

Emergence of a Situational Leadership during COVID-19 Pandemic called New Normal Leadership

¹Prof. Christopher DC. Francisco, LPT, MAEd, SMRIEdr, PhD (cand.), ²Alvin V. Nuqui, PTRP, LPT, FRIEdr, PhD

¹Marcelo H. Del Pilar National High School, City of Malolos, Bulacan, Philippines

christopher.francisco004@deped.gov.ph

²Don Honorio Ventura State University, Bacolor, Pampanga, Philippines

alvinvillegasnuqui@gmail.com

Abstract: *The main aim of the study was to extract an emergence of situational leadership during COVID-19 pandemic called new normal leadership among school administrators in the Philippines. To achieve this aim, the researcher selected several school administrators within the Province of Bulacan during the school year 2020-2021. The study utilized a qualitative research design which aimed to describe the lived experiences of individuals in a certain phenomenon or human condition. Using transcriptions, codes, and triangulations of the data gathered, themes were extracted in the data analysis. Findings revealed that: (1) New Normal Leadership is the ability to be adaptive while staying strong with one's commitment; (2) It is about being an effective instructional decision-maker; (3) A leader who is a good planner, vigilant, and initiator. Towards the end of this study, conclusions were drawn and recommendations were offered like the further testing of this extracted theory in quantitative approach, as highly recommended for confirmatory and more in-depth examinations.*

Keywords—Situational Leadership, New Normal Leadership, COVID-19 Pandemic, Qualitative Study

1. INTRODUCTION

The term “new normal” is not actually new since it was used even after the World War II. As mentioned in a study, leadership in the new normal is a leadership in which the author traces good to great leadership attributes in such forefathers as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln, and by doing so he really describes the nature of leadership itself. Lieutenant General Honoré, USA (Ret.), postulates that we won our freedom because of leadership during the critical times in our history, such as Valley Forge and the Civil War, and leadership will continue to help us as we transition to the next “new normal” period. Thus, a new normal leader is good leader who learn to do the routine things well, good leaders are not afraid to act even when criticized, and good leaders are not afraid to take on the impossible [1].

In another study, it was noted that a new normal leadership happen since schools are experiencing tough times with even tougher demands for accountability with limited financial resources. Solving this dilemma calls for working together in a collaborative manner to develop cost-effective solutions. With the new normal now being the standard, it is critical that school leadership becomes connective in nature rather than practiced in an educational vacuum. The New Normal is a term coined by William H. Gross in March 2009. The impetus is on the changing economic landscape, not only now but in the future. Shifting from one economic and social order to another is a phenomenon which involves less household debt, higher personal savings, and lower rates of consumption. With a dismal budget outlook, the new normal is causing much concern as it spreads a ripple effect in our economy. Differing fiscal constraints placed on every aspect of American society portray this new economic schematic.

New normal as a reality and certainty by which everyone seeking to improve education must accept. Doing more with less has become the scenario for achieving better academic outcomes for all students. A bright revenue forecast in education is not likely anytime soon. For the next several years, preschool, K-12, and postsecondary educators are projected to face the challenge of stretching resources in creative ways as never before witnessed [2]. Thus, new normal leadership was also coined as the new standard in implementing K-12 program since 2009 in America, and 2012 in the Philippines.

However, the year 2020 has brought another concept of new normal since the COVID-19 pandemic has affected globally in terms of the economy, and education. It is a battle at which people are being stretched to adjust to a situation where education and money are at stake. Hence, New Normal in Education is defined as a shift of learning space from public space to personal space, shift of delivery (i.e. teaching) methods from one size fits to all to individualized and differentiated learning, shift of responsibility in the teaching and learning process where there is an active participation of household members, and shift in learning evaluations. The main aim of this paper was to investigate the emergence of a situational leadership during COVID-19 pandemic called New Normal Leadership in the Province of Bulacan during the academic year 2020-2021.

2. RELATED WORKS

It becomes clearer that what is needed during these pandemic situations of extreme change is an emphasis on identification with the leader in building trust where subordinates balance respect for hierarchy with adapting to a disaster requiring collaboration, hereby emphasizing responsiveness to the leader's direction. A caveat is that

change acceptance can be low because leaders tend to underestimate the importance of people's emotional experiences as leaders often operate from implicit mental models that emphasize focus on the organizational aspects and the rational and logical activities of change, without dealing with the emotions unfolding around them on an individual level.

A recent study defined new normal leadership in terms of a focus on people, human resources, mentoring, learning, healing emotions; a leader who is a facilitator, never top down, conscious of leadership development; a healthy working environment, respect, exchange of ideas, a creative class; trust through sharing, teams, embracing equality, diversity, slack, tolerance; vision, and commitment to the vision, through talent, technology, storytelling; and a dynamic interplay between all stakeholders, employees, customers, investors, shareholders [3].

With more than 5 million people sick and 300 thousand dead, the global economy has experienced an economic shock more severe than the financial crisis of 2008. The sudden emergence of COVID-19 as a global threat came at a time when a significant percentage of businesses are divided in their degree of digital maturity. The pandemic forced organizations to make digitalization and digital transformation a rapid strategic focus. One of the most important aspects of this transformation has been providing remote infrastructure that can support an entirely digital workforce. Besides this urgent need of digital technology, the situation has resulted in a need of leaders who might need very different competencies and behaviours than leaders needed a couple of years ago. The lack of literature on digital leadership in crisis and empirical research describing the impact of digital transformation on leadership called the authors for further exploration. Thus, it was investigated the adaptation of managers to the rapid digitalization of their day to day assignments caused by the outbreak of COVID-19 as it was believed that a new normal leader is or challenged to adjust towards becoming a digital leader [4].

It is without a doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic has surprised the world in numerous ways. The society has faced drastic shifts in its usual way of life even in the simplest form: social distancing, mask wearing, frequent hand washing, among others. The race towards the development of COVID-19 vaccine may be underway, and as of press time, people are still banking on what has been known in the past, and what are currently experiencing in the present in visualizing the "new normal". The pandemic's significance remains undefined, as "new normal" surfaces and starts to transpose ways and processes that people previously held [5]. Hence, the need for transformational leadership style among school principals are needed [6].

What's new in the "new normal"? What made us dub it as "new"? The current health crisis brings effects that are "beyond measures". Since the advent of the pandemic,

education institutions around the world have been aggressive in response to the challenges of home quarantine, infrastructure limitations for learning, and even internet connectivity. As schools close, virus spread could be reduced, along with surge of new cases. Embracing digital technology in relation to teaching and learning has been the talk of the town in the early months of 2020. Schools are expected to offer provision so it becomes central to "development, learning, and achievement of the children and youth for whom they are responsible" [7][8].

Whether offered as a temporary or permanent solution, virtual learning is now posed as a solution so teaching and learning will still pursue amidst lockdown and restricted physical interaction. It is also crucial to note how some institutions have struggled and faced resistance from students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders as new forms of teaching and learning are introduced. The success of organization initiatives can be greatly attributed to leadership mind-set that create, implement, enhance, and strengthen proactive notions in relation to our experiences before, during and even after the pandemic. A scholar postulates, "crises are poignant reminders" of the significance of critical leadership role in strengthening communities in the midst of the challenge [9][10].

With these underlying ideas and concepts about new normal leadership, the researcher purported to investigate, "Is there is really a new normal leadership or is it just part of being a situational leader?"

3. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study aimed at investigating the following central question:

Is there is really a new normal leadership? If yes, how is it being demonstrated by school administrators during COVID-19 pandemic crisis in the educational system?

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Design

The phenomenological method was used in this study wherein qualitative data were utilized in form of narrations. A focus group discussion were conducted with the participants to explore their insights about their lived experiences as they selflessly fulfill their duty as administrative officers assigned in school. The method was phenomenological since it aimed to describe their perceptions and lived experiences. According to Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching of Grand Canyon University, the purpose of this design is to describe human experiences, reactions, feeling, perspectives, ideas, thought, and responses to a particular stimulus, called 'bracketing'. This design allows the researcher to dig into the relevant perceptions, substantial perspectives, understandings, and unexpressed feelings of those people who have actually experienced or

lived the phenomenon or situation of interest, or the so-called, “lived-experiences.”

This qualitative study obtained phenomenological inquiry through casual and informal conversation to obtain the lived experiences of several school administrators in the Province of Bulacan, Philippines.

4.2 Respondents

The respondents of the study comprised several school administrators within Bulacan, Philippines during the school year 2020-2021. As observed, the researchers did not go with the detailed presentations of the respondents so as to hide their identity for confidentiality purposes as part of ethical considerations in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and as a policy implemented by Review Ethics Board of the Philippines.

4.3 Instrument

A semi-structured interview was used in this study and it allowed the researcher to have flexibility in interviewing the participants. The survey questions were validated by the pool experts in the field to ensure that the needed data would be elicited. Likewise, the researcher wished to accurately capture the data and as a result all the interviews were audio-recorded. After the interviews were transcribed and analyzed, the data were treated and kept carefully for confidentiality purposes.

4.4 Data Analysis

The code and theme procedures were used in analysing and interpreting the narratives of the respondents. The researcher abstract the themes from the code. After which, the data processed were triangulated and checked by the respondents.

4.5 Data Gathering

For the smooth flow of the data collection, the following procedures were carefully followed by the researchers: (1) The researchers briefed the participants about the study and informed them that participation was voluntary. They were given a choice if they wanted to be part of the study or not. (2) The tape-recording consent form was then presented to them, which asked for their permission for the interviews to be recorded. (3) The researcher wished to be transparent, and as a result, the participants were given the interview guideline. The interview guideline was given ahead of time before the day of interview to help them prepare themselves. The interview guideline aided in providing information-rich answers, as the researcher had time to prepare for the interviews. (4) The participants were interviewed individually in a private and quiet room. Semi-structured, one-to-one interviews were used as in-depth information of the understanding was needed, and also to allow the researchers some degree. (5) The tape recorder was used during each interview. Making use of an audio recorder allowed the researcher to record fully and accurately what

was being said rather than taking notes during the interviews of flexibility in asking questions.

5. RESULTS

Central Problem: Is there is really a new normal leadership? If yes, how is it being demonstrated by school administrators during COVID-19 pandemic crisis especially in the educational system?

School Administrator 1: Our leadership and profession are tested during crisis. Yet we are not developed to quit but to continue to make an impact to the future generation in every way possible. To be able to have a chance to teach despite the pandemic is such an honor. We are still touching lives and shaping our students, virtually. What a privilege to still continue the legacy that has been passed unto us by our teachers, even virtually.

School Administrator 2: Yes, because of the current challenges to the education sector, because of the global COVID-19 pandemic, this require schools to consider alternative modalities for education delivery that would cater to the needs of our learners. School Leaders were challenge to respond and addresses the needs of the learners in delivering quality education despite this difficulties and be ready to make transition to new ways of leadership as mandated by the Department of Education (DepEd). New Normal leadership is being exemplified by the so called New Normal Leaders through capacitating themselves through their sound/effective decision making. Instructional leaders and head-teachers understand what they need to know, what to prepare and what actions to do in designing a realistic strategic plan for flexible learning for schools.

School Administrator 3: COVID-19 pandemic is a litmus challenge for the Department of the Education. Many schools rapidly transitioned to online learning from the usual settings due to this situation that were enforced. With these heavily-charged situations, it is really hard to imagine and ensure that the teachers, parents/guardians, and students at home are ready for the opening of the school year or not. For sure, nothing will enter and stick into their minds since they are hungry, worried, and anxious. The Schools Division Office of Bulacan, in collaboration with its internal and external stakeholders continue to stand and walk its promise of commitment to provide quality education, in all situations. In this view, the schools division office proactively initiates several practices which could be a best fight against COVID-19's harm in education.

First is the preparation of learning continuity plan which is based from careful observations in the situation. This entails surveys conducted by the schools administrators from teaching to non-teaching personnel, students, and parents which is used as bases for crafting concrete plans for the upcoming school year 2020-2021.

Secondly, teachers are vigilant in terms of their next steps in the battle. They retreat and initiate attending seminars and

training in order to sharpen their saw by upgrading themselves for the new normal education. While the DepEd central office is doing its best to extend its arm to send modules at schools, yet, teachers in the division has been preparing various modules for alternative delivery modes for each grade levels such as supplementary learning materials and self-learning kits. Funds are coming from school MOOE and Special Education Fund for the reproduction.

Third is the initiative to do simulation of online classes being conducted by schools. This is one of the schools division's best practice since the preparation of the modules and other learning materials are useless if these cannot be delivered and implemented successfully. Beside teachers' ICT proficiency, technicalities, and ICT facilities are also deemed necessary.

Lastly, the top management believes that this pandemic opens a stronger school community and external partnerships especially with the parents and guardians. In doing this, schools create opportunities that can teach parents how to navigate the online learning environment, guide their children as they learn online, and even, nourish their children's curiosity at home. In this view, teachers has been conducting webinars and other means to communicate and orient with them about procedures and guidelines on how to direct their children as classes go on once the schools year has started.

The Department of Education stands on the truth that growth mindset, appreciation of mistakes, and being resilient are important life lessons that it can impart to students at this of the pandemic. Teaching them to empathize with other people and challenging them to help the other members of the society can make the new normal more bearable, and imbibe the spirit of "Magiging na Bata ng Republika ng Pilipinas."

6. DISCUSSION

Situational leadership is the ability of the school administrators to adapt with the present situations. Nonetheless, new normal leadership, as one if its kind, has emerged due to the extra ordinary situations that happen in the world. School administrators believe that these situations are unique and significant for them though they used to adapt in their day-to-day experiences as school administrators. They were stretched out to be more digital in nature, especially in terms of reaching out their teachers, students, colleagues, and many more. It is as if they shifted from the traditional way of style into something that is more adaptive to changes that the world dictates nowadays. From the first informant, it was noted that the new normal leadership style is about being adaptive to the situation so as to continue their commitment. Whereas, the second informant would like to stipulate that the new normal leadership refers to being an effective instructional decision-maker, which means to say that a leader has to equip themselves in analyzing students' needs and formulate best or less imperfect decisions. Lastly, the third informant mentioned that a new normal leader is a good planner, vigilant, and initiator. A good decision comes from

the one who thinks well, and do well, wherein initiatives are very important since no one dares to be caught offhand.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Based from the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

The Department of Education is indeed filled with teachers and school administrators who are so unselfish to commit themselves so as to continue learning despite this COVID-19 pandemic. The emergence of a situational leadership during this trying times called New Normal Leadership has really been displayed by the school administrators even in a single minute, day-by-day, and wherever they are, to promote quality education in the country. Three concepts, from the three significant school administrators, were extracted from their responses in order to prove that there is really a New Normal Leadership: (1) New Normal Leadership is the ability to be adaptive while staying strong with one's commitment; (2) It is about being an effective instructional decision-maker; (3) A leader who is a good planner, vigilant, and initiator. Nevertheless, these concepts were strongly supported by several scholars in the field [11][12][13].

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

School administrators are challenged to share their experiences with their colleagues in order to obtain collegiality of their significant experiences in their respective school assignments. Benchmarkings of their best practices may help one another to get some knowledge, inspirations and motivations in managing their schools.

Further testing of this grounded theory in quantitative approach is highly recommended for confirmatory and more in-depth examinations.

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