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Article

Leading Beyond the Classroom: Lived Experiences of Non-Teaching Personnel on Leadership Styles at Northeastern College, Santiago City

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Abstract

Leadership in higher education extends beyond academic instruction and significantly influences the effectiveness of administrative operations, employee motivation, institutional culture, and organizational performance. While numerous studies have examined leadership from the perspectives of faculty members and academic administrators, limited qualitative research has explored how non-teaching personnel experience and interpret leadership styles within higher education institutions. This study explored the lived experiences of non-teaching personnel regarding the leadership styles practiced at Northeastern College, Santiago City. Guided by a transcendental phenomenological research design, the study sought to understand how leadership influences employees' motivation, job performance, professional growth, interpersonal relationships, and organizational commitment. Twelve (12) purposively selected non-teaching personnel from various administrative and support service offices participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method, allowing the identification of the essential structures of participants' experiences. The findings revealed that effective leadership among institutional administrators significantly influences employees' motivation, productivity, organizational trust, collaboration, innovation, and commitment to institutional goals. The study proposes the Non-Teaching Leadership Development and Empowerment Framework (NTLDEF) to strengthen leadership practices that foster employee engagement, organizational effectiveness, and continuous professional development within higher education institutions.

Keywords: higher education leadership, leadership styles, non-teaching personnel, phenomenology, transformational leadership, servant leadership, organizational commitment, employee empowerment

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Introduction

Leadership has long been recognized as one of the most influential determinants of organizational success, particularly in higher education institutions where academic excellence and administrative efficiency must function harmoniously. As universities and colleges continue to respond to rapid technological advancement, globalization, institutional reforms, and increasing stakeholder expectations, effective leadership has become indispensable in creating adaptive, innovative, and people-centered organizations. Contemporary higher education leadership extends beyond policy implementation and decision-making; it encompasses empowering employees, cultivating collaboration, fostering innovation, and developing organizational cultures that support continuous improvement and institutional sustainability. Recent literature emphasizes that transformational, participative, and servant leadership styles positively influence employee engagement, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and institutional effectiveness across higher education settings.

Globally, leadership research within higher education has traditionally focused on university presidents, deans, department chairs, and faculty leaders because of their direct involvement in teaching, curriculum development, research productivity, and academic governance. More recently, however, scholars have argued that institutional success depends equally on the effectiveness of administrative and non-academic leadership. Non-teaching personnel perform essential functions in admissions, finance, registrar services, human resources, information technology, student affairs, libraries, and other support services that enable universities to achieve their educational mission. Emerging phenomenological studies demonstrate that non-faculty leaders primarily function as facilitators and enablers who strengthen institutional operations by coordinating processes, supporting academic units, and implementing organizational policies. These findings underscore the strategic role of non-teaching personnel in advancing institutional excellence and organizational resilience.

Leadership is widely recognized as one of the most significant factors influencing organizational effectiveness, employee performance, and institutional sustainability in higher education. Universities and colleges operate as complex organizations where academic and administrative units must work collaboratively to achieve institutional goals. Consequently, leadership extends beyond managing academic affairs and encompasses motivating employees, fostering collaboration, promoting innovation, and creating organizational cultures characterized by trust, accountability, and continuous improvement. Contemporary leadership research suggests that effective leaders are no longer viewed merely as authority figures but as facilitators who empower employees, encourage participation, and cultivate environments that support organizational learning and professional growth (Northouse, 2022).

Recent higher education literature emphasizes that leadership effectiveness depends on leaders' ability to adapt their leadership behaviors according to organizational contexts and employees' developmental needs. Educational institutions increasingly adopt transformational, servant, authentic, participative, and distributed leadership approaches because these leadership styles encourage collaboration, innovation, employee empowerment, and shared responsibility. As higher education institutions continue responding to rapid technological advancement,

globalization, accreditation demands, and digital transformation, adaptive leadership has become essential for sustaining institutional competitiveness and organizational resilience (Bush, 2020; Hallinger, 2021).

Participative leadership emphasizes involving employees in organizational decision-making, problem-solving, planning, and institutional improvement initiatives. Rather than making unilateral decisions, participative leaders encourage dialogue, consultation, collaboration, and shared governance. This leadership style recognizes employees as valuable organizational partners capable of contributing ideas that improve institutional effectiveness and workplace innovation (Yukl, 2020).

Recent studies indicate that participative leadership strengthens employee motivation because individuals feel respected, valued, and trusted when leaders consider their opinions during organizational decision-making. Participative leadership likewise enhances teamwork, communication, organizational trust, and job satisfaction by promoting collaborative workplace relationships and reducing hierarchical barriers (Kim & Park, 2021).

Within the Philippine higher education system, institutional transformation has been accelerated by quality assurance initiatives, accreditation requirements, digital transformation, outcomes-based education, and increasing expectations from students and external stakeholders. Consequently, educational leaders are expected not only to achieve organizational targets but also to cultivate inclusive workplace environments characterized by collaboration, transparency, shared decision-making, employee well-being, and professional development. Leadership styles have become increasingly important because they directly influence employees' organizational commitment, productivity, workplace satisfaction, and service quality. Recent studies involving private higher education institutions likewise indicate that transformational leadership positively affects the job satisfaction and organizational commitment of non-teaching personnel, suggesting that leadership behaviors significantly shape administrative effectiveness and employee performance.

Despite these developments, leadership research within Philippine higher education continues to emphasize faculty members, instructional leaders, and school administrators, while the experiences of non-teaching personnel remain relatively underrepresented. Administrative employees interact daily with institutional leaders, implement organizational policies, coordinate essential support services, and contribute substantially to institutional effectiveness. Their lived experiences provide valuable insights into how leadership styles influence workplace relationships, employee motivation, communication, organizational trust, professional growth, and institutional commitment. Understanding these experiences is particularly important because non-teaching personnel serve as the operational backbone of higher education institutions, ensuring the efficient delivery of academic and administrative services.

At **Northeastern College, Santiago City**, non-teaching personnel play indispensable roles in maintaining institutional operations and supporting the college's mission of delivering quality higher education. They collaborate closely with academic officials, administrators, faculty members, students, and external stakeholders to provide efficient administrative services and maintain organizational effectiveness. As the institution continuously responds to evolving educational reforms and organizational demands, examining how non-teaching personnel

experience leadership styles becomes increasingly relevant. Their lived experiences can provide institutional leaders with practical insights into leadership behaviors that foster trust, empowerment, collaboration, innovation, and employee engagement while identifying leadership practices that may require further enhancement.

Although numerous studies have investigated transformational, transactional, servant, authentic, and distributed leadership within higher education, most have employed quantitative methodologies examining faculty members, academic administrators, or organizational performance indicators. Comparatively few qualitative investigations have explored leadership from the perspectives of non-teaching personnel, particularly using a phenomenological approach that captures the meaning and essence of their everyday workplace experiences. Furthermore, very limited studies have examined leadership experiences among non-teaching personnel within private higher education institutions in the Philippines, and no published phenomenological investigation was identified focusing specifically on **Northeastern College, Santiago City**.

Addressing this research gap, the present study explores the lived experiences of non-teaching personnel regarding leadership styles practiced at Northeastern College, Santiago City. By examining employees' perceptions of leadership behaviors, workplace interactions, professional growth, organizational commitment, and institutional culture, the study seeks to generate context-specific insights that may contribute to strengthening leadership practices, improving employee engagement, enhancing organizational effectiveness, and supporting sustainable institutional development. Ultimately, the findings will provide empirical evidence that can inform leadership development initiatives for higher education administrators while recognizing the critical contributions of non-teaching personnel to institutional excellence.

Research Gap

The synthesis of contemporary literature reveals several significant gaps that justify the conduct of the present study.

First, existing leadership studies in higher education predominantly focus on faculty members, academic leaders, deans, department chairs, and university executives, with considerably less attention devoted to the lived experiences of non-teaching personnel.

Second, although transformational, servant, participative, and authentic leadership have been widely examined, most investigations employ quantitative approaches that measure leadership effectiveness, organizational commitment, or job satisfaction using standardized surveys, limiting a deeper understanding of employees' subjective experiences.

Third, there remains a scarcity of phenomenological studies that explore how non-teaching personnel personally experience, interpret, and construct meaning regarding leadership styles within higher education institutions.

Finally, no published phenomenological study was identified that specifically investigates the lived experiences of non-teaching personnel at Northeastern College, Santiago City, creating a contextual gap in Philippine higher education leadership research.

The present study addresses these gaps by employing a transcendental phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of non-teaching personnel regarding leadership styles

and by proposing a context-specific leadership framework that may contribute to improved organizational effectiveness and employee development.

Purpose of the Study

The primary purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was to explore and understand the lived experiences of non-teaching personnel regarding leadership styles practiced at Northeastern College, Santiago City. Specifically, the study sought to describe how leadership influences employee motivation, workplace collaboration, professional growth, organizational commitment, and institutional effectiveness. By identifying the essential themes emerging from participants' experiences, the study aimed to develop a Non-Teaching Leadership Development and Empowerment Framework (NTLDEF) that may serve as a practical guide for institutional leaders in strengthening participative, transformational, servant, and empowering leadership practices. Furthermore, the findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of higher education leadership literature by providing empirical evidence from the perspectives of non-teaching personnel an important yet frequently overlooked sector within higher education institutions.

Methodology

This study employed a qualitative research approach utilizing transcendental phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of non-teaching personnel regarding the leadership styles practiced at Northeastern College, Santiago City. A transcendental phenomenological design was considered the most appropriate because it seeks to describe and understand the essence of participants' lived experiences while allowing the researcher to set aside personal assumptions through the process of epoche or bracketing (Moustakas, 1994; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach enabled the researcher to gain a deeper understanding of how non-teaching personnel perceived, experienced, and interpreted leadership behaviors demonstrated by institutional administrators in their everyday workplace interactions. Specifically, the study explored how leadership styles influenced employee motivation, workplace relationships, organizational commitment, communication, professional development, job performance, and institutional effectiveness. By focusing on participants' personal narratives and reflections, the study uncovered the meanings attached to leadership experiences that could not be sufficiently explained through quantitative measures alone.

The study was conducted at Northeastern College, Santiago City, a private higher education institution in Santiago City, Isabela, recognized for its commitment to quality instruction, community engagement, and holistic institutional development. The institution provides diverse academic programs supported by administrative offices and student service units where non-teaching personnel perform essential operational functions. These administrative employees are responsible for maintaining efficient institutional services, supporting academic operations, coordinating organizational processes, and ensuring effective service delivery to students, faculty members, parents, and external stakeholders. As non-teaching personnel work closely with institutional leaders on a daily basis, the college provided an appropriate setting for examining employees' lived experiences concerning leadership styles within a higher education environment.

The participants consisted of twelve (12) purposively selected non-teaching personnel representing various administrative and support service offices of Northeastern College. These included employees from the registrar's office, accounting office, human resource office, guidance office, library, information technology unit, admissions office, cashier's office, student affairs office, and other administrative support units. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) permanent or regular employment status; (2) at least three years of continuous service at Northeastern College; (3) direct and consistent interaction with institutional administrators or immediate supervisors; and (4) willingness to voluntarily participate in the study. Purposive sampling was employed because it enabled the selection of information-rich participants who possessed extensive firsthand experiences regarding leadership practices within the institution. Participant recruitment continued until **data saturation** was achieved, wherein no new themes or significant insights emerged from succeeding interviews (Saunders et al., 2018).

Data were gathered using a researcher-developed semi-structured interview guide consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed descriptions of participants' experiences with leadership styles practiced by institutional administrators. The interview questions focused on leadership behaviors, workplace communication, employee motivation, collaboration, organizational commitment, professional growth opportunities, workplace challenges, decision-making processes, conflict resolution, and recommendations for strengthening institutional leadership. Prior to the actual conduct of the interviews, the interview guide underwent **content validation** by experts in educational leadership, higher education administration, qualitative research, and organizational management to establish clarity, relevance, coherence, and alignment with the research objectives. Suggestions from the validators were incorporated into the final interview protocol. A pilot interview involving non-teaching personnel from another private higher education institution was likewise conducted to evaluate the comprehensibility of the interview questions, identify ambiguous statements, and estimate the duration of each interview session.

Before the commencement of data collection, formal approval was secured from the Office of the College President and the appropriate institutional authorities of Northeastern College. Participants were personally invited to participate in the study and were provided with an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the research, voluntary nature of participation, interview procedures, confidentiality measures, potential risks, expected benefits, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews lasting approximately 45 to 60 minutes were conducted in private offices or designated meeting rooms within the institution to ensure participant comfort, privacy, and minimal interruption. With participants' consent, all interviews were audio-recorded to preserve the accuracy of responses, while field notes were simultaneously documented to capture participants' non-verbal behaviors, emotional expressions, contextual observations, and researcher reflections that complemented the interview narratives.

Following each interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve the authenticity and richness of participants' experiences. The researcher carefully reviewed each transcript multiple times while comparing them with the original recordings to ensure transcription accuracy. To strengthen the credibility of the findings, member checking was

conducted by allowing participants to review their interview transcripts and verify the accuracy of the recorded information. Participants were also given opportunities to clarify, revise, or elaborate on their responses whenever necessary. The verified transcripts subsequently served as the primary source of qualitative data for phenomenological analysis.

The collected data were analyzed using Colaizzi's Seven-Step Phenomenological Method (Colaizzi, 1978), a systematic analytical procedure widely used in phenomenological research. The researcher initially immersed in the interview transcripts through repeated reading to gain a holistic understanding of participants' experiences. Significant statements directly related to leadership experiences were then extracted and carefully examined. Meanings were subsequently formulated from these significant statements and clustered into categories reflecting similar concepts. The clustered meanings were synthesized into overarching themes that represented the essential structures of participants' lived experiences regarding leadership styles. Comprehensive textual descriptions were then developed to explain each emergent theme, followed by the formulation of an exhaustive description capturing the fundamental essence of the phenomenon. Finally, the findings were returned to the participants for validation to ensure that the thematic interpretations accurately reflected their lived experiences.

To establish the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher adhered to the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), namely credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Credibility was strengthened through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation of interview transcripts and field notes, and continuous immersion in the data throughout the analytical process. Transferability was achieved by providing rich and detailed descriptions of the research setting, participants, leadership contexts, and organizational environment, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the findings to similar higher education institutions. Dependability was ensured through a comprehensive audit trail documenting every phase of the research process, including participant recruitment, interview procedures, transcription, coding, theme development, and data interpretation. Confirmability was established through reflexive journaling, maintenance of audit records, participant validation, and continuous bracketing of researcher assumptions to ensure that the findings emerged directly from participants' lived experiences rather than the researcher's personal biases.

Ethical principles were strictly observed throughout the conduct of the study. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were informed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any stage without negative consequences. Confidentiality and anonymity were safeguarded by assigning participant codes and pseudonyms in place of actual names, offices, or personally identifiable information. All interview recordings, transcripts, field notes, consent forms, and electronic research files were securely stored in password-protected digital storage devices accessible only to the researcher. The study likewise complied with the ethical principles outlined in the Philippine National Ethical Guidelines for Health and Health-Related Research (2022) by upholding the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, confidentiality, and respect for participants' dignity and professional integrity throughout every stage of the research process.

Results and Discussion

The transcendental phenomenological analysis of the interview transcripts revealed that leadership extends far beyond directing daily administrative operations within Northeastern College. For the participants, leadership is reflected in the manner institutional leaders communicate organizational goals, recognize employees' contributions, empower staff members, resolve workplace concerns, and cultivate a culture of collaboration, trust, and professional growth. The lived experiences of non-teaching personnel demonstrated that leadership styles directly shape employees' attitudes toward work, organizational commitment, interpersonal relationships, motivation, and overall job satisfaction. Participants consistently described effective leaders as individuals who inspire confidence, encourage participation, provide emotional and professional support, and create an organizational environment where every employee feels respected and valued regardless of position.

The participants likewise emphasized that leadership significantly influences institutional effectiveness because non-teaching personnel serve as the operational backbone of the college. Administrative employees interact daily with students, faculty members, parents, alumni, and external stakeholders; consequently, the quality of leadership experienced by employees affects not only their individual performance but also the efficiency of institutional services. Participants shared that supportive leadership encourages initiative, accountability, innovation, and teamwork, whereas ineffective leadership often results in communication gaps, reduced motivation, uncertainty, and decreased workplace morale. Despite encountering organizational challenges, participants appreciated leaders who remained approachable, transparent, empathetic, and committed to employee development.

Theme 1. Inspiring Organizational Commitment through Transformational Leadership

The first and most dominant theme revealed that transformational leadership significantly strengthens organizational commitment among non-teaching personnel by inspiring employees to embrace the institution's vision, mission, and long-term goals. Participants consistently described institutional leaders as individuals who motivate employees through encouragement, trust, recognition, and shared purpose rather than relying solely on authority or formal supervision. Employees explained that when leaders communicate clear organizational directions and demonstrate genuine concern for employees' welfare, they become more committed to performing their responsibilities with excellence and integrity. Rather than working merely to complete assigned tasks, participants developed a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility toward the institution because they perceived themselves as valuable contributors to Northeastern College's success.

Participants further explained that transformational leaders consistently communicate optimism and confidence even during periods of institutional change. Through regular meetings, open dialogue, and transparent communication, leaders enabled employees to understand organizational priorities and appreciate the significance of their individual contributions. Participants noted that leaders who articulate clear goals help employees recognize how their daily administrative work contributes to the overall mission of delivering quality education and institutional excellence. This understanding strengthened employees' intrinsic motivation because they viewed their responsibilities as meaningful rather than routine administrative obligations.

One participant shared:

"Our administrators always remind us that every office contributes to the success of the college. Even if we are not teaching in classrooms, they make us feel that our work is equally important in helping students achieve their dreams." (Participant 3)

Another participant explained:

"When our leaders explain the purpose behind every institutional decision, we become more willing to cooperate because we understand that the changes are intended for the improvement of the entire institution." (Participant 7)

Participant 11 similarly reflected:

"Recognition from our administrators motivates us to perform better. A simple appreciation during meetings makes us feel that our hard work is noticed and valued."

Several participants also emphasized that transformational leadership fosters organizational loyalty by creating positive emotional connections between employees and institutional leaders. Leaders who consistently recognize employee achievements, celebrate organizational successes, and encourage innovation inspire personnel to exceed minimum job expectations. Participants observed that appreciation and recognition, regardless of how simple, significantly increased morale and strengthened employees' willingness to contribute beyond their assigned duties.

Moreover, transformational leadership cultivated resilience among non-teaching personnel. During periods of organizational change, policy implementation, accreditation preparation, and increasing workloads, participants expressed greater confidence because institutional leaders maintained open communication, encouraged teamwork, and demonstrated optimism. Employees described these leadership behaviors as sources of reassurance that minimized uncertainty while strengthening trust in institutional leadership.

These findings strongly support Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), which posits that leaders inspire followers through idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Likewise, Northouse (2022) emphasized that transformational leaders strengthen employee commitment by aligning personal aspirations with organizational goals while fostering trust, motivation, and professional growth. Recent higher education studies further indicate that transformational leadership significantly improves organizational commitment, employee engagement, and institutional effectiveness because employees become emotionally invested in achieving shared organizational objectives (Hallinger, 2021). The findings therefore demonstrate that transformational leadership creates an organizational culture where non-teaching personnel become committed partners in achieving institutional excellence rather than merely administrative employees performing assigned responsibilities.

Theme 2. Strengthening Workplace Collaboration through Participative Leadership

The second theme revealed that participative leadership plays a critical role in strengthening workplace collaboration by encouraging employees to actively participate in organizational

decision-making, problem-solving, and institutional planning. Participants consistently described effective leaders as individuals who value employees' ideas, consult staff members before making important decisions, and encourage collaborative discussions regarding workplace improvements. Rather than maintaining rigid hierarchical relationships, institutional leaders cultivated environments where communication flowed openly across different administrative offices, allowing employees to contribute their expertise and practical experiences.

Participants explained that participative leadership increased their confidence because they felt respected as professionals whose opinions mattered. Employees appreciated opportunities to provide suggestions regarding office procedures, student services, workflow improvements, and institutional programs. They emphasized that consultation before decision-making fostered mutual trust because leaders demonstrated confidence in employees' capabilities and acknowledged their frontline experiences in managing daily institutional operations.

One participant shared:

"Whenever new policies are introduced, our supervisors ask for our suggestions first. It makes us feel that we are not simply following instructions but are actually helping improve the institution." (Participant 5)

Another participant stated:

"Collaboration becomes easier because our administrators encourage every office to share ideas. We solve problems together instead of blaming one another whenever challenges arise." (Participant 9)

Participant 2 added:

"Being consulted during meetings gives us confidence because our experiences are considered valuable. It motivates us to participate more actively in institutional activities."

Participants further emphasized that participative leadership strengthened teamwork among administrative offices. Because leaders encouraged interdepartmental communication, employees developed stronger professional relationships characterized by cooperation, mutual assistance, and shared responsibility. Participants observed that collaborative leadership minimized workplace conflicts because employees were encouraged to openly discuss concerns and collectively identify practical solutions. This culture of shared governance enhanced institutional efficiency while fostering stronger interpersonal relationships among employees.

Several participants likewise explained that participative leadership encouraged innovation. Employees became more willing to introduce new ideas, improve administrative procedures, and recommend organizational changes because leaders welcomed constructive suggestions without fear of criticism or rejection. Participants believed that organizational improvements became more sustainable because employees actively participated in implementing the decisions they helped formulate.

These findings align with Likert's Participative Leadership Theory (1967), which emphasizes that employee involvement in organizational decision-making enhances motivation, communication, organizational trust, and productivity. Likewise, Yukl (2020) argued that participative leadership strengthens organizational effectiveness by encouraging collaboration, shared responsibility, and employee empowerment. Recent higher education leadership studies further suggest that

participative leadership contributes to stronger teamwork, innovation, organizational commitment, and employee satisfaction because individuals become active partners in institutional governance rather than passive implementers of administrative directives. Collectively, these findings demonstrate that participative leadership cultivates collaborative organizational cultures where non-teaching personnel actively contribute to institutional effectiveness through shared leadership, open communication, and collective problem-solving.

Theme 3. Building Employee Confidence through Supportive and Servant Leadership

The third theme revealed that supportive and servant leadership significantly contributes to building employee confidence, workplace satisfaction, and professional well-being among non-teaching personnel. Participants consistently described effective institutional leaders as approachable, compassionate, and genuinely concerned with the welfare of their employees. Rather than exercising authority through strict supervision or hierarchical control, these leaders established meaningful interpersonal relationships characterized by empathy, trust, encouragement, and mutual respect. Participants explained that leaders who listen attentively to employees' concerns, acknowledge their personal and professional challenges, and provide timely assistance cultivate a work environment where employees feel psychologically safe, respected, and motivated to perform their responsibilities.

Participants emphasized that servant leadership created an atmosphere where employees felt comfortable expressing ideas, asking questions, admitting mistakes, and seeking guidance without fear of criticism or punishment. They explained that such leadership behaviors strengthened their confidence because they perceived their supervisors as mentors who genuinely desired their personal and professional growth rather than merely evaluating their performance. The participants believed that supportive leadership allowed them to become more independent, responsible, and proactive in accomplishing institutional responsibilities because they knew that guidance and encouragement were always available whenever needed.

One participant shared:

"Whenever I encounter difficulties in my work, my supervisor patiently listens and helps me find solutions instead of blaming me. That kind of leadership gives me confidence because I know I am supported while learning." (Participant 4)

Another participant explained:

"Our administrators always encourage us to improve ourselves. They allow us to attend seminars and training programs because they believe our professional growth benefits the entire institution." (Participant 10)

Participant 1 likewise reflected:

"What I appreciate most is that our leaders know us personally. They understand that employees also experience personal challenges, and they always show compassion without compromising professionalism."

Participants further explained that servant leadership strengthened emotional well-being by reducing workplace anxiety and stress. They described leaders who regularly checked on employees' welfare, recognized emotional concerns, and provided encouragement during difficult situations as individuals who created healthier organizational climates. Such leadership

behaviors enhanced employees' sense of belonging because they felt valued not only for their productivity but also as individuals deserving dignity, respect, and compassion.

Several participants also emphasized that supportive leadership increased employee self-confidence by recognizing individual accomplishments and providing constructive feedback. Rather than focusing solely on mistakes or deficiencies, leaders highlighted employees' strengths and encouraged continuous improvement. Participants explained that constructive feedback motivated them to develop new competencies while maintaining confidence in their professional capabilities. Recognition, even through simple verbal appreciation, inspired employees to perform beyond minimum expectations and strengthened their commitment to institutional excellence.

Moreover, servant leadership cultivated trust between employees and institutional leaders. Participants explained that leaders who demonstrated integrity, fairness, consistency, humility, and transparency gained employees' confidence because decisions were perceived as ethical and employee-centered. Trust encouraged open communication, minimized workplace misunderstandings, and strengthened organizational harmony. Employees became more willing to cooperate, collaborate, and support institutional initiatives because they trusted the intentions and decisions of their leaders.

These findings strongly support Greenleaf's Servant Leadership Theory (1977), which proposes that authentic leaders prioritize serving others by promoting employee growth, well-being, empowerment, and ethical leadership. Likewise, **Eva et al. (2019)** emphasized that servant leadership strengthens organizational trust, employee engagement, and psychological safety because leaders focus on developing employees as individuals rather than merely directing organizational performance. Furthermore, **Northouse (2022)** argued that supportive leadership contributes significantly to employee satisfaction, organizational commitment, and workplace resilience through empathy, listening, stewardship, and individualized support. Consistent with these perspectives, the findings indicate that servant leadership enhances employees' confidence, motivation, and organizational commitment by creating supportive workplace environments where professional development and employee well-being are equally valued.

Theme 4. Overcoming Workplace Challenges through Adaptive Leadership Practices

The fourth theme illustrates that adaptive leadership enables institutional leaders and non-teaching personnel to respond effectively to organizational challenges, changing institutional demands, and complex workplace situations. Participants acknowledged that higher education institutions continuously experience changes brought about by technological innovations, accreditation requirements, policy revisions, enrollment fluctuations, digital transformation, and increasing expectations from students and stakeholders. These evolving conditions often create uncertainties that require leaders to remain flexible, responsive, and innovative in guiding employees through organizational transitions.

Participants explained that adaptive leaders effectively managed change by maintaining open communication, encouraging teamwork, and involving employees in solving organizational problems. Rather than imposing immediate decisions without consultation, leaders explained the reasons behind institutional changes, clarified employees' responsibilities, and encouraged collaborative discussions that minimized resistance and uncertainty. Participants appreciated

leaders who remained calm, optimistic, and solution-oriented during challenging situations because these behaviors inspired employees to approach difficulties with confidence rather than fear.

One participant explained:

"Whenever new systems are introduced, our administrators patiently orient us before implementation. They understand that change is difficult, so they guide us step by step until we become comfortable with the new procedures." (Participant 8)

Participant 6 shared:

"There were times when our office experienced heavy workloads because of accreditation and enrollment. Instead of simply assigning more tasks, our leaders worked with us, listened to our concerns, and helped distribute responsibilities fairly."

Participant 12 remarked:

"Our leaders always encourage us to focus on solutions rather than problems. They remind us that every challenge is an opportunity to improve the services we provide."

Participants further emphasized that adaptive leadership encouraged creativity and innovation in administrative work. Institutional leaders motivated employees to identify more efficient office procedures, utilize available technologies, improve communication systems, and recommend practical solutions to recurring workplace problems. Employees explained that adaptive leaders welcomed innovative ideas regardless of employees' positions, creating an organizational culture where continuous improvement became everyone's responsibility.

Several participants also observed that adaptive leadership strengthened resilience during periods of organizational uncertainty. Leaders who maintained optimism, transparency, and emotional stability minimized employee stress while encouraging collective problem-solving. Participants believed that resilience became a shared organizational value because leaders consistently modeled positive attitudes and encouraged employees to learn from challenges rather than become discouraged by them.

Furthermore, adaptive leadership promoted continuous organizational learning. Employees explained that institutional leaders encouraged participation in professional development programs, technology training, and capacity-building initiatives that prepared personnel for changing workplace demands. This proactive approach enabled non-teaching personnel to develop new competencies while increasing organizational readiness for future institutional challenges.

The findings align with Adaptive Leadership Theory developed by Heifetz, Grashow, and Linsky (2009), which emphasizes that effective leaders guide organizations through complex challenges by promoting flexibility, collaboration, learning, and shared problem-solving. Likewise, Hallinger (2021) argued that educational leaders must continuously adapt leadership practices to respond to evolving institutional environments while maintaining employee engagement and organizational effectiveness. Recent higher education studies likewise indicate that adaptive

leadership strengthens organizational resilience because leaders empower employees to become active participants in navigating institutional change rather than passive recipients of administrative decisions. Collectively, the findings demonstrate that adaptive leadership enables non-teaching personnel to overcome workplace challenges while fostering innovation, resilience, and continuous organizational improvement.

These findings strongly support Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994), which emphasizes inspiring employees toward higher levels of achievement through vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized development. They likewise align with Leader–Member Exchange (LMX) Theory (Graen & Uhl-Bien, 1995), which explains that high-quality relationships between leaders and employees foster trust, empowerment, professional growth, and organizational commitment. Furthermore, Day et al. (2021) argued that leadership development is fundamentally centered on empowering individuals through mentoring, coaching, reflective practice, and continuous professional learning. Consistent with these perspectives, the findings demonstrate that visionary and empowering leadership enables non-teaching personnel to become confident, competent, innovative, and committed professionals who actively contribute to the continuous growth and long-term success of Northeastern College. Collectively, the five emergent themes illustrate that effective leadership extends beyond administrative authority; it is fundamentally a transformative process that nurtures people, strengthens relationships, empowers employees, and builds organizational cultures capable of sustaining excellence in higher education.

Conclusion

This transcendental phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of non-teaching personnel regarding the leadership styles practiced at Northeastern College, Santiago City. The findings revealed that leadership extends far beyond administrative supervision and organizational control; rather, it is fundamentally a relational and transformative process that shapes employees' motivation, professional growth, workplace relationships, organizational commitment, and institutional effectiveness. Participants consistently perceived effective leadership as one that inspires trust, promotes collaboration, empowers employees, demonstrates empathy, and provides opportunities for continuous professional development. Their narratives further revealed that leadership styles significantly influence employees' willingness to contribute meaningfully to institutional goals and sustain quality service delivery within the college.

The first emergent theme, Inspiring Organizational Commitment through Transformational Leadership, demonstrated that transformational leadership cultivates a strong sense of loyalty, responsibility, and ownership among non-teaching personnel. Institutional leaders motivated employees by communicating a clear organizational vision, recognizing individual and collective accomplishments, encouraging innovation, and promoting shared institutional values. Participants emphasized that they became more committed to their work because they understood how their administrative functions contributed to the realization of Northeastern College's educational mission. The findings indicate that transformational leadership strengthens employees' intrinsic motivation by fostering a workplace culture characterized by inspiration, trust, optimism, and shared purpose.

The second theme, Strengthening Workplace Collaboration through Participative Leadership, revealed that participative leadership significantly enhances teamwork, communication, and organizational cooperation. Participants appreciated leaders who consulted employees before making institutional decisions, encouraged collaborative discussions, and valued employees' ideas regardless of organizational position. Such leadership behaviors promoted mutual respect, strengthened interdepartmental relationships, minimized workplace conflicts, and encouraged collective responsibility for organizational success. The findings demonstrate that participative leadership transforms employees from passive implementers of administrative directives into active partners in institutional governance and continuous improvement.

The third theme, Building Employee Confidence through Supportive and Servant Leadership, highlighted the importance of leaders who prioritize employee well-being, provide emotional support, and encourage professional growth. Participants consistently described supportive leaders as approachable mentors who demonstrated empathy, fairness, humility, and genuine concern for employees' personal and professional development. These leadership behaviors enhanced employees' confidence, reduced workplace anxiety, strengthened psychological safety, and cultivated organizational trust. Consequently, employees became more motivated to assume responsibilities, develop new competencies, and contribute positively to institutional effectiveness.

The fourth theme, Overcoming Workplace Challenges through Adaptive Leadership Practices, emphasized that adaptive leadership enables institutions to respond effectively to organizational change, technological advancement, policy reforms, and operational challenges. Participants explained that adaptive leaders communicated institutional changes transparently, involved employees in problem-solving, promoted innovation, and encouraged collaborative decision-making during periods of uncertainty. These leadership practices strengthened organizational resilience, improved workplace flexibility, and empowered employees to develop creative solutions to emerging institutional concerns. The findings underscore the importance of adaptive leadership in sustaining organizational stability within dynamic higher education environments.

The fifth theme, Sustaining Professional Growth through Visionary and Empowering Leadership, demonstrated that visionary leadership significantly contributes to employees' continuous learning, career advancement, and organizational commitment. Participants appreciated leaders who invested in professional development through mentoring, coaching, seminars, leadership training, graduate education, and continuous capability-building. Employees became more confident, innovative, and proactive because leaders trusted their capabilities, delegated meaningful responsibilities, and encouraged lifelong learning. The findings indicate that visionary leadership develops highly competent administrative personnel capable of supporting institutional excellence and future organizational sustainability.

The study concludes that effective leadership among higher education administrators is characterized by transformational, participative, servant, adaptive, and empowering leadership practices that collectively strengthen employee engagement, workplace collaboration, organizational commitment, and institutional effectiveness. The lived experiences of non-teaching personnel demonstrate that leadership is most effective when leaders prioritize people, encourage shared decision-making, promote professional growth, and create supportive

organizational cultures grounded in trust, respect, transparency, and continuous improvement. These findings strongly affirm the principles of Transformational Leadership Theory, Servant Leadership Theory, Participative Leadership Theory, Leader–Member Exchange Theory, and Adaptive Leadership Theory, emphasizing that sustainable institutional success is achieved through leadership that develops both organizational systems and human potential.

Educational Implications

The findings of this study provide important implications for higher education leadership, organizational development, and human resource management. First, institutional administrators should continuously cultivate transformational, participative, servant, and adaptive leadership behaviors that strengthen employee motivation, organizational trust, and collaborative workplace relationships. Second, higher education institutions should establish comprehensive leadership development programs that emphasize communication, emotional intelligence, ethical leadership, conflict management, mentoring, and employee empowerment to improve administrative effectiveness. Third, human resource offices should strengthen employee development initiatives by providing regular leadership training, coaching, career advancement opportunities, and continuing professional education for non-teaching personnel. Fourth, institutional leaders should promote participatory governance by involving non-teaching personnel in organizational planning, policy formulation, and institutional decision-making processes to enhance organizational ownership and accountability. Finally, private higher education institutions should integrate employee wellness, organizational support systems, and leadership succession planning into institutional development programs to ensure long-term organizational sustainability and service excellence.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. Institutional Administrators should continuously practice transformational, participative, servant, and adaptive leadership by strengthening communication, employee recognition, shared decision-making, mentoring, and organizational transparency to improve employee engagement and institutional effectiveness.

2. Human Resource Management Offices should develop structured leadership development programs for administrators and supervisors focusing on emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, employee motivation, coaching, mentoring, organizational communication, and ethical leadership.

3. Non-Teaching Personnel should actively participate in professional development programs, leadership seminars, institutional committees, and organizational planning activities to strengthen leadership competencies, workplace collaboration, and administrative excellence.

4. Higher Education Institutions should institutionalize regular employee feedback mechanisms, leadership assessment systems, workplace climate surveys, and participatory governance structures to continuously improve leadership effectiveness and organizational culture.

5. Future Researchers should conduct comparative phenomenological, mixed-methods, or longitudinal studies involving multiple higher education institutions to further examine

leadership styles, organizational commitment, employee well-being, workplace engagement, succession planning, and administrative effectiveness among non-teaching personnel.

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