Research article

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP PRACTICES OF SUC PRESIDENTS: A TRIANGULATION DESIGN STUDY

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Abstract

This mixed-methods research principally aims to develop a conceptual structure based on transformational leadership standards to offer guidance to heads of higher education institutions and other school leaders. The concurrent triangulation design was used in order to develop and merge common themes that arose from the qualitative part and the quantitative segment of the study. Participants in the qualitative phase were the presidents of five purposively selected State Universities and Colleges (SUCs) in Central Luzon. Ninety-seven administrative council members composed of vice presidents, deans, directors, faculty presidents, non-academic staff presidents, student council presidents and other officials of equal rank provided data for the quantitative part. The findings and results of this study distinctly illustrated the participant-presidents as transformational leaders who are consistently utilizing the three broad categories of setting direction, developing people and redesigning the organization to excellently attain beneficial effects in their respective universities. The triangulation of data gathered led to the emergence of a model which may be utilized as a leadership guide for incumbent and potential presidents of higher education institutions, and other educational leaders about essential transformational leadership practices which may contribute to the creation of developmental change in their organizations. This study ascertained that transformational leadership has an evident positive effect on educational institutions, hence, recommendations were offered for utilizing the developed model of transformational leadership, equating existing practices with transformational leadership norms, making it an essential component of leadership courses and programs, and conducting further related studies.   **Copyright © WJER, all rights reserved.**

KEYWORDS: Educational leadership, transformational leadership, mixed-methods research, concurrent triangulation design
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INTRODUCTION

The combination of socio-economic conditions and ordeals of the 21st century pose significant leadership challenges to organizations across the world. These challenges have become increasingly complex, unpredictable, and multidimensional. For many organizations, they are unassailable apparently because traditional leadership strategies are persistently used but remain to be futile.

Remarkable changes have continually affected social, economic and political environments. Pasmore (2011) noted that there is a necessity for capable leadership in organizations if they were to successfully navigate through extraordinary changes. In order to generate and sustain social progress, effective leadership at all levels of society is extensively desired. The need for effective leadership in a global and rapidly changing society is more perceptible now than ever. Effective leadership has been acknowledged as a high-potent advantage an organization can have. Collins (2002) declared that one of the most powerful competitive advantages most organizations can possess is effective leadership. For an organization to function successfully there must exist first-rate leadership which shall spearhead people and organizational systems to attain and uphold high levels of achievement. Killian (2007) claimed that contemporary leadership theorists recognize that personal characteristics particularly intelligence and facets of personality such as dominance, conscientiousness, social tendency and internal locus of control are important to effective leadership. The aspect of dominance includes a desire to take charge, self-confidence and extraversion; conscientiousness comprises achievement drive, high energy and initiative; social tendency encompasses expressive affection, being a good listener and low need to be liked; and internal locus of control covers optimism, resilience and persistence.

The demands on educational institutions have never been so great and they need to find new ways of functioning to meet the challenges of the 21st century. In the past three decades, changes in various aspects of world technology, economics, society, politics, and culture imposed changes and forced reforms on many countries' educational systems (Abu-Tineh cited in Abu-Tineh, Khasawneh and Omary, 2009).A proven technique is through competent leadership which is regarded as essential for educational institutions to surmount hindrances. Research on school effectiveness demonstrates conclusively that the quality of leadership is a key element in determining the success of an educational organization (Bush and Bell, 2005). In their review of ten years of leadership research by top scholars in educational administration, Heck and Hallinger (cited in Stewart, 2006) concluded that there was a substantial accumulation of knowledge regarding school leadership and its effects. They found out that leadership will continue to be a focal point in the aspects of school accountability and restructuring. The importance of effective school leadership has been underscored in the Philippines because of persistent demands for reform and restructuring. The results of this study may serve as a basis for educational leaders to assess their strengths and weaknesses, and appropriately use evaluation findings to become more effective school leaders (Abu-Tineh, et.al. 2009). Chiefly, the outcome of this study is expected to provide university presidents with a model of transformational leadership practices which will contribute to developmental change in their organizations. Furthermore, it may serve to inform potential presidents and educational leaders in other institutions about the essential transformational leadership characteristics perceived by sitting presidents as best suited to meet various challenges. Finally, this study may work as the catalyst for further studies on the subject of transformational leadership in other schools, thereby offering valuable insights for educational leaders.

The study focused on the transformational leadership practices of five SUC presidents and perceptions of the members of the administrative council about the transformational leadership practices of their president. Each SUC President is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) who has general powers of administration and supervision, and acts as the ex-officio head of all officers, members of the teaching staff, administrative and all other employees of the institution (DHVTSU Code, 2009). The administrative council is a body consisting of the president of the university as chairman, the vice presidents, deans, directors and other officials of equal rank as members, whose duty is to review and recommend to the board of regents policies governing the administration, management and development planning of the University for Appropriate Action (R.A. 8292).While the five presidents represent SUCs of various types, organizational structures, and geographic locations within the region, their viewpoints may not represent those of other SUC presidents in the country, thus the paradigm which emerged may not be a generalized model. Similarly, the viewpoints of the participants and respondents used to develop the conceptual structure based on transformational leadership may only provide a modest basis for scientific generalization since the study made use of a small number of participants/respondents.

FRAMEWORK

Figure 1 illustrates Nicdao's Model of Transformational Leadership Practices of SUC Presidents. The main elements of the figure are four circles, a triangle, a rectangle and a diamond. Inside each shape are themes which emerged from the objectives of this study. The triangle at the bottom enfolds the unified themes of excellence for the vision, optimal people empowerment and transformational leadership in unison. An inverted triangle was fittingly used to epitomize the practices of the presidents which challenge traditional or hierarchical models of leadership where authority and decision-making power are concentrated at the top of an organizational pyramid. Two circles rest on top of the triangle to denote that the themes inside it emerged from the merger of the qualitative themes and quantitative themes. A line originates vertically from triangle and connects to the junction of the two circles.

The left circle on top of the triangle encloses the themes on the actions of the university presidents which are indicative of transformational leadership practices. A circle was used to symbolize these actions because they will keep on going indefinitely in the never ending process of transformation. The red color stands for the passion and intensity which the presidents demonstrated in creating and sharing university visions, empowering personnel, advocating continuous education, building harmonious relationships, inspiring people, promoting and rewarding excellence. Lines radiate from a hub like the spokes on a wheel which signifies that the actions were used in unison to enhance their collective effect. The circle is evenly divided into seven portions to denote the equal importance of each one in attaining the objectives of the universities. The right circle on top of the triangle surrounds the themes on the perceptions of administrative council members about the transformational leadership practices of their presidents. The red color stands for the passion and intensity which the presidents demonstrated as visionary leaders, fair and just, enthusiastic, mentors of future leaders, practitioners of shared leadership and advocates of collaboration. The circle is evenly divided into six portions to denote the equal importance of each theme. A line starts vertically from the junction of the two red circles and is directed upwards until its advance is blocked by a rectangle.

The rectangle in the middle of the figure that blocks the line emanating from the circles below it contains the constraints faced by presidents in carrying out transformational leadership practices. These impediments are ever present in the universities, thus an immovable rectangle was used to depict them. Green was used to imply envy and disagreement which are the main sources of discord. This color likewise represents misfortune which befell on the universities because of insufficient funding. The line originating from the red circle cannot go through this fixed green rectangle; consequently it was redirected to two circles on top of the rectangle. The two side circles enfold the actions done by the presidents to counter the constraints which materialized because of their initiatives for transformation and equally to put off additional obstacles from coming out. Circles were similarly utilized to embody these actions because of their cyclical functions to neutralize impediments. The color orange was used to characterize the energy and enthusiasm of the presidents in their unceasing confrontations against diverse challenges. The circle on the left side includes four actions of presidents: championing change, applying cutting-edge fiscal management, functioning legally and promoting honesty to surmount financial curbs in their universities. The circle on the right side which resembles the symbol for peace includes three actions of presidents: building strength in unity, communicating seamlessly and valuing people to overcome potential discord among university personnel. The line coming from the red circles connects to these orange circles where it emanates to progress on to the diamond at the apex of the figure.

The diamond encloses the effects of the transformational leadership practices of the presidents in their respective universities. A diamond was employed to stand for these effects since they resemble precious jewels owing to their exceedingly advantageous impact on the universities. The color yellow corresponds to the happiness and contentment which the presidents and their academic communities experienced as a result of these beneficial effects made up of accessible and high-quality education, institutional harmony, inspired personnel and influential governance. Simplicity is the foremost strength of the model for it can be comprehended effortlessly. The parsimonious utilization of shapes and their symmetrical arrangement make it straightforward and aesthetically appealing. The meaningful symbols ascribed to the figures and the sensible connotations attributed to the colors clarify the message of the figure.

Figure 1. Nicdao's Model of Transformational Leadership Practices of SUC Presidents
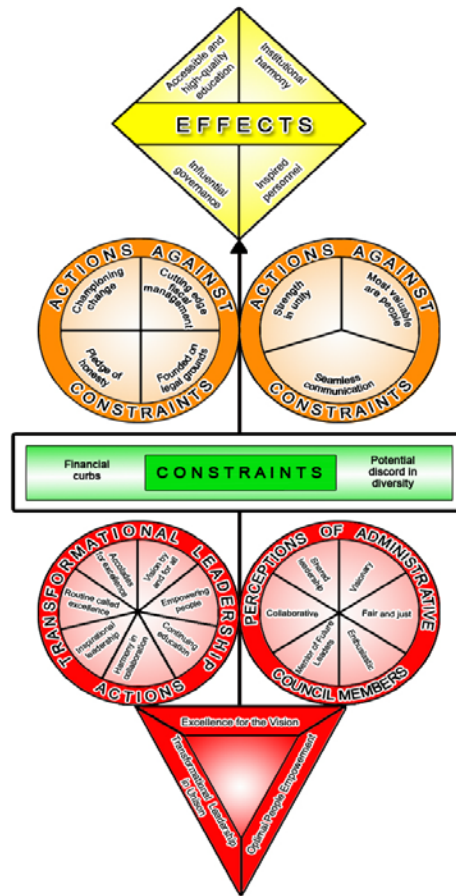
OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the actions of the Participant-Presidents which are Indicative of Transformational Leadership
- To identify the Effects of Actions Indicative of Transformational Leadership to Presidents' Schools
- To identify the Constraints Faced by Presidents in Carrying-Out Actions that Led to Change
- To identify the Acts Done by Presidents to Deal with Constraints
- To identify the Perceptions of Administrative Council Members About the Transformational Leadership Practices of Their Presidents

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Research Design

The researcher employed a mixed-methods approach which, according to Essink (2013), will offer a deeper understanding of the research findings and a higher level of confidence in their accuracy. Specifically, the concurrent triangulation design was used in order to develop common themes by merging themes which arose from the qualitative part and the quantitative segment of the study. Bryman (cited in Essink, 2013) convey that the mixed-methods design serves as a triangulation technique to increase validity of the research through the mutual corroboration and combination of different methods. Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) express that the purpose of the concurrent triangulation design is to obtain complementary quantitative and qualitative data on the same topic. They likewise assert that it is a single-phase design, where the two types of data are collected and analyzed in the same time frame. This study employed in-depth interviews in combination with a widely-distributed questionnaire.

Collectively, better interpretations can be made from the results produced by these methods (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2009).

The study was conducted in five purposively selected SUCs in Region III. Each SUC was selected because its thrusts and priorities focus on the major objectives of the Roadmap for Public Higher Education Reform which are to improve quality and standards of higher education, raise the level of educational outcomes and increase the social relevance of its developmental functions, and to expand access to quality higher education among lower income and disadvantaged groups. These universities have likewise proven to be main instruments in developing high-level professions to meet the manpower needs of industry, public service and civil society. Through their functions of instruction, research, extension and production, they have significantly contributed to the tasks of "alleviating poverty, hastening the pace of innovations, creating new knowledge and functional skills and increasing the productivity of the workplace and the dynamism of communities (Higher Education Reform Agenda, 2011).

Locale of the study

Participants in this study were the SUC presidents and their respective administrative councils composed of vice presidents, deans, directors, faculty presidents, non-academic staff presidents, student council presidents and other officials of equal rank. These council members work closely with their presidents in defining, clarifying and reconciling the board of regents policies and programs for smooth dissemination and effective implementation at all levels of the organization (DHVTSU Code, 2009).

The five SUC presidents were selected as they are information-rich individuals deemed experienced and conversant about the subject of interest (Schumacher and McMillan, cited in Essink, 2013). Ninety-seven administrative council members from the five SUCs, a sample that is a substantial representative of the population of interest, were the respondents to the questionnaire which was designed to assess their thoughts, opinions, and feelings about the transformational leadership practices of their presidents.

Instrumental Analysis

For the qualitative part of the study, the researcher acted as the principal instrument while the semi-structured interview was the primary means of data generation. Babbie and Mouton (2001) stated that in a semi-structured interview, the interviewer has a general plan of investigation, but allows the conversation to progress in no specific order, although specific areas of interest are raised.

The Interview Schedule was developed by the researcher based on Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) Three Broad Categories of Transformational Leadership, Leithwood's (cited in Stewart, 2006) seven dimensions of transformational leadership in schools and Kouzes and Posner's (cited in Abu-Tineh, et.al. 2009) model of transformational leadership. It was validated by three seasoned educators with Doctorate Degrees in Educational Management and one English Professor who is a candidate for a Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education. Each question in the Interview Schedule was evaluated according to: responsiveness to the research objectives; coherence to the references; and, appropriateness of language structure used. The recommendations of the validators were incorporated into the final form of the Interview Schedule.

A dry-run of the interview was conducted with the executive vice-president of a state university, who was not a participant in this study, as the participant. The interviewing skills of the researcher were assessed through a Rubric with the following items: jargon was not used when questions were asked; questions given clearly communicated what the researcher wanted to know; were the questions used for the interview open ended?; interviewer did not take sides in the interview, but remained neutral; interviewer was familiar with audio equipment; the interview generated answers related to the subject the interviewer was researching on; and, the interviewer attentively listened to the participant. The interview dry-run was beneficially used by the researcher as an opportunity to further develop his questioning abilities.

The quantitative portion of the study on the other hand, utilized a questionnaire which was designed to cover a wide range of transformational leadership practices data. Questionnaires are effective ways of quantifying the behavior, attitudes, preferences, opinions and intentions of a relatively large number of subjects more economically and speedily than other methods (McLeod, 2014).The questionnaire was developed by the researcher based on Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) Three Broad Categories of Transformational Leadership. It was validated by the same educators who assessed the Interview Schedule. Each questionnaire item was appraised if it will be: accepted; modified; or discarded. The validators made their recommendations which were included in the final structure of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

A reliability test using the test-retest method was performed by asking ten administrative council members of a state university which was not a part of the study to complete the questionnaire. After two weeks the same persons were again asked to complete the questionnaire which now featured rearranged items. The test-retest method is a measure of reliability obtained by administering the same test twice over a period of time to the same group of individuals. The scores from Time 1 and Time 2 can then be correlated in order to evaluate the test for stability over time (Phelan and Wren, 2005).

Discrepancies in the opinions in survey 1 and survey 2 of a participant for a particular item were noted after tabulating the results of the reliability test. Based on the calibration using the Pearson product-moment coefficient of correlation with $r > 0.80$, it was established that items with one discrepancy in the reliability test can be retained. However, two or more discrepancies indicated a need to revise the item. Items 17, 21, 31 and 35 had two discrepancies each. It was noticed that these items contained two or more qualifiers, thus apparently making it difficult for the respondents to come up with a definite standpoint. Therefore, the qualifiers in these items were trimmed down into one specific quality.

Initially, the researcher obtained the informed consent of each participant in the qualitative part of the study. They were given a short briefing concerning the nature and purpose of the research one week before the actual interview. The interviews were scheduled at a time and venue designated by the participants. The interview was utilized as a good way of accessing participants' viewpoints on their transformational leadership practices. Each participant was interviewed only once, but they were given the opportunity to add any further information, ask questions or alter what was previously said if they wished to. The term transformational was not used in the interview process to avoid pre-emptive responses from the participants. Each interview was audio-recorded. After all interviews were completed, the recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researcher and transformed to texts for analysis and categorization.

A pre-survey letter was given to the respondents one week before the distribution of the questionnaires for the quantitative segment of the study. The letter provided introductory information about the purpose of the survey and why the recipient had been chosen. The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to emphasize their importance in the study and to ensure a high response rate. One hundred and twenty-five questionnaires were distributed and 97 were completed which translated to a response rate of 77.60%.

During qualitative data analysis, the researcher carefully read the transcribed data, line by line. Data were divided into meaningful analytical units and coding was used to apply labels or key terms through meticulous examination of passages of text. According to Gibbs and Taylor (2010), coding involves going through the data for themes, ideas and categories and then marking similar passages of text with a code label so that they can easily be retrieved at a later stage for comparison and analysis. Codes with similarities were organized and grouped into concepts because they share certain qualities that signify a pattern (Saldaña, 2009). The researcher used classification reasoning plus insight and perception to discern which data are alike when grouping them together (Lincoln and Guba, cited in Saldaña).

In order to devise the conceptual elements of the study, the constant comparative method, which involves repeatedly comparing one unit of data with another (Merriam, 2002), was used to construct themes. DeSantis and Ugarriza (cited in Saldaña, 2009) proposed that a theme is an intangible unit that brings meaning and identity to an experience which is repeatedly manifested. The function of a theme is to categorize a set of data into a subject that covers a group of recurring ideas (Auerbach and Silverstein, 2003). On the quantitative segment of the study, survey data were immediately tabulated and recorded after collection from the respondents. Frequency distribution was applied to organize and describe frequency counts so that the information can be interpreted more easily. Three tables were created to present the perceptions of administrative council members about the transformational leadership practices of their presidents. These were based on Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) Three Broad Categories of Transformational Leadership which are setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organization. In spite of the researcher's exhaustive efforts to identify a criterion reference which would interpret scores based on a predetermined standard, none was found available, hence, a norm reference was utilized to compare and rank individual questionnaire items in relation to one another. Harvey (2014) declared that norm-referenced assessment tends to be relative to the performance of others whereas criteria-referenced assessment is based on a pre-set benchmark. Questionnaire items representing perceived practices of presidents with affirmation levels of 90% and higher were employed to construct themes. Finally, unified themes on the transformational leadership practices of the presidents arose by combining themes or categories which were developed from the qualitative and quantitative

sections of the study. The lines, figures and flow of the model which emerged were the creative assembly of concepts of the researcher. The model was based on how the data have been analyzed grounded from the behaviors of the results and findings and the interconnection of concepts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Findings in this study are presented according to the sequence of the problems in earlier sections. The specific order is as follows: actions of the participant-presidents which are indicative of transformational leadership; effects of actions indicative of transformational leadership to presidents' schools; constraints faced by presidents in carrying-out actions that led to change; acts done by presidents to deal with constraints; and perception of administrative council members about the transformational leadership practices of their presidents. The findings for the first four objectives were obtained from the responses of the participants in the qualitative part of the study while results for objective five were from the survey data collected from respondents in the quantitative segment of the study.

Actions of the Participant-Presidents which are Indicative of Transformational Leadership

The interview with the presidents of notable state universities paved the way to uncover transformational leadership practices applied in universities toward excellence. The participant-presidents cogitated their transformational leadership actions which were utilized in carrying out the mandated functions of a university which are instruction, research, extension and production. After a thorough evaluation of their impressions, seven themes or categories emerged: vision by and for all, empowering people, continuing education, harmony in collaboration, inspirational leadership, routine called excellence and accolades for excellence.

Effects of Actions Indicative of Transformational Leadership to the Participant-Presidents' Schools

The transformational leadership actions of the participant-presidents resulted in a variety of beneficial effects for their corresponding universities. The valuable outcomes embodied a broad extent of aspects including organizational and individual outcomes. The in-depth appraisal of the presidents' notions regarding the consequences of their transformational leadership practices revealed four categories: accessible and high-quality education, institutional harmony, inspired personnel and influential governance.

Constraints Faced by the Participant-Presidents in Carrying-Out Actions that Led to Change

The participant-presidents are conscious that continuous change is obligatory to enhance the responsiveness and global competitiveness of their universities. With this in mind, they developed innovative methods in various facets of university systems and sub-systems to realize growth and sustainability. The implementation of these strategic change initiatives were accompanied by customary constraints in terms of funding deficiencies and potential disagreement among university personnel.

Acts Done by the Participant-Presidents to Deal with Constraints

Hindrances associated with change initiatives may impede the ability of the universities to discharge their projected role as instruments of development in their respective spheres of influence. For these, however, the participant-presidents set off a multitude of actions in order to deal with constraints which came about and similarly to prevent additional impediments from materializing. These compendium of measures to counteract and preclude limitations were categorized into seven modes namely: championing change, seamless communication, founded on legal grounds, pledge of honesty, cutting-edge fiscal management, and strength in unity and most valuable are people.

Perceptions of Administrative Council Members about the Transformational Leadership Practices of their Presidents

For the quantitative segment of this study, 125 questionnaires were distributed to university administrative council members composed of vice presidents, deans, directors, and other officials of equal rank. Ninety-seven of these questionnaires were completed which translates to a response rate of 77.60 %. Based on Leithwood and Jantzi's (2006) Three Broad Categories of Transformational Leadership which are setting directions, developing people and redesigning the organization, the respondents were asked to pinpoint perceived practices of their university presidents. The sub-categories included in setting directions are building the school's vision, developing specific goals and priorities and holding high performance expectations. Developing people encompasses intellectual stimulation, offering individualized support and modeling desirable professional practices and values. Developing a collaborative school culture, creating structures to foster participation in school decisions and creating productive community relationships comprise redesigning the organization.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study which ascertained that transformational leadership has an evident positive effect on educational institutions, the following recommendations are put forward:

- Educational leaders must make use of the model of transformational leadership which emerged in order to excellently effect developmental change and optimally attain the objectives of their institutions.
- To upgrade their leadership proficiencies, university presidents and other school heads must reflect on their existing practices by equating these with transformational leadership practices since this study confirmed the assertion of leadership theorists that in the academe, transformational leadership is most effective.
- Transformational leadership should be made as an essential component of leadership courses and programs in the field of education to heighten the consciousness and enrich the appreciation of future educational leaders about essential transformational leadership characteristics which are best suited to surmount various challenges.
- Further studies on the subject of transformational leadership which shall encompass different levels of education should be conducted in other school contexts to offer valuable insight for educational leaders and enhance their vital aptitudes in a systematic and progressive manner.

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