed, targeting all 32 members of the OHRMO personnel from the Iloilo Provincial Government, including both permanent (Plantilla) and contractual staff. It excludes employees who are currently reassigned or detailed to other provincial offices to ensure the data reflects the immediate OHRMO environment.

➤ Collection Instruments

Primary data was gathered through a four-section structured questionnaire:

- Section I (Respondent Profile): Captured demographic and professional characteristics of the participants.
- Section II (Stressor Identification): Required respondents to rank five specific workplace stressors from 1 (most stressful) to 5.
- Section III (Morale Measurement): Utilized a 5-point Likert scale to assess eight key morale indicators.
- Section IV (Qualitative Feedback): Provided an open-ended format for participants to offer additional comments or suggestions.

➤ Ethical Considerations

The research adhered to strict ethical protocols. Informed consent was obtained from all 32 participants prior to data collection. Rigorous measures were implemented to guarantee the confidentiality and anonymity of responses throughout the research process, ensuring that individual data could not be traced back to specific personnel.

➤ Data Analysis and Interpretation

Workplace stressors were analyzed via frequency and percentage distribution to establish primary rankings based on the frequency of "#1" ranks. To determine the Average Morale Score, weighted means were calculated for each indicator.

Notably, to maintain the polarity of the Likert scale for Section III, the rating for indicator No. 7 ("Feeling of Burnout/Exhaustion") was reverse-coded during analysis. This ensures that a high mean score across all items consistently represents a positive morale outcome. The resulting means were interpreted using the following established scale:

Table 1 Established Scale

Mean Score Range	Descriptive Interpretation
4.21 – 5.00	Very High Morale
3.41 – 4.20	High Morale
2.61 – 3.40	Neutral

1.81 – 2.60	Low Morale
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low Morale

III. RESULTS

The results of the study, derived from a total enumeration (census) of 32 OHRMO personnel, provide a detailed look at the internal environment of the office during the PRIME-HRM Level 3 transition. The following narrative details the findings regarding workplace stressors and personnel morale.

➤ Primary Workplace Stressors

The workplace stressors were assessed by ranking 5 stressors from 1 (most stressful) to 5. As shown in Table 2: Primary Workplace Stressors the data reveals a significant concentration of stress around administrative and temporal demands.

Tight Deadlines emerged as the #1 stressor for 31.25% of the staff (10 out of 32 respondents), driven by the pressure to meet the strict 5-to-6-month Civil Service Commission (CSC) "Action Planning" windows. Physical Environment is ranked #2 stressor referring as Office noise, heat, or lack of ergonomic workplace, influence stress levels with 21.87% of staff (7 out of 32 respondents). Role Ambiguity, and High Volume of Documentation tied as the primary stressor for 18.75% of the staff respectively. Notably, Technical Challenges, while contributing to the office's "Technical Debt", was ranked as the top stressor by only 9.375% of respondents, though it consistently appeared as a secondary pressure across the data.

Table 2: Primary Workplace Stressors

Workplace Stressors	Frequency (Ranked #1)	Percentage (%)
Tight Deadlines	10	31.25%
Physical Environment	7	21.87%
High Volume of Documentation	6	18.75%
Role Ambiguity	6	18.75%
Technical Challenges	3	9.375%

➤ Personnel Morale and the Service Paradox

Personnel Morale Level assesses the mental and emotional state of the OHRMO staff regarding their tasks, their sense of value, and the overall work environment. The results, calculated using weighted ranking across the 32 respondents, are interpreted using the scale established in Table 3: Personnel Morale Scale.

Table 3: Personnel Morale Scale

Mean Score Range	Descriptive Interpretation
4.21 – 5.00	Very High Morale
3.41 – 4.20	High Morale
2.61 – 3.40	Neutral

1.81 – 2.60	Low Morale
1.00 – 1.80	Very Low Morale

The overall weighted average morale score for the OHRMO is 3.62, which represents High Morale. However, as illustrated in Table 4: Summary of Morale Indicators, this score is a composite of high institutional pride and significant internal strain, reflecting the "Service Paradox" where personnel remain committed to the organization while their personal well-being is under pressure.

The results indicate a strong foundation of professional identity and institutional commitment. The highest-rated indicator was the sense of pride in working for the office ($\bar{x} = 4.00$), with a vast majority of respondents selecting "Agree" or "Strongly Agree". This is followed closely by the belief that their contributions are valued ($\bar{x} = 3.90$), suggesting that staff feel recognized for their role in the PRIME-HRM transition.

Table 4: Summary of Morale Indicators for OHRMO Staff

Morale Indicator	Weighted Mean (\bar{x})	Interpretation
1. Sense of pride in working for the OHRMO	4.00	High Morale
2. Contributions to the transition are valued	3.90	High Morale
3. Sufficiency of digital tools/equipment	3.87	High Morale
6. Confidence in meeting CSC audit requirements	3.77	High Morale
4. Motivation to work despite heavy workload	3.68	High Morale
5. Mental wellness as an organizational priority	3.35	Neutral
8. Clear and timely communication	3.23	Neutral
7. Feeling of "burnout" (exhaustion)	3.19	Neutral

Furthermore, staff expressed High Morale regarding their confidence in meeting CSC audit requirements ($\bar{x} = 3.77$) and the sufficiency of digital tools ($\bar{x} = 3.87$). This suggests that despite the "Technical Debt" noted in the stressors section, the majority of the staff feels equipped to handle the digitization mandates.

However, the Service Paradox becomes evident in the lower-rated indicators. The scores for mental wellness as a priority ($\bar{x} = 3.35$) and clear and timely communication ($\bar{x} = 3.23$) both fall within the Neutral range. Most critically, the indicator for burnout (exhaustion) received the lowest score of 3.19, indicating a neutral state that borders on low morale. This quantitative finding is reinforced by qualitative comments where staff requested that leadership assess individual workloads "rather than just assigning" tasks, highlighting that

the volume of work is actively depleting the personnel's emotional resources.

In summary, while the OHRMO personnel are motivated by a high sense of value and professional pride, they are simultaneously experiencing structural fatigue and exhaustion, which threatens the sustainability of their morale during the transition to Level 3 maturity.

IV. DISCUSSION

The findings confirm the existence of the Service Paradox within the OHRMO. While personnel maintain high professional pride and institutional commitment, they are struggling with structural fatigue brought on by the PRIME-HRM transition.

Qualitative feedback from the respondents emphasizes that teamwork, transparency, and open communication are essential for maintaining morale. Employees suggested that "good performance should be incentivized" and that leadership should assess current workloads before delegating new tasks rather than "just assigning". To mitigate the risk of burnout, it is recommended that the OHR-Officer use this data for workload redistribution and targeted wellness interventions, fostering a culture of psychological safety as the office pursues Maturity Level 3.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

To further refine the "diagnostic data set" established in this study and to better address the "Service Paradox" within the OHRMO, future researchers should move beyond a general office-wide assessment and implement a more granular, unit-specific analysis. The following recommendations are proposed to deepen the understanding of how organizational functions influence personnel well-being:

➤ *Disaggregate Demographics by Functional Unit*

Future research should specifically capture the work unit or division of each respondent (e.g., Recruitment and Selection, Benefits Administration, or Performance Management). While the current study provides a "snapshot" of the overall environment, it does not distinguish if stressors like "High Volume of Documentation" or "Technical Challenges" affect all units equally or are concentrated in specific sections.

➤ *Correlate Stressors with Specific Job Functions*

By defining the individual job functions and division of work functions, researchers can identify which units are most susceptible to "Role Ambiguity"—the stress of balancing frontline services with rigorous audit preparation. This is critical because nearly 19% of staff identified role ambiguity as a top stressor, a figure that might be significantly higher in certain units than in others.

➤ *Evaluate Section-Specific "Structural Fatigue"*

Future studies should examine if the 5-to-6-month CSC "Action Planning" windows cause different levels of "Structural Fatigue" based on a unit's specific mandate. Understanding these localized pressures is essential for the OHR-Officer to fulfill staff requests to "properly know the workload before delegating tasks rather than just assigning" them.

➤ *Targeted Wellness Interventions*

Rather than office-wide programs, researchers should investigate the efficacy of targeted interventions based on unit-specific morale levels. For example, sections showing lower scores in "Mental wellness as a priority" ($\bar{x} = 3.35$) or higher "Burnout" ($\bar{x} = 3.19$) should be prioritized for workload redistribution.

By adopting these specific demographic and functional lenses, future research can provide a more sophisticated roadmap for maintaining PRIME-HRM Maturity Level 3 without compromising the psychological safety and internal morale of the HR practitioners themselves.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Bakker, A. B., & Demerouti, E. (2014). Job Demands–Resources Theory. In *Work and Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc..
- [2]. Civil Service Commission. (2012). *Memorandum Circular No. 3, s. 2012: Program to Institutionalize Meritocracy and Excellence in Human Resource Management (PRIME-HRM)*..
- [3]. Fountain, J. E. (2001). Paradoxes of Public Sector Customer Service. *Governance: An International Journal of Policy and Administration*, 14(1), 55-73.
- [4]. Pietz, K. B. (2019). *Change Effort Organizational Communication Effectiveness and Work Locus of Control Influence on Change Fatigue in the Workplace*. (Dissertation). University of Southern Mississippi.