

WORK-LIFE BALANCE AMONG SMALL CONSTRUCTION FIRM OWNERS A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF CV. MALALA IN INDONESIA

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the lived experiences of the owner of CV. MALALA in maintaining work-life balance within the demanding environment of the construction industry. Using a phenomenological qualitative design, data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations, then analyzed thematically following van Manen's framework. The findings reveal that work pressure arises from two major sources: (1) technical demands requiring continuous readiness for project execution, including during holidays, and (2) administrative complexity associated with inconsistent bureaucratic procedures. These pressures often generate work-family conflict, although effective communication and strong familial understanding help mitigate tension. The owner employs multiple coping mechanisms, including spiritual practices, emotional detachment, and social support from colleagues, which collectively reduce stress and reinforce personal resilience. Participants conceptualize work-life balance not as a strict separation but as an integrated, mutually enriching relationship between work and family roles. The study contributes to work-life balance literature by extending theoretical perspectives—role theory, conservation of resources, social support theory, and work-family enrichment—to the underexplored context of small construction-firm owners. Implications highlight the need for supportive ecosystems, including administrative reforms and institutionalized psychosocial support, to enhance well-being among micro-enterprise leaders in the construction sector.

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INTRODUCTIONS

The construction industry is known for its high workload and operational demands, requiring full preparedness from all stakeholders. Repetitive workloads, long working hours, and unstable project dynamics make this sector one of the areas with the greatest risk of work-life imbalance. Various studies, such as those from Fitrah & Prasetyo (2024);

Hadiyanto & Prasadjaningsih (2025); Mardikaningsih et al. (2022) show that work pressure in the construction industry is associated with decreased psychological functioning and the ability to maintain work-life balance. A study by Holden & Sunindijo (2018) showed that the combination of a strong work ethic, technology, and long working hours leads to fatigue and a reduced quality of life for construction workers. Lingard & Turner (2022) also found that tension between work and family life affects job satisfaction and the mental health of construction workers. These findings demonstrate the complexity of the issue of work-life balance in construction, requiring an in-depth approach, especially when workloads stem from various technical and administrative demands.

Over the past decade, the issue of work-life balance has received increasing research, as the construction industry exhibits higher levels of role misalignment than other sectors. Research by Kotera et al. (2020) confirms the high level of mental stress among construction workers due to long working hours and heavy physical and administrative burdens. Lingard & Turner (2022) also describe how physical pain and strain impact construction workers' ability to maintain a stable work-life balance. Furthermore, research by Cheung et al. (2022) emphasizes the importance of emotional well-being as a mediator between job stress and work-life balance in construction professionals. These findings reinforce the understanding that work-life balance in construction is influenced by various interrelated physical, emotional, and psychological factors.

Other studies highlight that role strain in the construction industry is often exacerbated by chronic fatigue and an inability to cope with prolonged workloads. Aghimien et al. (2024) identified high levels of burnout among construction workers as a major cause of increasing work-life conflict, particularly in regions with strict regulations and limited structural support. Research by Dlamini et al. (2019) showed that work-life balance policies in the construction industry are still inadequate due to work patterns that require rapid response and highly rigid organizational structures. Concurrently, Mustika et al. (2024) found that work-life balance is closely related to job satisfaction and commitment of construction employees in Indonesia, primarily due to psychological factors and organizational culture. Dong et al. (2025) also explained that work-life conflict is influenced by perceived time pressure and inconsistent role expectations. The overall literature shows that although the issue of work-life balance has been extensively researched, the primary focus remains on workers and professionals, not business owners.

The construction industry places workers, supervisors, quantity surveyors, or project managers as the primary subjects, leaving a gap in studies on the work-life balance of business owners (Irawan, 2024). Construction business owners shoulder broader responsibilities than workers, including project oversight, strategic decision-making, risk management, maintaining financial stability, and handling all administrative processes. The absence of structural support, such as human resources or middle management, results in these burdens being handled independently. Apraku et al. (2020); Oyewobi et al. (2022); Thompson & Uwajeh (2024) show that most studies only address WLB policies and employee perceptions, rather than the subjective experiences of business owners facing operational and administrative demands directly. This gap makes small business owners in the construction sector an underrepresented group in the academic literature.

Construction business owners work in unstable conditions, interact with numerous technical risks, face client dynamics, and experience varying administrative pressures across agencies. In small businesses, owners play multiple roles, from project management and workforce management to procurement and billing, often involving a variety of procedures. Research by Mustika et al. (2024) on stress and job satisfaction among construction workers in Indonesia provides insight into the influence of the work environment on psychological well-being, which is also relevant for business owners who have heavier responsibilities and longer working hours than regular employees. Furthermore, research by Jayaraman et al. (2023) confirms that quality of work life and social support influence an individual's ability to maintain work-life balance, a condition also experienced by small business owners operating without a large organizational structure.

The limited number of studies examining the lived experiences of small business owners in the construction industry demonstrates the need to understand how they interpret work pressure, respond to role conflict, and define

work-life balance. Van Manen (2016) asserts that a phenomenological approach allows for in-depth exploration of the meaning of lived experiences because it focuses on understanding how individuals interpret events, relationships, and the pressures they experience daily. This approach is appropriate for examining the experiences of small business owners who must navigate project uncertainty, administrative demands, and the need to maintain family relationships in unpredictable work environments.

This study aims to describe the lived experiences of the owner of CV. MALALA in carrying out his role as a small-scale construction business leader who faces technical, administrative, and social pressures in daily operations. This study examines how the business owner interprets role demands, perceives work-related pressures, develops coping strategies, and defines the relationship between work and family. This research provides insight into the real-life situations of small construction business owners who frequently encounter unscheduled work, must complete cross-agency billing documents, and have obligations to maintain household stability amidst project uncertainty. This research is expected to broaden theoretical understanding related to role theory, resource conservation theory, social support theory, and work and family enrichment within the scope of small business owners, which are still rarely studied in academic literature.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological framework to examine the lived experiences of the owners of CV. MALALA in managing work pressure and maintaining work-life balance. The choice of phenomenology is based on the research objective, which focuses on understanding subjective meaning, reflective experiences, and how individuals interpret everyday reality. This approach aligns with Van Manen (2016) phenomenological research principles, which emphasize uncovering the deeper meaning of human experience, rather than simply describing behavior or measuring quantitative variables.

The study participants were the owners of CV. MALALA, who run a construction business and have direct experience with technical, administrative, and family pressures. The participant selection technique was purposive because participants were considered to have relevant experience, a wealth of information, and the ability to provide in-depth reflection on the phenomenon under study. Data collection was conducted through in-depth semi-structured interviews and non-participant observation of participants' work activities and daily routines in their business and home environments, in accordance with the initial data description in the research manuscript.

Two interviews were conducted, each lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. The interview questions were open-ended to allow for in-depth narratives regarding work pressure, role conflict, coping strategies, and the meaning of work-life balance. All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent and then transcribed verbatim for analysis. Non-participant observation was conducted to understand the participants' work flow, field interactions, and administrative burdens, as documented in the initial research methods section.

Data analysis employed Van Manen (2016) phenomenological thematic analysis approach, with stages clarified in a systematic process. The analysis began with initial coding of the interview transcripts, followed by identification of meaning units based on quotes or statements reflecting significant experiences related to work pressure, role conflict, and coping strategies. These meaning units were then grouped into essential themes that illustrate the structure of the participants' core experiences, such as project pressure, administrative burden, family role conflict, emotional coping strategies, spiritual dimensions, and the meaning of work-life balance, as outlined in the initial findings.

The next stage is phenomenological reduction, a process of refining meaning by suspending the researcher's assumptions to maintain focus on the participants' authentic experiences. The final stage involves hermeneutical interpretation to uncover the deeper meanings contained within these experiences, referring to the interpretive principles emphasized by Van Manen (2016). This approach was used to generate a more comprehensive and reflective understanding of the participants' lived experiences in construction work and family life. Triangulation was conducted through member checking, reviewing field notes, and critical reflection by the researcher to reduce interpretive bias,

as outlined in the research validity section of the initial manuscript (Nurhayati et al., 2024).

The researcher played the role of the primary instrument, thus emphasizing her positionality in the analysis process, namely as an observer who strives to withhold personal interpretations and places the understanding of the participants' experiences at the center of the analysis. This research received ethical approval from the faculty overseeing the researcher's study program. All research ethics procedures were implemented, including informed consent, guaranteeing confidentiality, secure data storage, and the freedom of participants to discontinue participation at any time. Data is used only for scientific purposes and is maintained in accordance with applicable confidentiality principles, as per the ethical provisions stated in the research manuscript.

RESULTAS AND DISCUSSION

The research results were obtained through in-depth interviews and non-participant observation conducted with the owners of CV. MALALA. Phenomenological analysis yielded five main themes that describe the participants' lived experiences in managing the demands of work and family life. These themes include work pressure, role conflict, stress-causing factors, coping strategies, and the meaning of work-life balance. Each theme is complemented by direct quotes from the participants and analyzed to uncover the deeper meaning contained within the experiences.

Work Pressure

The work pressure experienced by participants stemmed primarily from the technical demands of traffic safety projects. Devices such as traffic lights and safety signs were placed in high-risk locations. Participants explained that after installation, traffic jams frequently occurred because road users were unfamiliar with the new system. This situation required a quick response from technicians and management, including themselves.

Quote:

"Sometimes traffic jams occur... technicians have to be ready... especially during holidays... the owner and I go out into the field."

This pressure reflects high-intensity work conditions that demand continuous readiness. Based on Hobfoll (1989), COR Theory, key resources such as physical energy, time, and attention are depleted by unpredictable technical demands. Participants' experiences indicate that small-scale construction projects often require the owner's direct presence due to the lack of an organizational structure capable of distributing responsibilities evenly.

From the perspective of Kahn et al. (1964) Role Theory, this situation indicates that participants' professional roles carry multiple expectations: they not only act as administrative managers but also must perform technical tasks in urgent situations. The unclear boundaries between administrative and technical roles create role overload. Van Manen (2016) phenomenology helps to interpret this pressure as an experience that is not merely operational in nature, but also fosters a sense of moral responsibility regarding public safety.

Role Conflict

Role conflict arises when work demands interfere with family plans. Participants shared several experiences where family schedules had to be canceled due to urgent service calls. Project documents that had to be completed quickly became one source of conflict.

Quote:

"When I had already promised a family event, suddenly the service came... the documents had to be ready in the morning... it was a conflict, but I could control it."

This experience demonstrates the form of role conflict described by Greenhaus & Beutell (1985), namely a situation where two roles simultaneously demand a person's time and energy. This conflict stems not only from fieldwork but also from unforeseen administrative pressures. This situation demonstrates a clash between the pressing demands of the professional role and family obligations that require emotional presence.

From the perspective of Kahn et al. (1964) Role Theory, this conflict arises from conflicting role expectations. The participant's narrative shows that he interpreted the situation as part of an unavoidable professional commitment.

Phenomenology helps explore how participants accept the conflict as part of the reality of work, not merely as a burden, but as a risk of the role they have played for decades.

Stress Factors

Stress arises not only from technical pressures but also from extensive administrative burdens. Participants revealed that differences in document formats between agencies require repeated trips to correct minor errors. This situation is time-consuming, energy-intensive, and costly.

Quote:

“Project billing is stressful... I have to go back and forth to Surabaya five times a week because of incorrect files... if it’s late, the funds are also late.”

Administrative burdens like these demonstrate that stress in the construction industry is not only technical but also stems from multi-layered bureaucracy. Lingard & Turner (2022) demonstrated that administrative complexity can be a major stress factor in construction work. This finding aligns with participants’ experiences of having to bear the financial consequences when project documents are delayed.

Within the framework of Hobfoll (1989), COR Theory, stress is created when an individual’s resources (time, energy, financial resources) are repeatedly depleted without opportunity for recovery. This also reinforces the phenomenological understanding that administrative stress is not only a technical burden but also shapes emotional experiences that influence participants’ decisions and daily lives.

Coping Strategies

When dealing with work pressure, participants utilize emotional coping strategies. Religious activities, such as praying at the mosque and attending prayer services, provide mental calm and stability. They also prefer to be alone in the office when they need to reorganize their emotions.

Quote:

“When I’m highly stressed, I go to the mosque, attend prayer services... sometimes I work alone in the office... it calms me down.”

In addition to emotional coping, social support from coworkers also helps. Coworkers cover for each other when urgent calls come in or when family needs attention.

Quote:

“They help each other... if I get an urgent call, a friend covers for me... they support each other.”

This strategy is directly related to Cohen & Wills (1985) Social Support Theory, which emphasizes that social support can reduce psychological distress and increase a person’s ability to cope with stress. Phenomenology helps explain that spiritual practices and social support are not simply responses to stress but also form meaningful experiences that strengthen personal resilience and a sense of connectedness in the work environment.

Work-life Balance (Meaning of WLB)

Participants interpreted work-life balance as a relationship that is built gradually, like the process of building a house. For them, the key point of balance lies in the foundation of values and understanding between work and family.

Quote:

“For me, life balance is like building a house. The foundation must be strong, like a business... work and family can be harmonious with a good foundation.”

This understanding shows that balance is not seen as a strict separation between the two domains, but rather as an integration. This aligns with Work and Family Enrichment Theory Greenhaus & Powell (2006) which explains that positive experiences in one role can enhance the quality of the other. For participants, maturity, work experience, and the values gained from work have a positive influence on family life.

Van Manen (2016) phenomenological approach helps reveal that this meaning is not merely a concept, but a deep reflection formed through long experience working in an environment that demands mental resilience. Participant narratives demonstrate that balance is achieved through a process of adaptation, not from a static, stress-free state.

Table 1. Phenomenological analysis (Themes, Codes, Representative Quotes, and Meanings)

Theme	Key Codes	Representative Quote	Meaning
Work Pressure	Technical Readiness, Field Involvement	“Technicians must always be ready... especially during holidays... I go to the field with the owner.”	Work demands require continuous responsiveness and direct involvement even beyond regular working hours.
Role Conflict	Schedule Disruption, Competing Demands	“When I already promised a family event, suddenly a service request came... the documents must be ready in the morning.”	Family plans are frequently interrupted due to urgent and non-negotiable work requirements.
Stress Factors	Administrative Inconsistency, Repetitive Corrections	“Each service has different document requirements... I had to go back and forth to Surabaya five times... if it is late, the funds are also delayed.”	Administrative complexity generates recurring stress and affects financial and operational stability.
Coping Strategies	Spiritual Regulation, Social Support	“When my stress increases... I go to the mosque, join prayers... sometimes I work alone in the office... it calms me.” / “We help each other... when I receive a sudden call, a colleague replaces me.”	Emotional regulation and coworker support help reduce psychological tension and maintain resilience.
Meaning of Work-life Balance	Role Integration, Foundational Values	“For me, life balance is like building a house... the foundation must be strong... work and family can harmonize with a solid foundation.”	Work-life balance is viewed as an integrative process built on strong personal and family values rather than strict separation.

DISCUSSION

The research findings indicate that the CV. MALALA owners' experiences in running a small-scale construction business are influenced by complex role dynamics, technical and administrative pressures, diverse coping strategies, and the meaning of work-life balance that develops through a long process of reflection. This discussion examines how each theme relates to theory and broadens the understanding of work-life balance among construction business owners, a group that has received little attention in the literature.

Work Pressure and Professional Role Framework

The work pressure experienced by participants indicates that small construction business owners juggle multiple roles. Participants are directly involved in technical handling in the field when traffic jams or road safety equipment malfunctions, for example, when traffic volumes increase during holidays. This involvement demonstrates that the role boundaries between business owners and technicians are not clearly defined. This situation aligns with Kahn et al. (1964), concept of Role Theory, specifically role overload, when role demands exceed an individual's time and energy capacity.

Technical pressure that requires uninterrupted preparedness also has the potential to drain personal resources, both physical and emotional. Within Hobfoll (1989) Conservation of Resources (COR) framework, this condition describes the repeated depletion of core resources such as energy and time. This experience also aligns with research by Kotera et al. (2020) which states that construction work carries a high physical and mental burden due to the constantly changing nature of the work and the demand for rapid response. Therefore, the work pressure experienced

by participants is not only operational but also has a direct impact on personal resilience. Van Manen (2016) phenomenological approach helps reveal that participants understand this pressure as part of their moral responsibility for road user safety. This understanding demonstrates that work pressure is not only seen as a technical demand, but also as a form of commitment to service quality and public safety.

Role Conflict from a Work-Family Balance Perspective

Role conflict arises when family activities are interrupted by work calls, such as billing documents that must be completed early in the morning or a sudden service request. This conflict reflects a form of time conflict as described in Greenhaus & Beutell (1985), Work-Family Conflict, namely when two roles require simultaneous attendance. For small business owners, time conflict is exacerbated because there is no organizational structure that allows for full delegation. This situation differs from employees in larger organizations with a clearer division of roles. These findings indicate that small business owners experience distinct and intense stress patterns, aligning with research by Mustika et al. (2024) which highlighted the influence of work pressure on the psychological well-being of construction workers.

Within a phenomenological framework, this conflict is understood not simply as a clash of schedules, but as an experience that shapes how participants interpret professional and family responsibilities. This conflict is accepted as part of the role identity they have held for years, thus forming a unique pattern of acceptance within the participants.

Administrative Stress and Its Impact on Personal Resources

Administrative stress emerged when participants had to repeatedly revise billing documents that had different formats between agencies. The back-and-forth process to Surabaya illustrates the bureaucratic burden that consumes time and energy and directly impacts the business's cash flow. This situation confirms that stress in the construction sector stems not only from field activities but also from the multi-layered administrative system. This phenomenon supports Lingard & Turner (2022) analysis of administrative stress in construction projects. In Hobfoll (1989) COR Theory, persistent administrative burdens deplete personal resources without the opportunity to recover. This situation also impacts psychological stability, as uncertainty about project funding disbursement can raise concerns about operational continuity.

From a phenomenological perspective, participants understood this administrative burden as a challenge that requires precision and a readiness to face risks. This understanding demonstrates that administrative experiences not only produce stress but also shape patterns of perseverance and adaptation.

Coping Strategies and the Role of Social Support

Coping strategies emerged in response to technical and administrative stress. Religious activities such as praying and praying at the mosque provided emotional calm that served as a self-regulation mechanism. These strategies reflect a form of emotional coping that provided participants with a space to reduce psychological tension. In addition to spiritual coping, coworker support also played a significant role. Coworkers who covered for each other during urgent calls indicated the existence of a strong social network. This finding aligns with Cohen & Wills (1985) Social Support Theory, which explains that social support can mitigate the negative impact of stress. This support not only helps complete technical tasks but also enhances a sense of security and togetherness within the work environment.

Phenomenology helps reveal that coping strategies are not simply actions but part of the meaning structures constructed by participants. Spiritual activities and coworker solidarity shape emotional experiences that provide strength to cope with daily stress. These strategies demonstrate that personal resilience is formed through the relationship between inner experiences and social support within the work environment.

Understanding Work-life Balance as an Integrative Process

Participants interpreted work-life balance as an integration between two domains that do not always operate separately. The metaphor of "building a house on a strong foundation" suggests that balance is understood as a gradual process that begins with family values and support. This understanding aligns with Greenhaus & Powell (2006) Work-Family Enrichment Theory, which asserts that work experiences can enrich family relationships, and vice versa.

This understanding emerged from extensive experience dealing with work pressures and managing a construction business. This understanding reflects a form of adjustment that develops through life experiences, not through formal strategies. From a phenomenological perspective, this understanding demonstrates the participants' depth of reflection on the relationship between work, family values, and personal resilience. The research findings suggest that work-life balance among small construction business owners does not necessarily depend on time allocation, but on the ability to interpret the relationship between professional and family roles more broadly.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that the owners of CV. MALALA face technical and administrative pressures that occur at irregular rates, impacting family relationships and daily routines. Key findings indicate that technical pressure stems from the demands of field readiness, while administrative pressure stems from inconsistent billing procedures. Role conflict occurs when work calls arrive unexpectedly and disrupt family schedules. In these situations, participants rely on emotional coping strategies through religious activities and social support from coworkers. The understanding of work-life balance develops as an integrative process that positions family and work values as mutually reinforcing.

This study's contribution lies in its in-depth explanation of the lived experiences of small construction business owners, a group rarely addressed in studies of work-life balance. This research extends the application of role theory, resource conservation theory, social support theory, and the concept of work-family enrichment to micro-business environments with limited operational structures. The findings provide empirical insight into how business owners interpret pressure, manage role conflict, and build personal resilience through reflective strategies and social support.

This study is limited by the number of participants, which included only one business owner, so the description of experiences does not reflect the diversity of small construction business conditions in other regions. Furthermore, this study utilized only interviews and observations without formal document triangulation, which could have broadened the depth of the administrative analysis.

Future research could expand the number of participants from various types of small construction businesses and examine comparisons between business owners with different organizational structures. Future studies could also examine the role of government agency or construction service provider policies on administrative burdens, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of business owners' work-life balance.

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