Lived Experiences of Campus Directors as Managers in a Philippine State University

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Abstract

The 21st century has introduced new challenges to the educational managers brought about by the fast changing world. Educational managers in a Philippine State University had to perform their administrative duties with the same competence parallel to their unwritten obligations. Thus, the objective of this study was to explore the lived experiences of campus directors as managers in a Philippine state university. This study utilized the qualitative-descriptive research design using a one-on-one interview. The participants of the study comprised of seven campus directors from the different campuses in the islands of Romblon. Using qualitative content analysis, three themes emerged. The first theme was "experience on becoming a campus director". Most of the campus directors shared their experiences before assumption, their adjustment period, and learning the ropes of management. The second theme was "challenges in becoming a manager". It showed that most of them dealt with their complex managerial roles, managing the employees, students, facilities and the stakeholders. The third theme was "self-concept as a manager". The essence of being a campus director disclosed that management/leadership can be developed and expanded over time. It is recommended that skills and knowledge gained through preparation can be supplemented by on-going training and mentoring. Trainings, specifically leadership-training programs should include critical reflection activities, such as comparing previous experience with the new experiences, self-evaluating, and challenging old worldviews. Moreover, the campus directors should develop time management and conceptual skills to address their hectic administrative tasks. It requires them to provide time to focus on ideas and be able to see the big picture of what the organization wanted to attain. Further, to respond effectively to the transformation challenges that managers in higher education and elsewhere are faced with, new skills and leadership practices will have to be acquired. This will require the ability for continuous personal transformation and life-long learning.

Keywords— lived experiences, campus directors, Philippine State University, essence, themes, Romblon

I. INTRODUCTION

Managing an educational institution in today's competitive world is a complex task. This is true whether it is in the basic education, tertiary or graduate studies. The 21st century had introduced various challenges in the lives of the educational managers. Multifaceted managerial roles and tasks, multigenerational workforce, millennial students, interculturalism, financial management, some of which the educational managers had to face. Beyond these challenges, an educational manager had to establish a strong sense of self. This was considered to be one of the keys into transforming an effective organization, an important aspect that the researcher opted to know in a Philippine State University specifically in Romblon.

Romblon is an archipelagic province of the Philippines located in the MIMAROPA region. Its main islands include Tablas, the largest, which covers nine municipalities, Sibuyan with its three municipalities, as well as the smaller island municipalities of Corcuera, Banton, Concepcion, San Jose, and Romblon, the provincial capital. It is in the islands of Tablas, Romblon, and Sibuyan where Romblon State University campuses were situated. To manage

these, campus directors were designated to handle each campus.

It is through the lived experiences of the campus directors as managers that will provide a full understanding from any perspective the true value and challenge in managing a school, in a smaller scale, a campus. One cannot simply generalize the managerial functions of the school manager and its effectiveness unless carefully understood from their unexplored lived experiences.

II. METHODS

Research Design
A qualitative descriptive research design was employed uncover the lived experiences of the campus directors.

Research Sampling/Locale/Respondents
The respondents of the study were the seven campus directors of the Romblon State University campuses.

Interview Protocol
The interview conducted with seven (7) campus directors was considered the primary data for this study. The interview protocol included the general question: *1) What are your experiences in managing this institution?*

Procedure
The actual interview was done by the researcher on a "one on one" basis after each campus director agreed through the letters of invitation and consent as respondent. An ethical process for conducting an interview protocol was observed during the entire interview particularly the interviewees' consent. Interviewees were assured of confidentiality for their answers, and their actual names were replaced with codes.

Data Analysis
Campus directors' responses to the interview questions served as the primary data for this study. Each interview session was audio recorded and then transcribed for analysis. The verbal data culled from the interview transcripts were coded and analyzed through qualitative content analysis by identifying the key-words-in-context (KWIC).

III.RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
A total of 84 codes were extracted on the lived experiences of campus directors as managers. From the codes, seven (7) categories were identified namely: experiences before assumption, coping with management; student management; employee management; linkages; administrative duties and; perception of career and being a manager. Further, from the seven (7) categories, three (3) themes emerged namely: experiences on becoming a campus director; challenges encountered as a campus director and; self-concept as a manager.

Theme One: Experiences on becoming a campus director
Out of the seven respondents, three of them did not plan to become a campus director including CD1, CD4, and CD7. On the other hand, CD2 expressed a strong desire and willingness to manage a campus. Lastly CD3 and CD5 remained neutral when it came to accepting the position while CD6 simply expressed his dismay on the impermanency of the position.

> *CD1- ..I had no ambitions on getting the position as a campus director. I was just compelled to do so...*

> *CD2- ..when I was younger I had aspirations on becoming a campus director, but with so many frustrations about the ranking, I started not to.*

> *CD4- ...I had no desire on becoming a campus director because I am about to retire..*

Planned or unplanned to become a campus director, most of them shared the same psychological adjustment that they had to deal with. Participants such as CD2, CD4, and CD7 demonstrated an entry into the educational administration that was stressful, emotionally charged, and subject to many influences of a sociological, organizational and a contextual nature. CD1 and CD5 devised their ways to cope with management through a steady support system. On the other hand, CD3 and

CD7 due to their previous managerial experiences maintained shared their stategy on how to cope with the new position.

> CD1-...*actually my only role is to follow from what I usually observe because I don't have any know-how on how to manage the campus.*

> CD7-...*I felt stressed for two days to the point where I could not sleep soundly at night.*

> CD4-...*when I assumed my position as campus director, I feel like I'm going insane.*

Assuming the position as a middle manager is not an easy and straightforward change in roles and responsibilities: "Crossing the boundary between teaching and administration precipitates a challenging cognitive, emotional, and social journey across uncharted personal, professional, and organizational territory"[1]. Developing effective ad hoc mentoring relationships and links with likeminded colleagues who have greater experience was a common strategy to improve performance and career success, as confirmed in the literature [2].

Theme Two. Challenges in becoming a manager

Majority of the campus directors disclosed that in performing their administrative tasks, they ensure that transparency and communication was observed. The importance of consulting the body was given emphasis in order to maintain a smooth process of service delivery.

> CD1-...*with proper communication and transparency, everything is running smooth...*

> CD2-...*I value transparency and making an update from time to time...*

CD6-...*I conduct a meeting, faculty meeting, orientation, briefings, consultation meetings...*

These statements could be linked to the emergent view that leadership is everyone's responsibility [3]. To that end, distributed and collective leadership styles have been proposed as a means for academics to develop shared responsibility in changing higher education cultures [4] [5].

Further, campus directors in most part shared how they managed their employees by constantly letting them feel respected, recognized, understood, guided, supported, and valued. They project a persona of a manager who is humble yet still set a certain boundary as an educational manager of their respective campus.

> CD1-...*I always exercise gratitude by letting them know that no matter how big or small their contribution is, it matters.*

> CD2-...*What is important is your understanding, through discipline with love and by showing oneself as an example...*

> CD6-...*What I do is to step down and work with them. Because if you work with them, leading them would be easier.*

According to Dr. Todd Whitaker, a professor of Educational Leadership at Indiana State University, the one thing that differentiates great educators, from others is the insistence that every day we treat every person with respect and dignity. They model the behaviour they expect in others. Apart from the manager-factor in employee management, campus directors emphasized the idea of recognizing their employees. Researchers found that recognition of employees were linked to job satisfaction and motivation. There are multitudes of ways to give recognition to an employee such as cash or non-cash. Campus directors evidently applied the non-cash

recognition through verbal appreciation or certificates.

On the other side of employee management laid the truth that one cannot please everyone. What most of the campus directors' situation to endure is that, their employees were their current peers. Some of the former peers are likely to test one's authority and leadership. Literature points out that this phase is one of the considerations that the manager has to make careful adjustments. However, it was prevalent that the campus directors stepped-on the role while remaining humble [6]. Surprisingly, campus directors experienced being torn between the young and the older generation of employees in the organization. Organizations nowadays are very unique because of its workforces' diversity. A study on managing multigenerational workforce revealed that there are coexisting more generations than ever before at the workplace, and this has room to an inevitable multigenerational clashes. However, the employers need to acknowledge not only the problems and pressures of mixed generations but also to see the opportunities, which come with the diversified workforce [8].

When it comes to managing the students, campus directors' expressed their positive impression. Some of them accepted the fact that there will always be minor disciplinary issues but they were able to address it appropriately. Some campus directors used warning, diplomacy, or by simply expressing positive physical gesture (tapping the shoulder as a form of discipline).

> *CD3-…I have no problems when it comes the students, because usually they live within the community…*

> *CD5-…The only problems that I usually experience was the challenge of the fashion trends which clashes with the defined attire and conduct stipulated in the student handbook.*

The university often rely upon student handbooks or codes of conduct to outline expected behaviors and the assigned consequences when students do not abide by the rules. By introducing rules and regulations early in a student's life, the student will become accustomed to abiding by rules in the future, thereby fostering law-abiding citizens. If these rules are not followed, students are then issued consequences based on the offense.

Campus directors also showed their various ways in reaching out and maintaining linkages with the external stakeholders (e.g. LGU, parents, and the community). CD1 emphasized that she does not personally reach to them to be given projects. This action was opposed to CD6 and CD7 who lay out their plans and appeal for their support. CD2 and CD4 did not mention their experiences with their linkages. CD3 mentioned how she dealt with the parents of the students by simply explaining to them if they have complaint. Among the seven respondents, CD5 showed her greatest satisfaction with the relationship to the stakeholders.

> *CD5-…the stakeholders are very supportive, for more than a hundred and one percent!*

> *CD6-…slowly, as my linkages grow, I appeal to them the assistance that they could contribute to the needs of the school.*

Indeed, the community and the university are two important social institutions. Both have organic linkages as the school cannot be seen as an independent institution isolated from the society in which it is located. As the old African proverb says, "It takes a village to raise a child." The universities that take the lead in this will benefit from what the partnerships bring them and will be ahead in a whole new field of endeavor.

Theme 3: Self-Perception of being a Manager

Each campus directors above showed that they have their own self-perception regarding their career, as a manager and self. This clearly showed that these perceptions helped shaped the way they managed their institutions. Generally, they considered their people to be at

their top-most priority when it comes to management.

> *CD1-…I always consider the good of the majority. I do not exercise favoritism.*

> *CD2-…I am an objective manager and I do not compete to other people but only myself.*

> *CD3-…Like a symbiotic relationship; if you treat them right, they will exchange it with the same respect.*

> *CD4-…I am not a transactional manager, I am transformational…*

> *CD5-…I am very transparent manager.*

> *CD6-…I only have three formulae in managing my campus—by practicing love, respect, and sharing…*

> *CD7-…You should know how to manage the people. Because if you are in the position, you serve as the compass who sets the direction of the campus…*

It is clear that the context of leadership is changing and that leadership with the capacity to build relationships, to collaborate and to lead change effectively will be critical to long-term success across domains of expertise and different organizational contexts. On the other hand, self-perception accuracy is a critical ingredient for authenticity and in forging a shared purpose for the leadership group. An accurate self-perception reflects self-awareness of relationship and interpersonal behaviors. Therefore, for leaders to be able to transform their organizations to become more effective, they first need to understand themselves [9]. The process of becoming a better leader is fundamentally grounded in personal transformation and self-discovery.

IV.   CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that in their lived experiences, transition from individual contributor to manager is a profound psychological adjustment- a transformation; becoming a manager is a big change, and with change comes challenges; and personal experiences shaped the campus director's self-concept of self, career, and management.

The totality of their experiences showed that managing a campus or school is completely different from the world of any single-tasking and regular teacher. It means one's work extends beyond the prescribed working hours. It means being ready to serve selflessly. Furthermore, in becoming a campus director, one has to be ready, not theoretically but must have a holistic understanding of the expectations of having the position. Learning the theories in management is indeed insufficient to any inexperienced aspirant. It is through experience that makes an educational manager become a well-rounded leader.

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