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Commending the Non-Commissioned Officer's Leadership as a Predictor of Occupational Burnout and Operational Performance Among Junior Enlisted Personnel of the 560th Air Base Group

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ABSTRACT

Non-Commissioned Officers (NCOs) provide frontline guidance and support in demanding military environments, where operational workloads can affect personnel well-being and performance. This study described junior enlisted personnel's assessments of NCO leadership, occupational burnout, and operational performance at the 560th Air Base Group, Brigadier General Benito N. Ebuen Air Base, during 2026, and examined challenges encountered by First Sergeants. A descriptive survey design involved 180 junior enlisted personnel selected from 326 eligible personnel through squadron-stratified sampling, supplemented by qualitative accounts from 11 First Sergeants. Adapted questionnaires measured four leadership dimensions, three burnout dimensions, and four performance dimensions; frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and thematic analysis were used. Leadership ratings ranged from 3.9236 for supervision, mentorship, and welfare support to 4.0361 for task guidance. Emotional exhaustion was moderate (M = 2.7833), whereas depersonalization (M ≈ 2.42) and reduced personal accomplishment (M = 2.1375) were low. Operational performance ratings were favorable (M = 4.0056–4.1667). Interview accounts identified manpower shortages, inadequate resources, strain on personnel welfare, and interpersonal leadership concerns. The findings informed a proposed Leadership Enhancement and Sustainability Framework prioritizing staffing, mentoring, workload management, and leadership integrity. Because the thesis did not report predictive regression or correlation tests, the results support descriptive assessment and an intervention proposal rather than established statistical prediction.

Keywords: *non-commissioned officer leadership; occupational burnout; operational performance; junior enlisted personnel; Philippine Air Force; leadership enhancement*

INTRODUCTION

Military support units require sustained mission readiness even when staffing, resources, and recovery time are constrained. Within such environments, NCOs translate command requirements into daily action and provide the immediate supervision through which junior personnel interpret tasks, develop competence, and seek support. Occupational burnout, commonly conceptualized through emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, is therefore relevant to military work environments as well as civilian organizations (Maslach et al., 2001; Archer & Alagaraja, 2021). The Job Demands–Resources model proposes that sustained demands and insufficient resources increase strain, while supervisory support can represent an important organizational resource (Demerouti et al., 2001).

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The 560th Air Base Group, stationed at Brigadier General Benito N. Ebuen Air Base in Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, undertakes installation operations, support services, security, and emergency response. The thesis reported 48 commissioned officers and 459 enlisted personnel, corresponding to 44.7% of authorized manpower, with 133 NCOs accounting for 28.9% of enlisted members (Philippine Air Force, 2026a). These conditions place substantial competing demands on NCOs who must supervise junior personnel while fulfilling operational responsibilities. The group's organizational history and mission responsibilities are described in its activation and unit records (Philippine Air Force, 2022).

Leadership research in military settings suggests that the quality of immediate supervision has implications for adjustment, well-being, and willingness to seek support (Britt et al., 2012; Gutierrez & Adler, 2022). However, general military findings cannot substitute for unit-specific assessment of the working conditions, supervisory practices, and practical concerns experienced by the 560th Air Base Group. The thesis identified an institutional evidence gap regarding how junior personnel perceived NCO leadership, the level of burnout they experienced, and the quality of their self-reported operational performance.

Accordingly, the study assessed respondent profiles; NCO leadership in terms of task guidance, mentorship and welfare support, fairness, and decision-making; occupational burnout in terms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment; and operational performance in terms of mission accomplishment, dedication, quality, and timeliness. It also examined First Sergeants' accounts of leadership constraints to guide a proposed Leadership Enhancement and Sustainability Framework. Although the original title uses the term "predictor," the analytical procedures reported in the thesis were descriptive statistics and thematic analysis, not a statistical prediction model; the interpretation here follows the analyses actually presented.

Literature Review

NCO leadership as an organizational and social resource

Frontline leaders provide direction, feedback, task prioritization, recognition, and a communication channel between command and enlisted personnel. In the Job Demands–Resources model, such support may offset the strain associated with sustained workload and limited operational capacity (Demerouti et al., 2001). A study of soldiers following combat deployment found that changes in perceptions of NCO leadership were associated with positive adjustment, showing the potential importance of the immediate leadership context (Gutierrez & Adler, 2022). These findings establish a conceptual basis for assessing guidance, mentorship, fairness, and inclusion among junior personnel.

Evidence concerning military personnel also highlights the value of supportive leadership for health and help-seeking. Britt et al. (2012) found that NCO leadership behaviors were related to stigma and perceived barriers to mental health treatment, while Booth et al. (2021) examined health-promoting leader behavior among deployed soldiers. In Philippine uniformed service research, Manuel et al. (2022) identified leadership-related factors in a model of police officers' work engagement. Although the institutional settings differ, these studies inform the thesis's emphasis on equitable supervision, recognition, and responsive care.

Leadership competence also requires organizational support rather than relying solely on individual initiative. NCOs may be expected to train personnel, uphold standards, resolve disagreements, and maintain cohesion at the same time that they carry direct operational duties. The Philippine Air Force's unit and leadership documentation supplied contextual standards for interpreting these responsibilities (Philippine Air Force, 2026b). These considerations support a unit-specific approach to developing NCO leadership skills and monitoring their practical application.

Occupational burnout under military operational demands

Maslach et al. (2001) conceptualized burnout as a multidimensional response to chronic workplace strain involving exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminished accomplishment. The military literature identifies

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prolonged workload, deployment pressures, demanding schedules, and insufficient resources as relevant antecedents of burnout (Archer & Alagaraja, 2021). The three-dimensional approach is useful because personnel may report some symptoms, such as fatigue, without similarly high levels of cynicism or self-perceived ineffectiveness.

Stress appraisal further suggests that working conditions do not operate independently of perceived coping capacity. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping connects the individual's interpretation of demands with available resources and responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Jacobs (2019) demonstrated the significance of follower perceptions of ineffective leadership for occupational stress, while Olapeju et al. (2024) documented individual, interpersonal, organizational, and military contributors to burnout among health providers. Together, these studies highlight why leadership and institutional resource constraints should be considered alongside burnout assessments.

Military research also underscores the need for a broad understanding of well-being. Barczak-Scarboro et al. (2022) examined mental, behavioral, and physical health among active-duty sailors and Marines, indicating that service conditions and welfare cannot be reduced to a single symptom. The present study therefore retained separate measures of exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced accomplishment rather than treating a general burnout score as sufficient evidence of specific needs.

Operational performance, motivation, and meaningful service

Operational performance in a military support group encompasses reliable mission accomplishment, commitment to duty, quality of output, and timely completion. Self-Determination Theory emphasizes autonomy, competence, and relatedness as conditions supporting motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Its relevance to NCO leadership rests in whether personnel receive sufficiently clear expectations, opportunities to exercise judgment, developmental feedback, and a sense of belonging within the unit.

The broader military leadership literature associate's organizational context with adjustment and engagement. Gutierrez and Adler (2022) reported positive relationships between leadership-related organizational conditions and soldiers' post-deployment adjustment; Manuel et al. (2022) studied leadership and work engagement in a Philippine uniformed service setting. These studies inform interpretation of performance ratings, but they do not authorize the conclusion that high leadership ratings caused high performance in the present sample. Such a claim would require a directly tested relationship or intervention design.

Performance and well-being may also coexist under strain. A workforce can report strong duty fulfillment while experiencing fatigue associated with staffing shortages, shift demands, or emergency duties. This possibility reinforces the importance of reading the study's leadership, burnout, and performance dimensions together rather than assuming that high productivity eliminates welfare risks (Archer & Alagaraja, 2021; Olapeju et al., 2024).

Theoretical and policy foundations of the proposed framework

The thesis integrated Maslach Burnout Theory, the Job Demands–Resources model, the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, and Self-Determination Theory. In combination, they provide a conceptual account of why workload pressures, supervisor practices, coping resources, and motivation warrant joint attention (Maslach et al., 2001; Demerouti et al., 2001; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Deci & Ryan, 1985). The study also discussed social support in military leadership as a mechanism relevant to psychological welfare and operational continuity (Booth et al., 2021; Britt et al., 2012).

The original framework additionally identified the Philippine Mental Health Act (Republic Act No. 11036) and the Armed Forces of the Philippines mental health wellness program known as TROPA as policy and institutional bases. The study did not evaluate compliance with these programs; rather, it used them to situate its proposed welfare measures. Internal Philippine Air Force records helped establish the local organizational context and the responsibilities of the unit (Philippine Air Force, 2022, 2026a, 2026b).

The resulting conceptual logic connected NCO leadership with assessment of burnout and operational performance and ultimately with a unit-level leadership sustainability framework. Figure 1 reproduces the core

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constructs and relationships from the thesis's original theory-based diagram. It should be read as a conceptual map rather than a confirmed statistical path model.

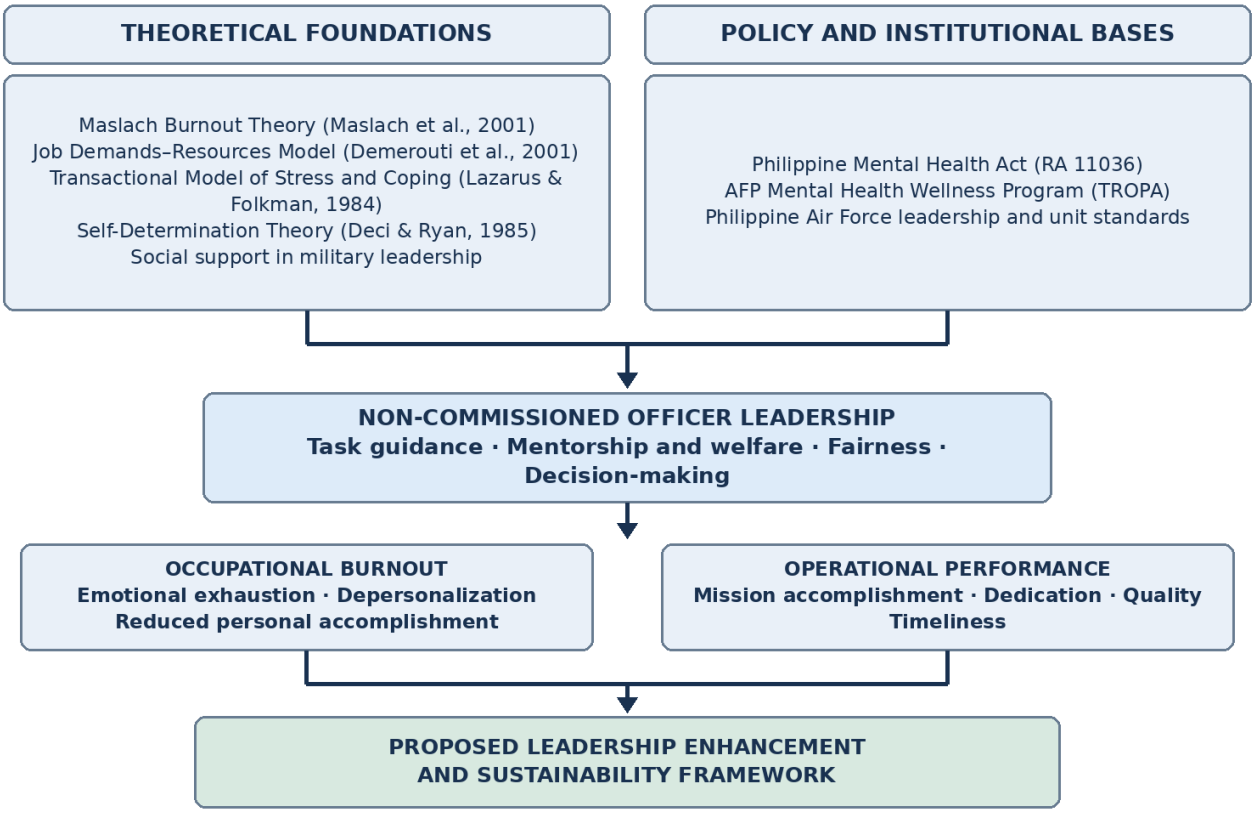


Figure 1. *Theoretical and conceptual framework of the study*

METHODS

Research Design

The study used a descriptive research design to summarize junior enlisted personnel's perceptions of NCO leadership, occupational burnout, and operational performance in the natural unit setting. Structured quantitative surveys were complemented by qualitative accounts from First Sergeants, which were analyzed thematically. The original methods did not include regression, correlation, or other inferential tests of prediction; accordingly, the results are presented as descriptive and thematic findings.

Research Locale

The research was carried out in 2026 at the 560th Air Base Group, Brigadier General Benito N. Ebuen Air Base, Lapu-Lapu City, Cebu, Philippines. The group had eleven squadrons and operated under sustained base-service, security, logistics, engineering, communications, and emergency support requirements. The thesis reported that the unit was operating with 44.7% of its authorized manpower at the time of the study.

Participants and Sampling Technique

The survey population comprised 326 eligible junior enlisted personnel who had served with the group for at least three consecutive months. A target sample of 180 was calculated using Slovin's formula with a 5% margin of error, and proportional stratification was based on assigned squadron. Participants were selected from

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squadron rosters using a systematic random procedure. For qualitative inquiry, 11 First Sergeants, one from each squadron, were purposively selected to describe the challenges of frontline leadership.

Table 1. *Junior Enlisted Personnel Population and Survey Allocation by Squadron*

Squadron	Eligible N	Survey n
HAS	77	43
561st SS	16	9
562nd AOS	14	8
563rd CES	21	12
564th SFS	49	27
565th MVS	26	14
566th BSS	29	16
567th CEISS	17	9
568th ABS	25	14
BGBNEAB Hospital	40	22
1304th Dental Dispensary	12	6
Total	326	180

Note. The qualitative component involved 11 First Sergeants in addition to the 180 survey participants.

Research Instrument

The questionnaire covered respondent profile; NCO leadership in task guidance, supervision and welfare, fairness and recognition, and participation in task-related decisions; occupational burnout in emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment; and operational performance in mission accomplishment, dedication, quality, and timeliness. The leadership items were adapted from a military leadership assessment scale, the burnout items from the Maslach Burnout Inventory–General Survey, and the performance items from the unit's evaluation context. Each used a five-point response scale. A separate NCO instrument and semi-structured interview guide captured challenges related to operational support and welfare.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher requested clearance through the graduate school and permission from the Group Commander, coordinated eligible participants with unit personnel, and pilot-tested the instruments outside the final sample. Following approval, questionnaires were administered to selected junior enlisted personnel; supplementary interviews were held privately with consenting First Sergeants. Completed instruments were checked for consistency, and the responses were encoded and organized for analysis.

Data Analysis

Frequencies and percentages summarized demographic and service profiles. Weighted means and standard deviations described each leadership, burnout, and operational performance indicator. The study interpreted the five-point ratings as 1.00–1.80 (very low/strongly disagree), 1.81–2.60 (low/disagree), 2.61–3.40 (moderate/neutral), 3.41–4.20 (high/agree), and 4.21–5.00 (very high/strongly agree). Interview narratives were coded and grouped into recurring themes; no predictive test was reported.

Ethical Consideration

The thesis described institutional and military authorization, participant briefings, written informed consent for interviews, voluntary participation, confidentiality assurances, use of nonidentifying survey information, and secure handling of data. The survey was completed within duty arrangements to minimize disruption. No ethics approval number was provided in the available manuscript; therefore, no number is supplied here.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Junior Enlisted Personnel

The survey comprised 180 junior enlisted personnel. Most were 26–30 years old (n = 77, 42.8%) or 31–35 years old (n = 64, 35.6%), and 132 respondents (73.3%) were male. The largest rank group was Airman/Airwoman (n = 65, 36.1%), followed by Airman Second Class/Airwoman Second Class (n = 53, 29.4%). Service tenure was concentrated in the first five years, and 113 respondents (62.8%) were college graduates. These results describe a largely early-career population for whom immediate guidance, mentoring, and career development are particularly relevant.

Table 2. *Selected Profile Characteristics of Survey Respondents (N = 180)*

Characteristic	Category	n	%
Age	26–30 years	77	42.8
Age	31–35 years	64	35.6
Sex at birth	Male	132	73.3
Sex at birth	Female	48	26.7
Rank	Airman/Airwoman	65	36.1
Rank	Airman/Airwoman 2nd Class	53	29.4
Tenure	Less than 2 years	56	31.1
Tenure	2–5 years	59	32.8
Education	College graduate	113	62.8

The sample was distributed across all eleven squadrons, with the largest surveyed stratum from the Headquarters Administrative Squadron (n = 43, 23.9%), followed by the 564th Security Forces Squadron (n = 27, 15.0%). The stratified approach enabled descriptive coverage of different support functions; it did not establish differences in outcomes by squadron, which were not separately tested.

Perceived NCO Leadership

Participants rated all four leadership dimensions favorably. Direction and clarity of task guidance received the highest summary mean (M = 4.0361, SD = 1.1841), followed by involvement in decision-making (M = 3.9639, SD = 1.2062), fairness and representation of concerns (M = 3.9375, SD = 1.2059), and supervision, mentorship, and welfare support (M = 3.9236, SD = 1.2156). The results reflect perceived strengths in explaining assignments, maintaining standards, and considering personnel input, while identifying welfare support as the comparatively lowest-rated domain.

Table 3. *NCO Leadership Ratings by Dimension*

Leadership dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Direction and clarity of task guidance	4.0361	1.1841	Agree
Supervision, mentorship, welfare support	3.9236	1.2156	Agree
Fairness, recognition, representation	3.9375	1.2059	Agree
Task-related decision-making involvement	3.9639	1.2062	Agree

Item-level ratings suggest opportunities to strengthen listening and responsive mentoring. In supervision and welfare, listening to personal and work concerns was rated M = 3.8944, compared with M = 3.9556 for coaching when difficulties arose. Within fairness, treating personnel equally received M = 3.9000; promptly updating personnel when tasks changed received M = 3.9944 under guidance. Although all fall within the “agree” band, the relatively lower values identify practical priorities for feedback and leadership development.

These perceptions are compatible with evidence that supportive immediate military leadership is relevant to adjustment, motivation, and barriers to help-seeking (Britt et al., 2012; Gutierrez & Adler, 2022). They cannot, however, demonstrate that leadership practices caused particular burnout or performance outcomes in the present survey; the thesis did not directly estimate such associations.

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Extent of Occupational Burnout

The three measured burnout dimensions showed differing patterns. Emotional exhaustion (M = 2.7833, SD = 1.1950) fell within the moderate/neutral interval, while depersonalization (approximately M = 2.42, SD = 1.2599) and reduced personal accomplishment (M = 2.1375, SD = 1.2782) were in the low/disagree interval. This pattern indicates that fatigue-related concerns persisted despite relatively low endorsement of detachment and negative self-evaluation.

Table 4. *Occupational Burnout Ratings by Dimension*

Burnout dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Emotional exhaustion	2.7833	1.1950	Neutral / moderate
Depersonalization	≈2.42	1.2599	Disagree / low
Reduced personal accomplishment	2.1375	1.2782	Disagree / low

The highest exhaustion item was feeling emotionally drained after a day of work (M = 2.8833), followed closely by feeling used up at the end of a shift (M = 2.8778). These ratings are not evidence of severe unit-wide burnout but do indicate that accumulated work pressure warrants attention. The comparatively low depersonalization and reduced accomplishment scores suggest that many respondents continued to identify with their duties and perceived themselves as capable of contributing.

The findings are consistent with multidimensional approaches to burnout, in which exhaustion need not coincide with comparably elevated cynicism or reduced professional efficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Studies of military work also emphasize that workload, workplace resources, and support structures should be considered alongside individual symptoms (Archer & Alagaraja, 2021; Olapeju et al., 2024).

Self-Reported Operational Performance

Operational performance was rated favorably across the four measured dimensions. Mission accomplishment was highest (M = 4.1667, SD = 1.2297), followed by quality of performance output (M = 4.1403, SD = 1.2360), dedication to duty (M = 4.0597, SD = 1.2620), and timeliness of work (M = 4.0056, SD = 1.2017). These values describe participants' self-reported experience of meeting requirements; no independent audit of operational outputs or objective performance testing was reported.

Table 5. *Self-Reported Operational Performance by Dimension*

Operational performance	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Mission accomplishment	4.1667	1.2297	Agree
Dedication to duty	4.0597	1.2620	Agree
Quality of performance output	4.1403	1.2360	Agree
Timeliness of work	4.0056	1.2017	Agree

Note. Responses reflect personnel perceptions rather than independently verified mission outcome indicators.

The strongest item in this series was pride in membership in the 560th Air Base Group (M = 4.2167), while an item on checking work to prevent errors or accidents was rated M = 4.2000. In contrast, requesting little or no extra time to complete responsibilities received M = 3.9444. The pattern suggests strong commitment to mission quality with comparatively greater pressure surrounding time and workload management.

The coexistence of high-performance ratings and moderate exhaustion illustrates why personnel welfare should be addressed even when self-reported mission dedication remains high. Motivation and organizational support can be important for meaningful work (Deci & Ryan, 1985), and related military evidence links leadership to the well-being and adjustment of service members (Booth et al., 2021; Gutierrez & Adler, 2022). The present data do not establish the direction or magnitude of such relationships within the 560th Air Base Group.

Challenges Encountered by First Sergeants

Thematic analysis of accounts from the eleven First Sergeants identified four connected concerns: manpower shortages and overlapping leadership demands; equipment, transportation, and other operational

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resource constraints; the difficulty of sustaining personnel welfare and motivation under heavy work pressure; and interpersonal dynamics involving fairness, cohesion, and perceptions of favoritism. These accounts help contextualize the moderately elevated exhaustion ratings and the slightly lower scores for welfare support and timeliness.

Table 6. *Themes From First Sergeant Accounts*

Theme	Recurring concern	Illustrative source excerpt
Manpower and overburdened leadership	Repeated tasking, concurrent roles, extended hours	"Kulang ang tao, sa isang araw na dedetail sila ng 2-3 beses."
Operational resource limitations	Equipment shortages, limited vehicles, compressed deadlines	"Lack of equipment for maintaining facilities, and lack of vehicles for military police."
Personnel welfare and morale	Fatigue, emotional demands, balancing team support with missions	Difficulty supporting personnel while meeting mission requirements.
Interpersonal dynamics and integrity	Diverse personalities, fairness concerns, favoritism	"Covering up bata-bata system."

The First Sergeants' accounts show that frontline leaders must balance direct task performance with supervision and personnel care, often without sufficient staffing or equipment. One comment described repeated daily task assignments, while another identified insufficient equipment and vehicles. The theme relating to the bata-bata system underscores the importance of transparent allocation, recognition, and conflict resolution. The statements reflect participants' experiences, not verified institutional misconduct findings.

The qualitative evidence lends practical relevance to the proposed actions: requests for staffing and equipment support, formal mentoring, scheduled welfare checks, workload monitoring, and fair leadership practices. These findings accord with literature emphasizing the organizational dimensions of occupational stress and the potential contribution of supportive leadership (Jacobs, 2019; Olapeju et al., 2024).

Proposed Leadership Enhancement and Sustainability Framework

The study translated the observed leadership ratings, burnout profile, performance assessment, and First Sergeant concerns into a proposed Leadership Enhancement and Sustainability Framework. Its components included action on staffing and equipment constraints, quarterly leadership development, monthly mentoring, scheduled welfare and recovery checks, cross-training and succession planning, NCO peer support, and inclusive leadership practices. The plan was proposed as an output of the study; the thesis did not provide a completed implementation evaluation or measured post-program effects.

Table 7. *Selected Priorities from the Proposed Leadership Enhancement and Sustainability Framework*

Priority	Indicative measure	Timing / lead
Manning and workload	Coordinate requests for critical vacancies; improve allocation of existing work	Immediate–6 months; command and manpower staff
NCO leadership competence	Quarterly mentoring, communication, welfare, and fair-treatment training	Quarterly; unit training staff and NCOs
Early-career mentoring	Designate NCO mentors and structured individual check-ins	Monthly; NCOs and junior personnel
Fatigue and welfare	Recovery rotations and confidential well-being checks	Monthly; NCOs and medical staff
Succession and resilience	Cross-training, supervised delegation, and peer support	6–12 months; squadron leadership
Equipment availability	Equipment inventory, maintenance scheduling and acquisition requests	3–12 months; logistics and unit leadership

Note. these are proposed measures, not documented accomplishments or empirically demonstrated intervention effects.

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The framework is a context-sensitive administrative output rather than a predictive model. Its implementation would require authorized unit review, allocation of resources, confidential monitoring of staff welfare, and follow-up measures comparing leadership ratings, exhaustion, and performance indicators over time. Its value in the present study is the alignment of proposed actions with reported gaps; its effectiveness remains to be evaluated.

CONCLUSION

The study documented generally positive assessments of NCO leadership, moderate emotional exhaustion alongside low depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment, and favorable self-reported operational performance among 180 junior enlisted personnel of the 560th Air Base Group. First Sergeants' accounts identified manpower shortages, inadequate resources, competing supervisory responsibilities, welfare pressures, and fairness concerns as practical challenges. These findings support closer attention to supervision, mentoring, workload management, equipment availability, and equitable treatment. They provided the basis for the proposed Leadership Enhancement and Sustainability Framework, but they do not demonstrate a statistically predictive or causal relationship between leadership, burnout, and operational performance because no such analysis was reported.

Recommendation

The 560th Air Base Group and concerned Philippine Air Force authorities should consider a phased review of critical staffing gaps and resource requirements, prioritize consistent task allocation, and strengthen periodic welfare and workload monitoring. NCO development activities may focus on clear instructions, responsive mentoring, constructive recognition, inclusive decision-making, and fair handling of personnel concerns. Confidential support pathways, rest and recovery practices where operationally feasible, and mentoring for early-career personnel should be reviewed alongside existing command and mental health programs.

For research and evaluation, future studies should examine the relationship among leadership, burnout, and performance using appropriately specified inferential models and, where feasible, independent performance measures. Follow-up assessments before and after framework implementation could establish whether the proposed measures achieve meaningful changes while accounting for unit workload, staffing, and other relevant contextual factors. Such work should preserve respondent confidentiality and obtain the required institutional and military permissions.

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