

Article

# The Nonprofit Assimilation Process and Work-Life Balance

Sarah E. Riforgiate <sup>1,\*</sup>  and Michael W. Kramer <sup>2</sup><sup>1</sup> Department of Communication, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI 53201, USA<sup>2</sup> Department of Communication, University of Oklahoma, Norman, OK 73019, USA; mkramer@ou.edu

\* Correspondence: sriforgi@uwm.edu; Tel.: +1-414-251-8649

**Abstract:** Nonprofit organizations are a context where workers' passion and commitment to their work may make it more difficult to negotiate between professional work and private life demands. Challenges in navigating work and life are important issues for individual sustainability and influence organizational sustainability in terms of retention and organizational commitment. As new employees join an organization, they are socialized into the rhythm and norms of the workplace; therefore, early employment provides an important juncture to study how new employees come to understand work-life expectations. This qualitative study considers 55 interviews with new employees (employed six months or less) at a nonprofit social welfare organization which was concerned with high employee turnover. Participants described how they came to the organization, how they learned the expected behaviors for their positions and messages received from organizational members (e.g., supervisors and coworkers) and social groups outside of the organization (e.g., family and friends) pertaining to managing work and life responsibilities. Findings highlight the importance of communication, extend organizational assimilation concepts, and offer practical implications to enhance sustainability for organizations and employees.



**Citation:** Riforgiate, S.E.; Kramer, M.W. The Nonprofit Assimilation Process and Work-Life Balance. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 5993. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su13115993>

Academic Editors:

Horacio Molina-Sánchez,  
Gabriele Giorgi, Castillo Guajardo  
and Antonio Ariza-Montes

Received: 30 April 2021

Accepted: 24 May 2021

Published: 26 May 2021

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2021 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

**Keywords:** organizational assimilation; work-life communication; sustainability; organizational membership; nonprofit work

## 1. Introduction

Workplaces are changing rapidly, creating work-life sustainability issues for individuals and organizations [1]. Technology developments have increased the speed of work and blurred boundaries between paid work and private life [2–4]. Further, dual-income families are increasingly prevalent [5] and women make up almost half of the U.S. work force [6]. These shifting trends bring work-life issues to the forefront [7] and work-life balance concerns have gained public attention, ranging from U.S. White House statements indicating that “the Federal Government must continue to make progress in enabling employees to balance their responsibilities at work and at home” [8] to high profile executives advocating for individuals to make work-life changes to “*Thrive*” [9].

Research suggests that work-life conflicts have negative impacts on work satisfaction and life satisfaction [10,11], which reduce individual and organizational sustainability and well-being [12]. Further, overwork is prevalent and threatens individuals' ability to manage work-life concerns. Galinsky and colleagues [13] surveyed 1003 wage and salaried workers and found that “44 percent of U.S. employees [reported they] were overworked often or very often” and one-third “can be viewed as being chronically overworked” (p. 2). In response to work-life conflict and issues of overwork, organizations frequently regard addressing these concerns as “strategic and crucial in guaranteeing the very survival of the companies in question, increasing their ability to attract and retain talent, boosting productivity, and in short sharpening their competitive edge” [14]. Further, Kossek et al. [15] note “that employment practices that sustain work-life balance and wellbeing in workplace experiences are critical pathways to long-term workforce effectiveness” and warrant additional study (p. 296).

Despite emphasis on work-life issues and attempts to address work-life concerns, change has been slow. Workers often fear that if they use policies aimed at assisting them with work-life balance, their behaviors will result in them being stigmatized and others will not view them as a serious worker [14,16]. For example, Kelly et al. [17] followed the implementation of a results-only work environment (ROWE) at a large U.S. electronic retailer's corporate office. Despite training and employer backing of the ROWE program, while some employees were excited at the opportunities to better manage priorities, many were not open to changes and some were overtly resistant. This resistance to create solutions to help workers manage work-life demands threatens both individual and organizational sustainability [12].

Frequently when organizations implement work-life policies, employees pick and choose which policies to use by predominantly taking advantage of policies that privilege work (e.g., flextime versus time off) [18]. Further, as Kirby and Krone [19] found, even when formal policies are in place, employees may not take advantage of policies and instead rely on cues from coworkers to navigate workplace expectations. In another study, employees noted that they were aware that when they make work-life requests, they should emphasize the organization's interests and make other arrangements if needed [20]. These findings point to the importance of communication and interpretation of coworker interactions when implementing changes to enhance work-life practices.

As Kossek et al. [15] assert, "a sustainable workforce is created and nurtured via employment practices that link employee work-life balance and wellbeing to employment experiences over the course of employees' working lives, enabling them to perform well over time while also thriving in their personal and family lives" (p. 296). One point where professional organizations have the potential to improve work-life practices occurs when new employees join. When individuals enter workplaces as new employees, they have the most objective view of the organization because they see it as an outsider [21]. This provides an opportunity to examine the messages and communication processes new employees experience as they participate in organizational assimilation (the process of becoming full members of organizations) [22]. Therefore, this study leverages organizational assimilation theory to identify how new employees are attracted to organizations and the messages that they receive regarding work-life practices that enhance or challenge individual and organizational sustainability.

While research has considered how new members learn about organizations [22–24], this study extends this research by examining workplace and private life communication that structures understandings of work-life issues specifically. This qualitative study takes advantage of a unique opportunity to study 55 new U.S. employees (first six months of employment) in a nonprofit organization that was experiencing high employee turnover. This study represents one organization as a specific case to analyze practices that contribute to individual and organizational sustainability in this context. Additionally, practical and theoretical implications of this study can be applied to other organizational settings and contribute to future research directions. Following, we discuss pertinent research regarding organizational assimilation to provide a foundational conceptual framework and discuss how nonprofit organizations are an important context for understanding work-life concerns. Then, we detail our methodology, findings, and explore the theoretical and practical implications of this study.

### *1.1. Organizational Assimilation*

The assimilation process explains how people participate in organizations over their lifespan and is frequently conceptualized as a series of stages: (1) anticipatory socialization, the experiences of individuals prior to participating in an organization; (2) encounter, the experiences of individuals during their initial participation in which they feel like newcomers; (3) metamorphosis, their experiences as full members of their organization; and (4) exit, their experiences as they plan to leave and then exit organizations [22]. Because people generally do not remain employed in the same organization throughout their careers

and also join and leave other nonwork organizations throughout their lives, the process of assimilation is ongoing and cyclical rather than linear as people manage multiple roles in familial and social groups with multiple organization roles simultaneously [25]. Balancing these multiple roles adds complexity to managing work-life issues.

The study of the assimilation process by which individuals join, participate in, and leave work organizations has a long history. Summaries of this research have periodically provided a rich understanding of the importance of communication in the process [22–24,26]. A common bias in this literature is that it almost exclusively focuses on individual's work roles without considering the intersection of work and other life roles as significant during assimilation. Despite this, a few studies suggest the importance of nonwork roles during the process. For example, Teboul [27] found that family members and friends can be important information sources of alternative perspectives during assimilation. Additionally, Jablin and Kramer [28] reported that family members' adjustment to new communities influenced job transferee's adjustment to their new positions. Findings like these suggest a need to more closely examine the intersection of employee work-life issues during the assimilation process. These issues seem particularly salient for employees of nonprofit organizations since their identification with the organization's mission may blur the work-life distinction [29].

### 1.2. Nonprofit Organizations

Work-life issues have been studied in myriad organizations and span for-profit [3,30,31] and nonprofit contexts [29,32]. Often employees, particularly nonprofit employees, align their identity with their work [33,34] and doing so allows them to identify with organizations and feel that their work is meaningful [35]. Sanders [35] explains that meaningful work includes "work and activities that people freely engage in that, for them, draws on their values, makes a difference in the world, connects them to others, values their contributions, and serves a purpose greater than themselves" (p. 113). Communication is central in understanding how work is valued, with meaningful work providing an alternative discourse to valuing work economically [35]. Meaningful work discourses can benefit workers by highlighting how their work matters and giving them language to discuss the importance of their work more broadly to others; however, there can also be drawbacks to meaningful work discourses [29,32,35].

In nonprofit work, identity alignment means that workers may feel that it is acceptable to sacrifice their "nonwork life" because they do meaningful work [29]. For example, Dempsey and Sanders [32] examined narratives of nonprofit founders whose identity closely aligned with their work and prompted extreme sacrifices for work such as 14 h days, forgoing relationships, and working without pay to ensure the nonprofit's success. While often less extreme, Ruder and Riforgiate [29] found that college students studying to enter nonprofit work are socialized during anticipatory socialization to seek out work that is personally meaningful which prioritizes the importance of work and creates perceptions that sacrifice is worthwhile as a part of the job. Therefore, nonprofit organizations may communicate different assimilation messages and expect deeper levels of employee work commitment than for-profit organizations, making work-life issues more problematic for nonprofit employees.

Overall, research suggests the importance of studying how communication influences the assimilation process for new employees in nonprofit organizations and specifically how employees develop expectations for managing work-life issues. Therefore, we address the following research questions:

1. *What factors influence potential employees of a nonprofit social welfare agency during anticipatory socialization?*
2. *What communicative messages do newcomers in nonprofit organizations receive to help them manage their work-life boundaries from both organizational members and other members of their network during organizational assimilation?*

## 2. Materials and Methods

Christian Child Welfare Agency (CCWA) is a nonprofit organization operating in several Midwestern states. It provides a range of services to families and individuals including adoption services, foster care, group home housing and related recreational activities, and monitoring of court-ordered visitations among many other social services. One of the challenges that CCWA faced was high employee turnover, where approximately half of the employees resigned before they completed a full year of work. Thus, CCWA was interested in learning ways to enhance member assimilation and work-life practices to improve employee retention.

After receiving Institutional Review Board approval from both of our universities and permission from a CCWA executive, we received a list of all 139 CCWA employees hired during the previous four months and still employed, including email and phone contact information. Interviews were collected within two months of receiving the list, so no participants were employed for more than six months. To conduct interviews, we divided the list in half and used a systematic sample of every fourth name to make initial contacts. We made the decision to select every fourth name on the full listing of potential participants to ensure that we had responses across locations and job types to represent diverse participant responses across the organization. When we were unable to contact an individual, we moved to the next name on the list and worked through the full list multiple times. We each continued until we independently felt we reached theoretical saturation, the point at which we felt that additional interviews would not provide additional insight into understanding the experiences of CCWA newcomers [21]. Using this approach, we interviewed a total of 55 CCWA employees.

### 2.1. Participants

Participants included 8 males and 47 females; this male to female worker ratio (14.5% males) was similar to the ratio of the 139 new employees that the organization provided (19.4% males), reflecting a predominantly female workforce. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 65 ( $M = 34.28$ ). They predominately self-identified as Caucasian but included 6 Hispanic, 3 Black, 2 mixed-race, 2 Native American, 1 Indian of Mayan Decent, and 1 Puerto Rican participants. Twenty-five participants indicated that they were married, 20 single, 6 divorced, and 3 engaged or in a serious relationship. For the 28 participants who reported that they had children, they had between 1 and 4 children ( $M = 2.21$ ) including adult children.

Participants worked for CCWA from 1 to 6 months ( $M = 3.77$ ) and their total work experience ranged from 0.33 to 44 years ( $M = 13.96$ ). Their positions included full- and part-time employment in various positions including 13 family support workers, 7 social workers, 5 administrative assistants, 4 resource workers, 2 each of directors, supervisors, compliance technicians, kinship care specialists and transportation coordinators and primary counselors, and the rest reported specialized occupations (e.g., equestrian program coordinator, data entry).

### 2.2. Interviews

Prior to contacting participants, CCWA emailed all eligible employees and indicated that our research was company approved and, as outside researchers, we would keep employee answers confidential. Interviews were conducted via phone at times convenient to respondents. Individuals participated in interviews at their work desks, while driving as part of their normal workday, or after work at home in the evening or on weekends. Using a semi-structured interview protocol, participants were asked how they came to CCWA, how they learned behavioral expectations for their positions, and messages that they received from organization members (e.g., supervisors and coworkers) or from social groups outside of the organization (e.g., family and friends) pertaining to managing work and private life responsibilities. Interviews lasted 15 to 72 min and averaged 39 min. A total

of 35.93 h of interview data were transcribed, resulting in 662 pages of typed single-spaced text for analysis.

### 2.3. Analysis

Qualitative coding and data analysis occurred in multiple cycles using an iterative process moving back and forth between data segments to understand meaning and communication processes [21]. We used NVivo software throughout the analysis to sort and organize data. Specifically, analysis began with initial coding, where we considered each of the responses and labeled them with a descriptive statement to summarize the ideas; this involved using key words to categorize important ideas and begin distilling the data [36]. After data were closely analyzed, we looked for patterns in the data by relabeling larger themes, extracting data to cluster ideas together into categories, and looking for relationships between ideas using visual mapping techniques [37].

We moved back and forth between micro and macro analyses until a clear pattern emerged from the data. During this process, memo writing occurred as we explained findings and clustered similar quotations to refine themes and understand larger communication processes [38]. These coding cycles considered memorable messages, along with formal, informal, and nonverbal communication that shaped new employees' understanding of work obligations and the ways that employees should manage intersections between work and life.

## 3. Findings

### 3.1. Anticipatory Socialization

Our first research question asked: *What factors influence potential employees of a nonprofit social welfare agency during anticipatory socialization?* This question allowed us to explore the anticipatory socialization stage of organizational assimilation to determine patterns of why individuals applied to the nonprofit organization and their initial expectations of work. Recruitment and aligning expectations have bearing on attracting and retaining employees, contributing to individual and organizational sustainability [14].

Anticipatory socialization involves two distinct processes: (1) vocational anticipatory socialization, the process of selecting the type of work or career to pursue; and (2) organizational anticipatory socialization, the process of selecting a specific organization in which to do that work [22]. Although many findings were similar to those reported elsewhere, some unique factors influenced these nonprofit employees.

#### 3.1.1. Vocational Anticipatory Socialization

New employees noted a variety of reasons why they were attracted to work for CCWA, representing vocational anticipatory socialization. First, some employees at CCWA were eager to use their degrees and training. One 32-year-old female administrative assistant reported, "I was actually looking for a job more in my degree field, which is business administration." Although for many participants, their training meant using a social work degree, for others it meant using other specialized training (e.g., a business degree, grant writing skills).

In other cases, employees explained that their socialization focused on pursuing helping occupations, which they connected to the mission of CCWA. A 22-year-old female family support worker explained her reason for working at CCWA:

*I have a lot of experience with children and especially children who come from rougher backgrounds, and have known foster kids myself, and so, um, child welfare is one of my passions, and so [CCWA] kind of fit along those—my passion.*

Like most newcomers we interviewed, she was drawn to occupations that were people oriented, which matched CCWA's mission. This also mirrors Sander's work indicating that organizational mission is important to nonprofit workers [35].

Further, some newcomers pursued occupational interests which related to specific CCWA programs. One man reported "I applied to be part of the equine program." For him,

working with horses and children was important, but others wanted to work in specific areas such as adoption, data entry, transportation, or administration.

Because vocational socialization is ongoing throughout life, other employees with many years of experience were adjusting or tweaking their career pursuits by changing jobs. A recently hired female specialist reported:

*I was working at the mental health center here and I didn't like it. So, I was looking for something else and I saw the ad for the kinship specialist position, and I applied for it and interviewed and everything. And I got it.*

Like this person, over one-third of respondents were looking for change from their previous jobs or careers. Thus, similar to for-profit employees, during vocational anticipatory socialization, CCWA employees pursued careers based on their education, their desire to serve children and families, or interests in specific occupations. CCWA provided an opportunity to achieve those career goals.

### 3.1.2. Organizational Anticipatory Socialization

Communication patterns that led to discovering work opportunities at CCWA were typical of other findings on newcomers. Almost half of these newcomers applied because they learned about openings through personal contacts. For example, one 37-year-old male who previously worked with a CCWA employee reported "I was recruited basically . . . She was looking to fill a vacant supervisor position and I was looking." In this case, personal contact with a previous coworker not only made the potential employee aware of the CCWA position, but the CCWA employee actively recruited him for it.

By contrast, approximately one-quarter of newcomers found out about CCWA jobs through internet searches such as a female administrative assistant who explained, "I looked on their website for job openings and applied through there." Additionally, a few worked for CCWA through temporary employment agencies or during internships before applying for regular employment. A recent 21-year-old female college graduate reported, "I did a practicum with them through my college, and then after I finished that semester, I applied for a full-time position." Others found positions through professional magazines, job fairs, or local newspapers.

Employees' reasons for choosing to work for CCWA varied. Like many employees who change jobs, a common motive was looking for more satisfying work conditions. For example, one 37-year-old male succinctly explained his reasons for changing jobs as, "A couple of things—pay was better. And the way that they treat their employees was a lot better than where I was, too." Like this example, seeking better work conditions and pay were common reasons for switching to CCWA. A few newcomers indicated the friendly people that they met during the interview made CCWA seem like it had good working conditions.

Work-life issues influenced others to choose working for CCWA. A 36-year-old woman shared:

*It was really important to me to stay in [city]. This is the home area for both my husband and I. We moved home . . . so I knew that my next career step had to happen in [city], which can be somewhat limiting. I'm just so thankful that worked out.*

For individuals like her, a recent move or geography and family relations made CCWA an attractive employer to maintaining work-life balance.

Somewhat surprising, unique characteristics of CCWA seemed unimportant to most newcomers. Approximately two-thirds of respondents indicated that the nonprofit status of CCWA was unimportant and almost one-quarter indicated that there was nothing particular about CCWA that mattered to them, as this interview illustrates:

*I: Did the fact that CCWA was a nonprofit, or had religious affiliation, did any of that matter to you?*

*R: Not really. I didn't really care too much . . . I didn't really know too much about the organization, to be honest, until after I started working.*

For newcomers like this 24-year-old male, characteristics that mattered to some applicants were unimportant. In fact, he did not even research the organization as might be expected. Having a job and a “place to call home” were all that really mattered. Of course, for others, the fact that CCWA was a nonprofit with a positive reputation was very important.

The religious nature of CCWA was an influential factor for a few employees. As a 22-year-old female family support worker explained:

*I’m a Christian, so it’s nice kind of knowing I’m working with an organization that has that in their beliefs. It doesn’t really come up at work. I get daily devos in my email and that’s about it, but it’s just kind of nice that that’s there . . . It was a nice perk to see that.*

For her, CCWA’s religious nature made it possible to integrate her work and spiritual life. Quite often, CCWA’s religious affiliation was unimportant, but for a few newcomers like this woman, CCWA’s religious affiliation made accepting a position more appealing.

Overall, consistent with research on recruiting for-profit employees, the findings suggest that communication from current employees was a common way for individuals to consider working at CCWA, although others learned about employment opportunities through typical recruitment efforts like internet job postings, job fairs, or internships. During organizational anticipatory socialization, participants usually indicated that they sought CCWA work to improve their work conditions. Interestingly, CCWA’s nonprofit status rarely mattered to them and calls into question the extent that nonprofit workers seek meaningful work over simply locating employment. Further, CCWA’s religious affiliation only mattered to a small minority of newcomers. This suggests that occupational identity was more important to these employees than organizational identity. Job opportunities that fit participants’ identity motivated them to work for CCWA, but frequently it was not the organization itself that attracted them.

### 3.2. Communication to Learn Work-Life Role Expectations

Throughout the interviews, new employees were asked about messages from work and at home concerning managing work and life roles. As noted, while employees did not always join CCWA because it was a nonprofit, as they learned about the organization’s mission to help children and families, they became invested in the work. One 42-year-old social worker shared “there’s a great support to do our work . . . which is make families stronger spiritually and physically . . . . The organization, it tries to create the resources and environment so we can do that work.” However, this work could be emotionally taxing and require variable hours. To address some of the challenges of the work, messages from the organization and coworkers emphasized self-care and boundaries to manage workloads.

#### 3.2.1. Messages Supporting Work-Life Balance

The second research question asked: *What communicative messages do newcomers in nonprofit organizations receive to help them manage their work-life boundaries from both organizational members and other members of their network during organizational assimilation?* This question allowed us to explore how newcomers’ expectations and the messages that they received aligned with their expectations and allowed for them to navigate work-life balance as a new employee.

At the corporate level, training programs and workshops were offered to help employees with stress and other workplace and work-life issues. A 22-year-old female family support worker shared:

*We definitely talk about self-care a lot. I know I’ve heard that mentioned here and at trainings that I’ve gone to outside the office [through CCWA]. Talking about how work is work and when you go home you need to find a way to de-stress and let that go because it’s not good to take that with you. . . . [Training discusses] things we can do outside of work to take care of ourselves like exercising, reading a book, going to the movies, things like that.*

Participants shared that the formal training provided specifically encouraged separating work from nonwork and finding ways to release workplace stress, emphasizing the importance of private life activities.

These work-life messages were also shared in new employees' interactions with coworkers. A 42-year old male social worker explained, "People tell me, just remember to take care of yourself. My coworker, the other social worker who I share this room with is, she's always nice and telling me 'Go eat lunch outside. You need to just relax a little bit.'" Other employees emphasized how coworkers encouraged them to talk about difficult situations at work so that they did not talk about work at home. A 21-year-old male family support worker emphasized:

*What the supervisors have said about that is basically like, this job can be pretty emotional and they say that you just need to try to leave it at the office and make sure you're taking care of yourself at home. . . . They just kind of emphasize the importance of self-care.*

Support and guidance from existing organizational members emphasized self-care to new employees to help them acclimate.

Another way CCWA helped new and existing employees to manage work-life was to limit working overtime and encourage employees instead to take flextime as needed. Limiting work hours was intended to help prevent overwork and burnout, to make the job sustainable, particularly because some workers had positions that required managing challenging or emotional situations. A female kinship care specialist talked about how she appreciated the "flexible schedule and just kind of being able to do my own thing" as long as the work got done. The work CCWA was responsible for was a seven-days-a-week task because family visits and meetings also happened on weekends. However, CCWA made sure employees had weekends off by rotating people "on call" and providing work cell phones separate from personal phones. Because of weekend work, employees had more flexibility in the week to take time off. For many with family obligations, being able to come and go as needed helped them manage private life needs.

Further, messages from management and coworkers encouraged new employees to attend to family matters when necessary to balance private life needs. Especially as employees started, they were told to not work overtime by supervisors and coworkers. A 23-year-old female coordinator shared how she was encouraged to "make time for the things that I want to do" by taking days off. Her boss was "totally fine with me flexing my time and coming in late or leaving early some days." Participants used flextime to go to doctor appointments, register with the department of motor vehicles, stay at home on school holidays or with their sick children, move their own children from school to after-school programs, care for elderly family members, run errands, or even just to sleep in.

In a more extreme instance, a 36-year-old female in development talked about how the organization put family first and really supported her when she had to attend to her son who broke his arm. She was pleasantly surprised and greatly appreciated the support and flexibility:

*The office was wonderful! The VP called me the morning of the surgery. I had only been there [at CCWA] for probably a couple of months and the VP called me the morning of the surgery and let me know he was thinking about our family and he has my son in his prayers and he was just really thoughtful about it. Later that day one of his admin assistants dropped off a wonderful care package full of really cool stuff for little boys. . . . That was amazing to me.*

During interviews, participants readily recalled instances where they were encouraged to care for themselves and their private life needs, particularly those involving family. The instances involved training workshops, verbal messages from organizational leaders and coworkers, and observations of other employees using policies and flextime to manage work and private life needs.

### 3.2.2. Barriers to Work-Life Balance

With all the messages, training, and policies supporting work-life separation and encouraging sustainable work-life practices, it would seem like employees would feel supported as they managed work-life balance. However, despite sincere efforts to help employees across CCWA, new employees interviewed struggled to manage work and life needs for a variety of structural reasons. They encountered internal organizational constraints, systemic constraints, and other challenges creating barriers around job experiences.

#### Internal Organizational Constraints

First, high turnover at CCWA (approximately half of hired employees left employment within 12 months) meant that most employees were relatively new. A 21-year-old male family support worker detailed, “Most of the family support workers are relatively new. I think generally that most of them have been here a year or two and not much more than that.” More experienced and longer tenured employees in CCWA were stretched to complete their work, leaving little time for mentoring or helping onboard new employees. A 36-year-old female in development confided, “Joining a new organization can be really tough. It is not that they are unsupportive, but they may not care because they are doing their own work.”

Training new employees took existing workers away from time to complete their own work. The additional mentoring responsibility put a strain on existing worker’s ability to manage work and life, as well as to model beneficial practices. Further, high turnover meant that some employees doing training had only a few months more experience than new employees and were still figuring out their own work. The high percentage of new employees also meant new members had few opportunities to observe and learn appropriate work-life balance strategies.

New employees working with clients relied on supervisors or coworkers for help learning the work of their actual positions. Many employees shadowed coworkers so existing employees could continue working and train simultaneously. However, shadowing was limited to experiences that randomly occurred during the shadowing period and left many tasks or procedures out of the training. A 21-year-old male family support worker said shadowing was “pretty helpful” but wanted more because he did not feel “prepared.” He continued that “each case is different, so there were some things that didn’t really come up while I was shadowing her, or even some common things” and he needed to know how to do regularly to complete his job. This lack of preparation created difficulty in completing work, extended the time it took to learn and accomplish tasks, and contributed to uncertainty. These consequences required additional effort and emotion management that further strained new employees’ ability to balance work demands.

A 42-year-old experienced, social worker shared that shadowing “gave me an idea of how complex” his job was but failed to train him adequately on the copious paperwork required. Discussing the training, he continued, “It’s not enough because there are a lot of forms that I still need to ask how to do.” At times, he did not even know he needed to complete forms. He shared:

*I just get an email saying this form has not been submitted, so then I didn’t know anything about it. Then I go talk to my supervisor and ask her “What do I need to do now?” They are requesting me to do something I don’t even know.*

Instances like these slowed workers down because they were confused about work processes and often felt that they were burdening their coworkers and supervisors with questions, making it challenging to manage work obligations in the time allotted. Inadequate preparation led to time management conflicts that exacerbated work-life stress.

Another internal structural constraint was that CCWA worked across several states. This meant that some employees held unique positions in their office and they had to coordinate with people in the same positions at different offices for training and work. A female kinship care specialist commented, “I’d say working with people in other offices is kind of difficult because you can’t just walk down the hall and ask them a question. You

have to email or call and sometimes that can be harder.” When she did her shadowing, she had to travel to another location and “It was just more difficult in that I didn’t have somebody in the office with me that could help me and show me.” Distance made training difficult and meant making extra effort and time to coordinate work contributing to work-life stress.

Finally, work volume was an issue. Particularly as new employees, participants took longer to complete tasks than seasoned employees. A 42-year-old male social worker who was supposed to work 40 hour weeks said when he started, he was “working 50 h a week.” He expanded, “Ethically, I cannot just say ‘this is my limit on this case.’ This is what I’m going to do just because the company or the organization cannot provide more social workers so we can have less cases.” New employees felt an ethical responsibility to help their clients even if that meant working longer hours.

### Systemic Constraints

Additional constraints resulted from positions that required coordination with external organizations as part of the overall system of serving clients. This created scheduling issues affecting work-life balance. While people working in administrative roles worked normal business hours and avoided overtime because their work was all internal at CCWA, people in many positions struggled with scheduling because their schedules were dictated by government agencies that CCWA served. A 23-year-old program coordinator discussed how she was told in her interview that she would have to work an occasional Saturday. She agreed to work one Saturday every month, but because CCWA works with government organizations, CCWA employees were required to staff government sponsored events every Saturday. She said she and her coworkers “all feel the same way. We all, we’re pretty irritated and a little blindsided when we were told that we had to do these.” So, although CCWA tried to help this employee manage her schedule, CCWA had little ability to do so. Even though “it’s not going to be forever,” she was concerned about the implications and shared, “I just worry sometimes that me showing I will work every Saturday kind of puts an idea that I’m always available every Saturday and that is not the case at all.” In fact, Saturday work caused her to miss several family events which created imbalance in her private life and criticism from family members.

A second systemic constraint resulted from the clients associated with employee caseloads. Employee’s cases included working with children who had to attend school full-time and family members of the children who had various work schedules which created difficult and fluctuating schedules to manage. Employees work responsibilities often required being highly flexible in meeting clients outside of business hours including evenings and weekends. For example, a different 23-year-old female program coordinator described how she shifted her hours to accommodate teenagers she worked with. “A normal day for me really doesn’t start until like 10:00 a.m. because I work a lot in the evening.” Overall, new employees acknowledged that to do their jobs, they had to work non-standard hours which they had to explain to family and friends in their private lives.

Additionally, the unpredictable work often resulted in frequent rescheduling and adjustments to meet employee and clients’ time constraints. A 21-year-old male family support worker explained that with his caseload, he could meet some people during working hours, but there were not enough late afternoon time slots available, so he needed to work some evenings. These meetings were further complicated because his clients “have a lot of things that come up last minute” and cancellations need to be rescheduled by the end of the month. For example:

*If they’re sick, they can’t just cancel their day. They still have to do their visits, so somebody has to cover. It’s not necessarily like people come, track you down at your cubicle and make you do the visits; they just really want to make sure . . . to cover that visit.*

A female transportation worker echoed work variability, commenting “Yeah, you’re constantly dealing with changes with scheduling and having to reschedule and having to change things around and cancel. . . . It’s probably the most difficult thing to deal with.”

#### Challenges Creating Barriers around Job Expectations

While lack of tenured employees, challenges with specific training, workload volume, and unpredictable schedules would be challenging for any employee, these new employees faced additional pressure because they wanted to complete their work to show job competence and remain employed. Many participants expressed wanting to help children which is the central work of the organization; as such, they felt pressure to go above and beyond because they “care” about the kids. For example, a 23-year-old program coordinator asserted, “I will fight any battle that I need to, to make sure that these kids get what they need to be successful. I will go head to head with anybody.” Feeling deep obligations to help their clients spurred employees to weigh work as a high priority contributing stress when managing work and life demands.

Ultimately, although employees were told to care for themselves, the pressure to simultaneously care for self and child-clients caused tension that seemed irreconcilable for many employees. Employees talked about flexing their hours but then indicated working more than 40 h weeks. Some confided that they underreported their hours, which contributed to more “imbalance.” A male social worker explained this tension:

*I think the organization sometimes surprises me because they send us messages that we need to keep working with families; we need to keep providing them with the best help. . . . Then the contrary messages I get from my coworkers is that sometimes if I visit with somebody . . . they will say something like, “Oh, that’s too much time. You’re spending too much time with those kids.”*

The mixed messages increased tensions, caused imbalances in explaining work to coworkers, created difficulties seeking advice about work, and made work more time consuming and challenging.

New employees explained work was “emotionally draining” and challenging which made it “difficult to separate from personal life a lot of the time” (21-year-old male family support worker). Many new employees discussed separating work and life, both for legal reasons (client confidentiality) and to take a break from work. One 54-year-old data entry clerk explained “when I get home, I am ready to let it all go. I don’t take work home.” These participants further explained that separating work and the rest of life was important for self-care and well-being, so they did their best to not talk about work outside their working hours.

However, separating work and private life could be challenging because technology allowed for constant access. Even when employees knew that they did not have to answer messages outside of work hours, messages still were present. As a 59-year-old counselor explained:

*My boss will communicate whenever something occurs to her, so things come through on my phone. So, I tend to respond to that. She’ll write me back and say, “Remember, you don’t have to respond on weekends.” She’s not expecting me to respond on the times when I am off; it’s just that I carry my phone around.*

Other workers got a sense that they were obligated to reply to emails and phone messages quickly anytime. A 36-year-old female in development explained how she did not respond immediately to an email and then received email messages asking whether she saw the email and “did you follow up with him?” This led to a feeling that “We kind of work all the time.”

Both the number and variability of hours worked were a point of contention with family members. Many workers discussed how they had multiple conversations with family to justify their work. A 54-year-old female data entry clerk explained that her family “probably would like me to be home more” but she would explain that “some days are

busier than others; that's just the way it is." A 23-year-old female program coordinator who worked a lot of evenings and weekends explained:

*My job takes up a lot of my time and a lot of my effort and a lot of my emotion and a lot of my capability to be emotionally attached to my family. . . . They were frustrated. When I told them when I got the job, I was like, "Oh, they [CCWA] said it'd be a pretty much 9-5 and I'd work about one weekend a month or something like that." Then when I started, I worked every weekend and almost every evening and that probably just didn't put a very good taste in their mouth.*

In response, her family encouraged her to talk with her boss and request working fewer weekends. She was aware that her hours were a point of contention and her family expressed dismay when she missed family events. These exchanges contributed to feelings of work-life imbalance. Although comments like these from family members were intended to be supportive, they simultaneously contributed to work-life stress by suggesting that employees were not effectively managing work-life balance.

While most new employees were experimenting on how to manage their workloads, learn their positions, flex their hours, and negotiate family expectations, several openly discussed plans to leave CCWA to gain balance. Participant's discussed "stress and a lot of emotion and anxiety" as well as feeling overwhelmed by the work and lack of training to do their job well. Additionally, comments from family members (spouses, children, parents) contributed to feelings of imbalance and provided an impetus to find a different position.

#### 4. Discussion

This study explored the assimilation process for new employees in a nonprofit social welfare agency that was experiencing high new employee turnover. The goal of this study was to gain understanding of how the unique characteristics of this type of nonprofit work, in which workers may feel that it is normative to sacrifice areas of their nonwork "life" because they are doing meaningful work [29,35], may influence employees' understanding of appropriate work-life balance during the assimilation process. Work-life experiences are important for creating sustainable working conditions for employees and contributing to organizational sustainability [4,14]. While we recognize that our study occurred in a single nonprofit organization, our analysis adds to the body of research in this area and the findings point to practical and theoretical implications that warrant additional exploration. Our analysis suggested that vocational anticipatory socialization for these employees occurred as they looked for work that used their education and met their interests. Additionally, organizational anticipatory socialization occurred as participants learned about job opportunities through personal contacts and mediated messages. These findings are quite similar to findings for employees in for-profit organizations with few differences, adding support to existing understanding.

Further, our analysis indicated that new employees received a variety of often contradictory messages concerning work-life balance. Organizational leaders, supervisors, and peers frequently encouraged them to maintain work-life balance to take care of themselves. At the same time, the structure, nature, and communication of the work created obstacles to maintaining work-life balance for those serving clients, although not for those in more office related tasks. These findings offer important conceptual and practical implications.

First, this study enriches and extends organizational assimilation research in two ways. Whereas previous research has focused on employees in for-profit organizations [22] or volunteers [25], this study examined employees of nonprofit organizations. Findings confirmed that the assimilation process is quite similar between nonprofit and for-profit full-time employees despite occupational and organizational differences. Employee recruitment for nonprofit agencies is similar to other settings and nonprofit employees face similar uncertainties in their new jobs. Surprisingly, the organization's nonprofit and religious status were important only for a small percentage of newcomers; most new employees were more concerned about issues like pay, job requirements, and location. However,

others were motivated by a need to help and serve others, similar to the motivations of some volunteers [39].

Researchers primarily have examined organizational identity as an outcome of assimilation for employees [40] and volunteers [41]. Further, Sander's work explains how nonprofit organizational members often engage in organizational identity as part of meaningful work [35]. Results in the current study suggest that identification with the nonprofit was not a reason that employees joined CCWA. Some were simply looking for better work conditions (e.g., higher salary), while many others identified with the type of work and the clients. For the latter group, occupational identification was more critical than organizational identification during the hiring process and these early stages of assimilation. Participants were first concerned with the occupational role they would fill and later embraced the mission and values of the work rather than the specific nonprofit organization; this explains the willingness of many participants to switch from a similar organization to CCWA. Perhaps over time, those who remain in nonprofit organizations develop higher levels of organizational identification. Thus, this study expands our understanding of anticipatory socialization by emphasizing the importance of differentiating between occupational and organizational identification and emphasizes the need to further explore how these two factors have differential impacts during the assimilation process.

Second, this study provides a variety of insights into work-life balance issues that influence individual and organizational sustainability. Results suggest that employees received mixed or contradictory messages about maintaining work-life balance. The explicit messages were consistent: take care of yourself and maintain good work-life boundaries. Organizational policies such as flextime also promoted work-life care. Unfortunately, structural and job-related factors hindered this possibility when clients needed to be served during evening and weekend hours or when the complexity of learning the job or completing job requirements caused employees to work extra hours—sometimes covertly or without receiving overtime pay. This pattern of communication mirrors work by Kirby and Krone [19] that indicated policies can exist, but employees are more influenced by the day to day discursive interactions that shape understandings of workplace expectations. New nonprofit employees may be particularly vulnerable to discursive and mixed messages, honoring messages that indicate the importance of work over life, as they attempt to assimilate into the organization and be accepted.

Employee behavior in response to mixed messages is consistent with research by Wieland [31], who found that to appear competent and as a great worker, some employees forgo employer mandated balance policies. For nonprofit employees, occupational identification or internalization of the "ideal work norm" is another impetus for nonprofit employees to dedicate as much time as necessary to work in order to be seen as a valued employee [14,42]. Conflicting messages resulted in employees emphasizing work over private life for the most part and feeling compelled to compromise private life to manage work obligations, a result consistent with other work-life research [16,34,43,44].

The pattern of favoring work over private life confirms that workers rely on "practices" over the "policy" in organizations to determine acceptable behavior [19]. Newcomers were aware that CCWA stressed self-care and balancing personal and professional obligations, but they observed others in the workplace who were committed to clients and sacrificed private life to complete work. Consistent with the ideal worker norm [42], because many in CCWA's workforce are relatively young, employees felt that they needed to do what it took to complete the work, with some expressing fear that if they were not able to perform the work that it was because they were not capable workers. Thus, their own impression of management concerns as newcomers worked against them seeking the information and assistance that they needed [45].

Consistent with conceptualization of stress related to work-life balance, this study confirms that these new employees experienced two types of time-based conflict [46]. The long and irregular hours created time conflicts since they could not be at work and home at the same time. In addition, their psychological response to their clients' conditions made

it difficult to disengage from work even after they left work, bringing work thoughts into private life time. Some attempted to manage their work thoughts and emotions by not discussing work at home, but others admitted that they had difficulty turning off work when they were not on the clock. So, although organizations may develop policies to reduce the number of hours physically involving work, these policies will not address the mental overlap of this stressful work.

Finally, results indicate that technology has made maintaining work-life balance more difficult. Respondents mentioned how cellphones created a sense of obligation to be available 24/7 even if the official communication from the organization indicated otherwise. Being called or receiving text messages by someone in the organization suggested that they should be willing to interrupt their personal lives to prioritize work. Consistent with research on corporations, the results suggest that technology is contributing to the employees of this nonprofit organization working longer hours at work and at home without receiving additional compensation [47].

### *Applications*

These findings have practical applications for leaders of nonprofit organization managing employees to make workplaces and employee experiences more sustainable. First, organizational leaders may benefit from emphasizing both occupational and organizational information during the assimilation stage to help workers identify with both the work and the organization as they learn how to complete work tasks. Recruitment messages tend to emphasize organization image and mission. Emphasizing other occupational opportunities, such as accounting or grant writing, in addition to social service jobs, may be effective in attracting and recruiting new members.

Second, our findings reinforce that the nonprofit employees in our study are attracted to work-life policies that offer flexibility because flexible policies enable workers to accommodate some work-life concerns. Beyond CCWA, emphasizing policies that enable work-life balance may attract more employees to organizations. However, to retain employees, additional communication and practices that take the unpredictability out of work hours seems necessary to fulfill workers' expectations for managing work-life balance. For example, providing workers with clear expectations of hours, hiring and retaining a sufficient number of workers to create reasonable workloads, and hiring workers to work later shifts or weekends up-front would help workers determine if the position is a good fit based on their work and life needs. These practices could reduce turnover by reducing unmet expectations [48] and enhance worker and organizational sustainability. Finally, organizations need to attend to messages that employees receive at multiple organizational levels, from upper management to peers. Alleviating contradictory messages could relieve tensions new employees encounter that lead to feelings of imbalance and being overwhelmed.

## **5. Conclusions**

Assimilation involves learning job tasks alongside organizational norms and culture. Gaining an understanding of how an organization expects employees to manage work-life balance is part of that learning process. This study's results indicate that organizations may communicate clear expectations for maintaining work-life balance in their explicit messages, but that employees learn norms from other sources as well. In this study, employees in a nonprofit social welfare agency learned through observation of their peers and the structure of the work that those explicit work-life balance messages did not represent the organizational norm of prioritizing work over private life.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, S.E.R. and M.W.K.; formal analysis, S.E.R. and M.W.K.; investigation, S.E.R. and M.W.K.; methodology, S.E.R. and M.W.K.; writing—original draft, S.E.R. and M.W.K.; writing—review and editing, S.E.R. and M.W.K. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## References

1. Montoya, Y.; Trethewey, A. Rethinking Good Work: Developing Sustainable Employees and Workplaces. The Project for Wellness and Work Life. 2009, pp. 1–17. Available online: <https://humancommunication.clas.asu.edu/sites/default/files/rethinkingworkdevelopingasustainableself.pdf> (accessed on 24 May 2021).
2. Blithe, S.J. Mobile working mothers and the simultaneous shift. *Electron. J. Commun.* **2015**, *25*. Available online: <http://www.cios.org/ejcpublish/025/1/025104.html> (accessed on 24 May 2021).
3. Golden, A.G. The structuration of information and communication technologies and work-life interrelationships: Shared organizational and family rules and resources and implications for work in a high-technology organization. *Commun. Monogr.* **2013**, *80*, 101–123. [CrossRef]
4. Mikołajczyk, K. Sustainable development of an individual as a result of mutual enrichment of professional and personal life. *Sustainability* **2021**, *13*, 697. [CrossRef]
5. Chethik, N. *Voicemale: What Husbands Really Think about Their Marriages, Their Wives, Sex, Housework, and Commitment*; Simon & Schuster: New York, NY, USA, 2006.
6. Dworkin, T.M.; Maurer, V.; Schipani, C.A. Career mentoring for women: New horizons/Expanded methods. *Bus. Horiz.* **2012**, *55*, 363–372. [CrossRef]
7. Kirby, E.L.; Riforgiate, S.E.; Anderson, I.K.; Lahman, M.P.; Lietzenmayer, A.M. Good working mothers as jugglers: A critical look at two work–family balance films. *J. Fam. Commun.* **2016**, *16*, 76–93. [CrossRef]
8. Presidential Memorandum: Enhancing Workplace Flexibilities and Work-Life Program. Available online: <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/06/23/presidential-memorandum-enhancing-workplace-flexibilities-and-work-life> (accessed on 29 April 2021).
9. Huffington, A. *Thrive: The Third Metric to Redefining Success and Creating a Life of Well-Being, Wisdom, and Wonder*; Harmony: New York, NY, USA, 2014.
10. Kossek, E.E.; Ozeki, C. Work-family conflict, policies, and the job-life satisfaction relationship: A review and directions for organizational behavior-human resources research. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **1998**, *83*, 139–149. [CrossRef]
11. Kirby, E. Work-life Balance. In *The International Encyclopedia of Organizational Communication*; Wiley: New York, NY, USA, 2017; pp. 1–21. [CrossRef]
12. Di Fabio, A. Positive healthy organizations: Promoting well-being, meaningfulness, and sustainability in organizations. *Front. Psychol.* **2017**, *8*, 1938. [CrossRef]
13. Galinsky, E.; Bond, J.T.; Kim, S.S.; Backon, L.; Brownfield, E.; Sakai, K. Overwork in America. Family and Work Institute. 2005. Available online: <https://cdn.sanity.io/files/ow8usu72/production/adba773f25d46c0b714d577bd3ab61fea450a069.pdf> (accessed on 24 May 2021).
14. Gálvez, A.; Tirado, F.; Martínez, M.J. Work-life balance, organizations and social sustainability: Analyzing female telework in Spain. *Sustainability* **2020**, *12*, 3567. [CrossRef]
15. Kossek, E.E.; Valcour, M.; Lirio, P. The sustainable workforce: Organizational strategies for promoting work-life balance and wellbeing. In *Work and Wellbeing: A Complete Reference Guide*; Chen, P.Y., Cooper, C.L., Eds.; Wiley: New York, NY, USA, 2014; Volume 3, pp. 295–319.
16. ter Hoeven, C.L.; Miller, V.D.; Peper, B.; den Dulk, L. “The work must go on”: The role of employee and managerial communication in the use of work-life policies. *Manag. Commun. Q.* **2017**, *31*, 194–229. [CrossRef]
17. Kelly, E.L.; Ammons, S.K.; Chermack, K.; Moen, P. Gendered challenge, gendered response: Confronting the ideal worker norm in a white-collar organization. *Gend. Soc.* **2010**, *24*, 281–303. [CrossRef]
18. Matos, K.; Galinsky, E. National Study of Employers. Families and Work Institute. 2014. Available online: <https://www.familiesandwork.org/research/2014/2014-national-study-of-employers> (accessed on 24 May 2021).
19. Kirby, E.L.; Krone, K.J. “The policy exists but you can’t really use it”: Communication and the structuration of work-family policies. *J. Appl. Commun. Res.* **2002**, *30*, 50–77. [CrossRef]
20. Hoffman, M.F.; Cowan, R.L. Be careful what you ask for: Structuration theory and work/life accommodation. *Commun. Stud.* **2010**, *61*, 205–223. [CrossRef]
21. Tracy, S.J. *Qualitative Research Methods: Collecting Evidence, Crafting Analysis, Communicating Impact*, 2nd ed.; Wiley-Blackwell: Malden, MA, USA, 2020.
22. Jablin, F.M. Organizational entry, assimilation, and disengagement/exit. In *The New Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*; Jablin, F.M., Putnam, L.L., Eds.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2001; pp. 732–818.

23. Kramer, M.W.; Miller, V.D. Socialization and assimilation: Theories, processes, and outcomes. In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Communication*; Putnam, L.L., Mumby, D.K., Eds.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2014; pp. 525–547.
24. Waldeck, J.H.; Myers, K.K. Organizational assimilation theory, research, and implications for multiple areas of the discipline: A state of the art review. In *Communication Yearbook 31*; Beck, C.S., Ed.; Lawrence Erlbaum: New York, NY, USA, 2008; pp. 322–367.
25. Kramer, M.W. Toward a communication model for the socialization of voluntary members. *Commun. Monogr.* **2011**, *78*, 233–255. [[CrossRef](#)]
26. Jablin, F.M. Organizational entry, assimilation, and exit. In *Handbook of Organizational Communication: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*; Jablin, F.M., Putnam, L.L., Roberts, K.H., Porter, L.W., Eds.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 1987; pp. 679–740.
27. Teboul, J.C.B. Facing and coping with uncertainty during organizational encounter. *Manag. Commun. Q.* **1994**, *8*, 190–224. [[CrossRef](#)]
28. Jablin, F.M.; Kramer, M.W. Communication-related sense-making and adjustment during job transfers. *Manag. Commun. Q.* **1998**, *12*, 155–182. [[CrossRef](#)]
29. Ruder, E.M.; Riforgiate, S.E. Organizational socialization of millennial nonprofit workers. In *Examining Millennials Reshaping Organizational Cultures: From Theory to Practice*; Ashlock, M.Z., Atay, A., Eds.; Rowman & Littlefield: New York, NY, USA, 2019; pp. 33–50.
30. Nordbäck, E.S.; Myers, K.K.; McPhee, R.D. Workplace flexibility and communication flows: A structural view. *J. Appl. Commun. Res.* **2017**, *45*, 397–412. [[CrossRef](#)]
31. Wieland, S.M.B. Struggling to manage work as a part of everyday life: Complicating control, rethinking resistance, and contextualizing work/life studies. *Commun. Monogr.* **2011**, *78*, 162–184. [[CrossRef](#)]
32. Dempsey, S.E.; Sanders, M.L. Meaningful work? Nonprofit marketization and work/ life imbalance in popular autobiographies of social entrepreneurship. *Organization* **2010**, *17*, 437–459. [[CrossRef](#)]
33. Muirhead, R. *Just Work*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 2007.
34. Tracy, S.J.; Trethewey, A. Fracturing the real-self↔fake-self dichotomy: Moving toward “crystallized” organizational discourses and identities. *Commun. Theory* **2005**, *15*, 168–195. [[CrossRef](#)]
35. Sanders, M.L. Meaningful work and the nonprofit. In *Understanding Nonprofit Work: A Communication Perspective*; Koschmann, M.A., Sanders, M.L., Eds.; John Wiley & Sons: Hoboken, NY, USA, 2020; pp. 109–135.
36. Saldaña, J. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*; Sage: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2015.
37. Clark, A.E. *Situational Analysis: Grounded Theory after the Postmodern Turn*; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2005.
38. Charmaz, K. *Constructing Grounded Theory*; Sage: Los Angeles, CA, USA, 2014.
39. Clary, E.G.; Snyder, M. The motivations to volunteer: Theoretical and practical considerations. *Curr. Dir. Psychol. Sci.* **1999**, *8*, 156–159. [[CrossRef](#)]
40. Gailliard, B.M.; Myers, K.K.; Seibold, D.R. Organizational assimilation: A multidimensional reconceptualization and measure. *Manag. Commun. Q.* **2010**, *24*, 552–578. [[CrossRef](#)]
41. Kramer, M.W.; Meisenbach, R.J.; Hansen, G.J. Communication, uncertainty, and volunteer membership. *J. Appl. Commun. Res.* **2013**, *41*, 18–39. [[CrossRef](#)]
42. Drago, R.W. *Striking a Balance: Work, Family, Life*; Dollars & Sense: Boston, MA, USA, 2007.
43. Kirby, E.L.; Buzzanell, P.M. Communicating work-life issues. In *The Sage Handbook of Organizational Communication: Advances in Theory, Research, and Methods*; Putnam, L.L., Mumby, D.K., Eds.; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2014; pp. 351–373.
44. Lucas, K.; Liu, M.; Buzzanell, P.M. No limits careers: A critical examination of career discourse in the US and China. In *International & Intercultural Communication Annual*; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2006; pp. 217–242.
45. Morrison, E.W.; Bies, R.J. Impression management in the feedback-seeking process: A literature review and research agenda. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* **1991**, *16*, 522–541. [[CrossRef](#)]
46. Greenhaus, J.H.; Beutell, N.J. Sources of conflict between work and family roles. *Acad. Manag. Rev.* **1985**, *10*, 76–88. [[CrossRef](#)]
47. Fraser, J.A. *White-Collar Sweatshop: The Deterioration of Work and Its Rewards in Corporate America*; Norton: New York, NY, USA, 2001.
48. Wanous, J.P.; Poland, T.D.; Premack, S.L.; Davis, K.S. The effects of met expectations on newcomer attitudes and behaviors: A review and meta-analysis. *J. Appl. Psychol.* **1992**, *77*, 288–297. [[CrossRef](#)]