

Effects of the Single-Entry Approach Program on Labor Disputes as Implemented by the Department of Labor and Employment

Rodolfo O. Sildora Jr.^{1*}, Mon Carlo D. Frejoles², Mick Ian M. Cornelia³

¹DOLE-RO7, Negros Oriental Field Office, Negros Oriental, Philippines

²Department of Public Works and Highways – 1st District, Negros Oriental, Philippines

³Foundation University, Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, Philippines

*Corresponding Author Email: sildoraro@gmail.com

Date received: May 2, 2024

Date revised: May 23, 2024

Date accepted: May 30, 2024

Originality: 96%

Grammarly Score: 90%

Similarity: 4%

Recommended citation:

Sildora, R., Frejoles, M.C., & Cornelia, M.I. (2024). Effects of the single-entry approach program on labor disputes as implemented by the Department of Labor and Employment in Negros Oriental Field Office.

Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives, 2(7), 484–493. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0178>

Abstract. The study aimed to determine the effects of the Single-Entry Approach program on labor disputes as implemented by the Department of Labor and Employment in Negros Oriental Field Office. The researcher employed a descriptive-correlational design. The 120 respondents (60 requesting parties and 60 responding parties) were randomly selected clients who were involved in the SEnA program of the DOLE Negros Oriental Field Office. The researcher used a validated questionnaire to gather data and applied statistical methods such as percentage, weighted mean, mean, and Spearman's rank order correlation coefficient. The findings revealed high awareness and satisfaction for both the requesting and responding parties, indicating a correlation between clients' awareness of the SEnA program and their satisfaction levels. However, the fact that RFAs are still being referred to other agencies only shows that certain aspects of the program require more enhancement. Specifically, the client's awareness of the SENA program, communication effectiveness, and conciliation-mediation skills could lead to increased settlement rates and reduced referrals to the NLRC.

Keywords: Single-entry approach program; Labor disputes; Awareness; Settlement; Satisfaction.

1.0 Introduction

Conflicts are common in the workplace and can arise between individuals, teams, departments, employers, employees, and various aspects of industrial relations (Pinheiro et al., 2019). In settling conflicts, mandatory arbitration agreements have been scrutinized for over a decade, and recently proposed legislation in the US seeks to void pre-dispute mandatory arbitration agreements in a range of disputes (Sharma, 2020). In addition, mediation, as an alternative dispute resolution method, can be used to facilitate negotiations between involved parties to reach a mutually acceptable solution (Folorunsho, 2018). However, low participation and enforcement levels in dispute resolution mechanisms hinder consumer protection goals, and incorporating dispute avoidance tools and trust-building measures can improve regulation and common enforcement mechanisms (Nicuesa, 2018).

In the Philippines, despite the country's violent history, it maintains its traditions of conflict resolution, with a focus on enhancing local peace-building organizations instead of institutionalizing conflict resolution (Gonzales, 2022). Moreover, innovative methods for effective conflict management in contemporary workplaces have been explored, such as regular training for conciliators and mediators, to improve their conflict resolution skills and commitment to assisting laborers (Rebayla et al., 2023). Lastly, the insights obtained from the research regarding the conflict management process offer new and innovative approaches to managing conflicts effectively in contemporary workplaces and organizations (Ilac & Presbitero, 2022).

Similarly, the Department of Labor and Employment's Single-Entry Approach (SEnA) program in the Philippines stands as a significant example of an alternative dispute resolution (ADR) initiative (Department of Labor and Employment, n.d.). Although the DOLE Negros Oriental Field Office (DOLE-NOFO) has achieved commendable settlement rates of 88.89% in 2021 and 88.00% in 2022, surpassing the office target of 70.00% (DOLE7 Memo No. 638 s-2022), a slight decline in these rates is observed. This decline underlines the necessity for continuous improvement, particularly in the context of quality service in government. As noted by Ocampo et al. (2019), the responsiveness aspect requires the most enhancement when it comes to delivering quality services. This sentiment resonates with the understanding that the quality of government service delivery is closely linked to the level of national happiness (Helliwell & Wang, 2020). Hence, the research study will bridge this gap including the knowledge and research by providing a localized perspective on the SEnA program in DOLE-NOFO, as no prior studies have been conducted that examine the effects of the SEnA program in the country.

Given the stated situation, there is a pressing need to conduct a research study on the matter. As such, with the necessary qualifications and competence of the researcher, who has a thorough background in conciliation and mediation in the DOLE SEnA program as well as Labor Relations and Labor Standards, this research was carried out. Furthermore, by examining the effects of the SEnA program on labor disputes, this study aimed to produce valuable insights that could contribute to enhancing the DOLE program's outcomes, updating policy and practice, and ultimately promoting better labor relations and governance in the province.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study is a descriptive-correlational type. It identified (a) the common issues raised by the requesting parties and answered by the responding parties relative to employment; (b) the clients' awareness of some important areas; (c) the level of clients' satisfaction; and (d) the average performance rate of the SEnA program. Also, in this study, the clients' awareness of the SEnA program and their level of satisfaction were correlated.

2.2 Research Participants

The study's respondents comprised clients, referred to as requesting parties and responding parties, engaged in DOLE-NOFO's SEnA program. Employing a simple random sampling technique, 120 respondents were chosen, evenly split between requesting parties—comprising actively employed individuals, terminated, resigned, or retired—and responding parties, which included establishment owners, managers, employers, and management representatives. This sample size effectively captured data pertinent to the study's objectives.

2.3 Research Instrument

The researcher used a self-made questionnaire as an instrument to collect data. He believed that the questionnaire would gather data faster than any other method. Besides, the respondents could easily respond to the questionnaire since they were directly involved in the conduct of the SEnA process. Moreover, the questionnaire was drawn out based on the researcher's readings, reviewed articles, and published literature related to the study. The items in the questionnaire cover relative aspects of the common issues of employment and answer the specific questions under the statement of the problem.

For validation purposes, the researcher presented the questionnaires to three experts in the field in addition to the panel members who first evaluated the entire research proposal. These experts assessed the accuracy of the instrument used in this study in terms of grammar, format, alignment of questions, construct, and criterion. The researcher then adopted and integrated all the corrections and suggestions of the panel members and validators for more clarity and definiteness.

To guarantee reliability, a dry run was conducted with 30 randomly selected clients participating in the SEnA program serving as the respondents. The items were tested for their reliability using Cronbach's alpha test, which essentially measures the consistency of a measurement in assessing a concept. Cronbach's alpha test serves as a method to quantify the strength of that consistency. Typically, a desirable range falls between 0.70 and 0.90, or even higher depending on the nature of the research. When Cronbach's Alpha values are 0.7 and above, it indicates that all the variable indices or dimensions demonstrate acceptable internal consistency (Adeniran, 2019). The

results of the dry run involving thirty respondents yielded a value of > 0.70 , satisfying that all items in the questionnaire are reliable.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

After the design hearing, the researcher adopted all the corrections and suggestions of the panel members. A letter of request to conduct the study was sent to the OIC Chief of DOLE-NOFO and the Regional Director of DOLE. The signed and approved request was presented to all individuals and authorities concerned, and then to the respective respondents. During the questionnaire distribution, the researcher explained to the respondents the purpose and importance of the research. The sets of questionnaires were distributed every day from Mondays to Fridays until the target of 120 respondents was reached. The retrieval of the questionnaires was done right after the respondents finished answering the questions. The results were then consolidated and tallied using MS Excel and were analyzed and interpreted.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

The researcher utilized several analytical tools, including percentages, to illustrate the relationship between parts and the whole. This method effectively presented the common issues raised by the requesting parties and addressed by the responding parties concerning employment. Moreover, the weighted mean was used to determine the degree of the client's awareness of the SenA program and their satisfaction with its implementation. The mean was also utilized to assess the average performance of the SenA program. Spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was applied to identify the degree of relationship between the client's awareness of their rights, access to information about the SenA program, communication with the SEADO, and their level of satisfaction. Throughout the analysis, specific interpretations were applied to describe the client's awareness and satisfaction levels with the SenA program.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

In maintaining the highest standards of ethical research, careful consideration of ethical principles is paramount. Therefore, this study diligently pursued ethical clearance from both the university graduate school, where the researcher is enrolled, and DOLE-NOFO, the site of study. Before their inclusion, participants received comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives and procedures, and their informed consent was solicited. They were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any point, free from coercion or intimidation. Stringent confidentiality measures were enacted to safeguard the privacy of all shared information, and measures were taken to minimize potential risks to participants.

In alignment with the ethical guidelines set forth by the Ethics Committee of Foundation University, the researcher meticulously adhered to prescribed procedures. Consultation was undertaken to ensure the research topic's soundness, significance, and ethical appropriateness. Throughout the research process, the researcher maintained a non-judgmental stance to prevent any hint of bias. Moreover, participants were actively engaged in the consent process, indicating their full comprehension of the potential risks and benefits associated with their participation in the study.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Clients' Awareness

In terms of Knowledge of Their Rights

Table 1 depicts the data on the level of awareness of the clients in terms of knowledge about their rights. As depicted the composite scores for both requesting parties and responding parties indicate a relatively very high ($w\bar{x} = 4.25$) and high ($w\bar{x} = 4.17$) level of awareness, respectively.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the level of awareness of the clients in terms of knowledge about their rights (n=120)

Indicators	Requesting Party (n=60)		Responding Party (n=60)	
	$w\bar{x}$	LoA	$w\bar{x}$	LoA
1. The right to a settlement agreement that is fair and just.	4.40	FA	4.28	FA
2. The right to due process of the parties during the SenA proceedings.	4.23	FA	4.22	FA
3. The right to file a complaint with the SenA program if there is a labor issue or conflict with the employer or vice versa.	4.21	FA	4.07	A
4. The right to confidentiality during the SenA proceedings.	4.13	A	4.10	A
Composite	4.25	FA	4.17	A

Among the requesting parties, the respondents are “fully aware” of their right to a settlement agreement that is fair and just ($w\bar{x} = 4.40$), the right to due process of the parties during the SEnA proceedings ($w\bar{x} = 4.23$), and the right to file a complaint with the SEnA program if there is a labor issue or conflict with the employer or vice versa ($w\bar{x} = 4.21$). Furthermore, the table reveals that the requesting parties are “aware” of their right to confidentiality during the SEnA proceedings ($w\bar{x} = 4.13$).

On the one hand, the responding parties are “fully aware” of their right to a settlement agreement that is fair and just ($w\bar{x} = 4.28$) and the right to due process of the parties during the SEnA proceedings ($w\bar{x} = 4.22$). In addition, they are “aware” of their right to file a complaint with the SEnA program if there is a labor issue or conflict with the employer or vice versa ($w\bar{x} = 4.07$) and the right to confidentiality during the SEnA proceedings ($w\bar{x} = 4.10$).

These findings connote that requesting and responding parties are fully aware of their rights in SEnA proceedings contributing to the effectiveness of information dissemination efforts by DOLE-NOFO and other government agencies involved in labor dispute resolution (Daen, 2018). During the conduct of SEnA, the SEADO explained and discussed the primary objective of the Program which is to achieve an amicable settlement and prevent disputes from escalating to formal litigation. Requesting and responding parties were informed about their rights and obligations under laws and the potential benefits of undergoing the SEnA program. Similarly, in their study, Soriano et al. (2022) observed a high level of awareness among respondents regarding mediation rules, procedures, and ethical standards for mediators. Additionally, Toohey (2018) noted an increasing awareness of non-determinative dispute settlement processes such as mediation, which are increasingly gaining attention as effective methods for resolving disputes.

Despite the overall high level of awareness, there are minor differences in awareness levels among specific rights between the parties. This unveils potential areas for targeted educational interventions or enhancements in communication strategies to ensure equal understanding among all stakeholders, reinforcing the importance of effective communication as a key element in resolving both relationship and task conflicts (Adham, 2023).

In terms of Access to Information about SENA Program

Table 2 presents the data on the level of awareness of the clients in terms of access to information about the SEnA program. As shown, the composite scores for both requesting parties and responding parties unveil a generally high ($w\bar{x} = 4.08$) and high ($w\bar{x} = 3.97$) level of awareness, respectively.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the level of awareness of the clients in terms of access to information about the SENA program (n=120)

Indicators	Requesting Party (n=60)		Responding Party (n=60)	
	$w\bar{x}$	LoA	$w\bar{x}$	LoA
1. The SEnA program is available to all workers, whether regular, contractual, or probationary, workers separated from employment, or even on the part of the employer.	4.32	FA	4.08	A
2. Dissemination of information about the SEnA program through DOLE's website, offices, and the Public Employment Service Office (PESO).	4.10	A	3.97	A
3. Contact information for the SEnA program, including phone numbers, email addresses, and physical address of the DOLE-NOFO office.	3.95	A	3.80	A
4. Comprehensive overview of the SEnA program, including its objectives, procedures, and benefits.	3.95	A	4.02	A
Composite	4.08	A	3.97	A

Among the requesting parties, the respondents are “fully aware” that the SEnA program is available to all workers, whether regular, contractual, or probationary, workers separated from employment, or even on the part of the employer ($w\bar{x} = 4.32$). Moreover, they are “aware” of the dissemination of information about the SEnA program through DOLE's website, offices, and PESO ($w\bar{x} = 4.10$), Contact information for the SEnA program, including phone numbers, email addresses, and physical address of the DOLE-NOFO office ($w\bar{x} = 3.95$), and a Comprehensive overview of the SEnA program, including its objectives, procedures, and benefits ($w\bar{x} = 3.95$).

On the other hand, the responding parties are “aware” of the SEnA program being available to all workers, whether regular, contractual, or probationary, workers separated from employment or even on the part of the employer ($w\bar{x} = 4.08$), Dissemination of information about the SEnA program through DOLE's website, offices, and PESO ($w\bar{x} = 3.97$), Contact information for the SEnA program, including phone numbers, email addresses, and physical address of the DOLE-NOFO office ($w\bar{x} = 3.80$), and a Comprehensive overview of the SEnA program, including its objectives, procedures, and benefits ($w\bar{x} = 4.02$).

These findings imply that both requesting and responding parties have a generally high level of awareness regarding communication with the SEnA program, which affirms that dissemination expresses a proactive idea that extends beyond mere accessibility and distribution of governmental information (Daen, 2018). Additionally, Singer (2018) offers advice to those involved in disputes to help them analyze their situations and goals. However, the lack of knowledge about methods of settling disputes, particularly among financially challenged employees, could be a barrier to accessing the program (Francisco et al., 2022). With a notable rise in information accessibility, this edition explores how utilizing information can improve governance and public service delivery (Kosec & Wantchekon, 2020).

In terms of Communication with SEADO Handling the Clients' RFA

Table 3 stipulates the data on the level of the clients' awareness of communication with the SEADO handling the Client's RFA. The data show that the composite scores for both requesting parties and responding parties indicate a relatively high ($w\bar{x} = 4.04$) and high ($w\bar{x} = 3.89$) level of awareness, respectively.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the level of awareness of the clients in terms of communication with the SEADO handling the client's RFA (n=120)

Indicators	Requesting Party (n=60)		Responding Party (n=60)	
	$w\bar{x}$	LoA	$w\bar{x}$	LoA
1. Confidentiality of the Clients' communication with the SEADO.	4.22	FA	4.00	A
2. The SEADO communicates with clients in a language that they understand.	4.22	FA	3.98	A
3. Communication with the SEADO through various means, including phone calls, emails, and in-person meetings in the Office.	3.92	A	3.85	A
4. Contact information of the SEADO handling the RFA.	3.82	A	3.73	A
Composite	4.04	A	3.89	A

Specifically, the requesting parties are “fully aware” of the Confidentiality of the Clients' communication with the SEADO ($w\bar{x} = 4.22$) and the SEADO communication with clients in a language that they understand ($w\bar{x} = 4.22$). Moreover, they are “aware” of Communication with the SEADO through various means, including phone calls, emails, and in-person meetings in the Office ($w\bar{x} = 3.92$) and Contact information of the SEADO handling the RFA ($w\bar{x} = 4.04$).

The responding parties, on the other hand, are “aware” of the Confidentiality of the Clients' communication with the SEADO ($w\bar{x} = 4.00$), the SEADO communication with clients in a language that they understand ($w\bar{x} = 3.98$), Communication with the SEADO through various means, including phone calls, emails, and in-person meetings in the Office. ($w\bar{x} = 3.85$), and Contact information of the SEADO handling the RFA ($w\bar{x} = 3.73$).

These findings signify that both requesting and responding parties have a generally high level of awareness regarding communication with the SEADO, which affirms that dissemination expresses a proactive idea that extends beyond mere accessibility and distribution of governmental information (Daen, 2018). Furthermore, alongside managing the communication flow, mediators exert influence over the communication by directing, through explicit statements, the shaping narrative that parties can agree upon (Silbey & Merry, 2018). Sillars and Wilmot (2013) also believe that having appropriate control over the communication process can potentially result in more equitable, humane, and satisfying forms of conflict contrasting with a touch of idealism.

3.2 Clients' Satisfaction with SENA

In terms of Timeliness of Resolution

Table 4 manifests the data on the level of client satisfaction with the implementation of the SEnA program in terms of timeliness of resolution. The composite scores for both requesting parties and responding parties indicate a generally high ($w\bar{x} = 4.34$) and high ($w\bar{x} = 4.19$) level of satisfaction, respectively.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the level of clients' satisfaction with the implementation of the SEnA program in terms of timeliness of resolution (n = 120)

Indicators	Requesting Party (n=60)		Responding Party (n=60)	
	w $\bar{x}$	LoS	w $\bar{x}$	LoS
1. The DOLE-NOFO responds promptly to the client's request for assistance (RFA).	4.50	VS	4.28	VS
2. The SEADO initiates the fast-tracking of resolving disputes notwithstanding the 30-day process cycle time.	4.37	VS	4.20	S
3. The SEADO adheres to the 30-day timeline set under the SEnA program in disposing of the RFA.	4.33	VS	4.13	S
4. The SEnA program reduces the time taken to resolve disputes between parties.	4.17	S	4.13	S
Composite	4.34	VS	4.19	S

Specifically, the requesting parties are “Very Satisfied” with the following: the DOLE-NOFO responds promptly to the client's RFA ($w\bar{x} = 4.50$); the SEADO initiates the fast-tracking of resolving disputes notwithstanding the 30-day process cycle time ($w\bar{x} = 4.37$); and The SEADO adheres to the 30-day timeline set under the SEnA program in disposing of the RFA ($w\bar{x} = 4.33$). Moreover, the requesting parties are “Satisfied” with the SEnA program reducing the time taken to resolve disputes between parties. ($w\bar{x} = 4.17$).

Likewise, the responding parties are “Very Satisfied” with the DOLE-NOFO responding promptly to the client's request for assistance ($w\bar{x} = 4.28$). Moreover, they are “Satisfied” that SEADO initiates the fast-tracking of resolving disputes notwithstanding the 30-day process cycle time ($w\bar{x} = 4.20$), the SEADO adheres to the 30-day timeline set under the SEnA program in disposing of the RFA ($w\bar{x} = 4.13$), and the SEnA program reduces the time taken to resolve disputes between parties ($w\bar{x} = 4.13$).

These findings would mean that both requesting and responding parties are highly satisfied with the timeliness of resolution within the SEnA program which points out the effectiveness of the program in delivering timely assistance and dispute resolution services to clients. This affirms that both the promptness of response and the successful resolution of issues significantly influence satisfaction with complaint handling (Mattila & Mount, 2006). On the other hand, minor differences in satisfaction levels among specific indicators can be observed between parties. This indicates the need for continued efforts to ensure consistent service quality and responsiveness across all aspects of the program, which affirms that customer satisfaction is influenced by the quality of service provided (Vu, 2021).

In terms of Fairness and Impartiality

Table 5 indicates the data on the level of client satisfaction with the implementation of the SEnA program in terms of fairness and impartiality. The composite scores for both requesting parties and responding parties indicate a generally high ($w\bar{x} = 4.35$) and high ($w\bar{x} = 4.23$) level of satisfaction, respectively.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the level of clients' satisfaction with the implementation of the SEnA program in terms of fairness and impartiality (n = 120)

Indicators	Requesting Party (n=60)		Responding Party (n=60)	
	w $\bar{x}$	LoS	w $\bar{x}$	LoS
1. The SEADO shows consistency in its decision-making process.	4.42	VS	4.22	VS
2. The SEADO is neutral and impartial in facilitating the resolution process.	4.38	VS	4.23	VS
3. The parties involved in the dispute resolution are treated fairly.	4.37	VS	4.23	VS
4. The parties are given equal opportunities to express their rights to be heard.	4.25	VS	4.25	VS
Composite	4.35	VS	4.23	VS

The results show that the requesting parties are “Very Satisfied” with the following: SEADO showing consistency of the SEADO in its decision-making process ($w\bar{x} = 4.42$), the SEADO is neutral and impartial in facilitating the resolution process ($w\bar{x} = 4.38$), the parties involved in the dispute resolution are treated fairly ($w\bar{x} = 4.37$), and the parties are given equal opportunities to express their rights to be heard ($w\bar{x} = 4.25$).

Correspondingly, the responding parties are “Very Satisfied” that the SEADO shows consistency of the SEADO in its decision-making process ($w\bar{x} = 4.22$), the SEADO is neutral and impartial in facilitating the resolution process ($w\bar{x} = 4.23$), the parties involved in the dispute resolution are treated fairly ($w\bar{x} = 4.23$), and the parties are given equal opportunities to express their rights to be heard ($w\bar{x} = 4.25$).

These findings suggest that both requesting and responding parties are highly satisfied with the fairness and impartiality of the SEnA program which affirms that impartiality plays a crucial role in the conflict resolution process by ensuring that disputants receive a sense of justice and fairness (Lutta, 2022). Meanwhile, there are no indications of dissatisfaction or significant differences in satisfaction levels among specific indicators between the parties stressing how the concept of fairness is closely linked to the rules and societal norms governing the allocation of benefits and consequences (Jordan et al., 2021). Mediators frequently discuss the key principle of impartiality, which is central to the mediation process (Rosamund, 2018).

In terms of Communication and Responsiveness

Table 6 exhibits the data on the level of client satisfaction with the implementation of the SEnA program in terms of communication and responsiveness. It is exhibited that the composite scores for both requesting parties and responding parties indicate a generally high ($w\bar{x} = 4.30$) and high ($w\bar{x} = 4.29$) level of satisfaction, respectively.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the level of clients' satisfaction with the implementation of the SEnA program in terms of communication and responsiveness

Indicators	Requesting Party (n=60)		Responding Party (n=60)	
	$w\bar{x}$	LoS	$w\bar{x}$	LoS
1. The SEADO communicates with clients in a respectful and professional manner.	4.43	VS	4.30	VS
2. The clients are provided with information on the scheduled SEnA Conferences.	4.37	VS	4.28	VS
3. SEnA program is communicated clearly and effectively to clients.	4.22	VS	4.28	VS
4. The clients are provided with clear and concise information on how to access the program.	4.20	S	4.30	VS
Composite	4.30	VS	4.29	VS

Based on the data, the requesting parties are "Very Satisfied" that the SEADO communicates with clients in a respectful and professional manner ($w\bar{x} = 4.43$), The clients are provided with information on the scheduled SEnA Conferences ($w\bar{x} = 4.37$), and the SEnA program is communicated clearly and effectively to clients ($w\bar{x} = 4.22$). Further, requesting parties are "Satisfied" that the clients are provided with clear and concise information on how to access the program ($w\bar{x} = 4.20$).

Similarly, the responding parties are "Very Satisfied" that the SEADO communicates with clients respectfully and professionally ($w\bar{x} = 4.30$), The clients are provided with information on the scheduled SEnA Conferences ($w\bar{x} = 4.28$), the SEnA program is communicated clearly and effectively to clients ($w\bar{x} = 4.28$), and the clients are provided with clear and concise information on how to access the program ($w\bar{x} = 4.30$).

These findings connote that both requesting and responding parties are highly satisfied with the communication and responsiveness of the SEnA program, indicating the effectiveness of the program in providing clear, timely, and respectful communication to clients. This reaffirms the importance of employing efficient methods and strategies to facilitate direct communication between parties and successfully overcome blocks (De Ramos & Pasion, 2023). More so, there are no indications of dissatisfaction or significant differences in satisfaction levels among specific indicators between both parties. This implies a consistent perception of communication and responsiveness throughout all aspects of the program, reinforcing the idea that active listening and the perception of responsiveness cultivate an interpersonal connection that benefits both individuals and parties (Itzhakov & Reis, 2023).

In terms of Clarity and Comprehensiveness of Information

Table 7 displays the data on the level of client satisfaction with the implementation of the SEnA program in terms of clarity and comprehensiveness of information. The composite scores for both requesting parties and responding parties indicate a generally high ($w\bar{x} = 4.30$) and high ($w\bar{x} = 4.29$) level of satisfaction, respectively. In particular, the requesting parties are "Very Satisfied" that there is easy access to information on the program's services, process, and requirements ($w\bar{x} = 4.42$), Clients are given the opportunity to know the possible outcome when passing through the SEnA program ($w\bar{x} = 4.37$), the SEnA program provides clear and concise information to clients in terms of the issues raised ($w\bar{x} = 4.33$), and the SEnA program considers the language, race, and cultural needs of clients ($w\bar{x} = 4.33$).

Table 7. Descriptive statistics of the level of clients' satisfaction with the implementation of the SEnA program in terms of clarity and comprehensiveness of information (n = 120)

Indicators	Requesting Party (n=60)		Responding Party (n=60)	
	w $\bar{x}$	LoS	w $\bar{x}$	LoS
1. There is easy access to information on the program's services, process, and requirements.	4.42	VS	4.25	VS
2. Clients are given the opportunity to know the possible outcome when passing through the SEnA program.	4.37	VS	4.25	VS
3. SEnA program provides clear and concise information to clients in terms of the issues raised.	4.33	VS	4.25	VS
4. SEnA program considers the language, race and cultural needs of clients.	4.33	VS	4.30	VS
Composite	4.30	VS	4.29	VS

Also, the responding parties are "Very Satisfied" that there is easy access to information on the program's services, process, and requirements ($w\bar{x} = 4.25$), Clients are given the opportunity to know the possible outcome when passing through the SEnA program ($w\bar{x} = 4.25$), the SEnA program provides clear and concise information to clients in terms of the issues raised ($w\bar{x} = 4.25$), and the SEnA program considers the language, race, and cultural needs of clients ($w\bar{x} = 4.30$).

These findings illustrate that both requesting and responding parties are highly satisfied with the clarity and comprehensiveness of the information provided by the SEnA program. This underscores the effectiveness of the program in ensuring that clients have access to clear and relevant information to navigate the dispute resolution process. It reinforces the importance of ensuring clarity in language and intent to enable parties to enforce their preferred jurisdiction, choice of law, and forum when disputes arise (Hannaway & McKenzie, 2021). Additionally, in a rapidly evolving labor environment, obtaining legal clarity on the outcome of a dispute is of utmost importance to both employers and employees who cannot afford delays (Ilies, 2022).

3.3 Clients' Awareness and Their Level of Satisfaction

Table 8 discloses the information regarding the relationship between the clients' awareness of the SEnA program and their level of satisfaction. Using Spearman Rank Order Correlation, it unveils that all p-values are less than the level of significance (0.05). This finding allows the rejection of the null hypothesis. Considering also the values of r_s , the data signify that (a) there is a significant and "moderate" relationship between the requesting party's awareness or knowledge of their rights and their level of satisfaction, and (b) there is a significant and "strong" relationship between the responding party's awareness or knowledge of their rights and their level of satisfaction.

Table 8. Correlation analysis for the relationship between the clients' awareness and satisfaction (n = 120)

Variables correlated to the overall level of satisfaction...	r_s	p	Decision	Remark
Requesting Party				
Knowledge about Their Rights	0.392	0.002	Reject H_0	Significant
Access to Information about SEnA Program	0.654	<.001	Reject H_0	Significant
Communication with the SEnA Desk Officer Handling the RFA	0.611	<.001	Reject H_0	Significant
Responding Party				
Knowledge about Their Rights	0.634	<.001	Reject H_0	Significant
Access to Information about SEnA Program	0.695	<.001	Reject H_0	Significant
Communication with the SEADO handling the RFA	0.705	<.001	Reject H_0	Significant

Level of significance = 0.05

Moreover, the data expose that there is a significant (p -values $< \alpha = 0.05$) and strong (r_s -values > 0.50) relationship between the requesting party's level of satisfaction and the following areas of their awareness about the SEnA program: (a) knowledge about their rights; (b) access to Information about SEnA Program; and (c) communication with the SEADO handling the RFA. The same results are evident in the responding party's response.

The findings above signify that the higher the extent of awareness of the requesting and responding parties about the SEnA program, the higher also is their level of satisfaction (Curado et al., 2022). This correlation is attributed to various factors. Primarily, enhanced awareness empowers parties with a better grasp of their rights and available resources, facilitating effective navigation of the dispute resolution or SEnA process. In concurrence, the presence of clear communication channels through the SEADO handling the RFA and access to relevant information contribute to a smoother resolution process, thereby alleviating frustration and boosting satisfaction

(Adu-Oppong & Agyin-Birikorang, 2014). Furthermore, when parties feel adequately supported and informed throughout the process, they are more inclined to perceive the outcome as fair and satisfactory emulating the notion that, communication involves a reciprocal process of mutual influence, fostering interdependent exchanges that contribute to feelings of satisfaction (Mehra & Nickerson, 2019). Additionally, Soriano et al. (2022) found a correlation between clients' level of awareness and the extent of mandatory mediation implementation, as determined by the number of submitted and disposed civil cases.

In summary, the analysis highlights the significant positive correlation between clients' awareness of the SEnA program and their level of satisfaction, underscoring the importance of effective communication and access to information in enhancing the client's level of satisfaction.

4.0 Conclusion

The SEnA program of the DOLE-NOFO provides insights into the program's performance and impact on client satisfaction. The prevalence of the common issues of last salary/final pay, separation pay/indemnity pay, and non-payment of 13th-month pay underscores the need for interventions to address these recurring issues effectively. Moreover, the assessment of clients' awareness levels regarding their rights and the SEnA program reveals generally high levels of awareness for both requesting and responding parties. However, there are opportunities for further improvement in access to information about the program and facilitating better communication. Additionally, the high levels of client satisfaction with various aspects of the SEnA program including timeliness of resolution, fairness, communication, and information clarity, reflect the program's effectiveness in addressing labor disputes and meeting client expectations. The SEnA program's performance rate within 30 days indicates high settlement rates across the three years. The low percentage of RFAs referred to NLRC reduced the burden on formal legal processes. Eventually, the significant relationship between clients' awareness of the SEnA program and their level of satisfaction emphasizes the importance of promoting awareness to enhance client satisfaction. Despite the high level of client awareness, and satisfaction, and the program's better performance rates in settling RFAs over the past three years (2021-2023), there persists a notable number of labor cases referred to the NLRC. This is the challenge that will stress the importance of DOLE-NOFO's continued efforts to further enhance the implementation of the SEnA program in Negros Oriental, ensuring that labor disputes are addressed effectively and efficiently.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Rodolfo O. Sildora Jr. conceived the initial idea, developed the conceptual framework, formulated the research questions, and designed the overall methodology. Mon Carlo D. Frejoles led the writing of the initial draft, organized the manuscript structure and drafting the discussion sections. Mick Ian M. Cornelia performed the statistical analysis, conducted the literature review, and significantly enhanced the clarity and coherence of the manuscript. All authors engaged in discussions of the results and approved the final version of this paper.

6.0 Funding

This research did not receive funding from any funding agency.

7.0 Conflict of Interests

This study has no conflict of interest of any sort.

8.0 Acknowledgment

The authors will forever be grateful to those individuals who contributed to the realization of this academic journey, especially the people of DOLE7-NOFO and the respondents/clients.

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