

# “CHANGE NAMAN”: THE TALES OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS IN CHANGE MANAGEMENT

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## ABSTRACT

*Change in schools is inevitable yet frequently met with resistance. School leaders are often tasked with balancing long-standing traditions and the need for innovation, where their capacity to shape organizational culture determines whether change leads to progress or tension. Effective change management requires more than enforcing compliance; it involves cultivating a culture that supports innovation while honoring core values. This study explored the lived experiences of school administrators in managing change using transcendental phenomenology. Conducted in the municipality of Tboli, South Cotabato, the study involved elementary and secondary public-school administrators and employed thematic analysis. Five emergent themes described administrators' experiences navigating change: managing contextual challenges and transitions; promoting quality education and resourcefulness; empowering teachers and building capacity; collaborative, trust-based leadership; and managing resistance and facilitating change. Ten additional themes explained the context of these experiences, including foundations of leadership identity, leadership development and growth, impact on relationships, coping strategies, challenges in leading change, resource and administrative demands, emotional and bodily responses, commitment to institutional success, and sources of joy and fulfillment. Administrators' future self-perceptions as change managers were reflected in three themes: becoming adaptive leaders, people-centered and empowered leaders, and goal and vision-oriented leaders. The study recommends strengthening adaptive and people-centered leadership practices, providing targeted capacity-building in change management, fostering teacher participation in reform initiatives, and pursuing future research on coping and relational strategies in resource-constrained, multicultural school environments.*

**Keyword:** *change management, school leadership, resistance to change, phenomenology, school administrators*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In every school, change is inevitable yet often resisted. Leaders must balance preserving traditions with embracing transformation, where their ability to shape organizational culture determines whether reforms drive progress or deepen division. Managing resistance goes beyond enforcing compliance; it requires fostering a culture that encourages innovation while upholding core values, an often-overlooked dimension of effective school leadership. Globally, change initiatives, whether through policy reforms, technology adoption, or organizational restructuring, often face resistance from individuals accustomed to established routines [24]. Such resistance is a natural human response driven by uncertainty, fear of loss, and disruption of norms [12]. Schools are no exception; efforts to improve learning and efficiency often encounter pushback.

In the Philippines, the challenge of educational reform is shaped by cultural, social, and systemic factors. Frequent changes in policies and programs by the Department of Education; such as the K-12 curriculum, the shift to blended and online learning modalities, and ongoing curriculum adjustments, have created a dynamic but often unstable environment for schools [5]. While these reforms aim to improve learning outcomes, they also generate both resilience and resistance among educators. Teachers, in particular, face persistent obstacles including limited resources, inadequate training, and entrenched instructional practices, which contribute to reluctance toward new pedagogies, hesitation in adopting educational technologies, and adherence to hierarchical norms that can impede

transformative change [23]. These frequent policy shifts place additional demands on school administrators, requiring them to adapt quickly, interpret changing directives, and support teachers and learners through ongoing transitions. Effective change management in this context is not solely procedural but deeply relational, requiring administrators to balance organizational goals with the emotional, professional, and cultural needs of their staff.

In Mindanao, where schools are staffed by culturally and linguistically diverse teachers, managing resistance to change presents a particularly complex leadership challenge. Teachers from indigenous, migrant, and various ethnolinguistic backgrounds bring with them deeply rooted values, beliefs, and social norms that shape how they perceive and respond to educational reforms. While some view change as an opportunity for professional growth and institutional improvement, others perceive it as a threat to established cultural practices and community traditions [18][30]. In Tboli, South Cotabato, this complexity is further intensified by the practice of discretionary reshuffling among school administrators in rural schools. This system exposes administrators to continuous organizational change as they are reassigned from one school to another, requiring repeated adjustment to new institutional cultures, teaching staff, and community dynamics. As a result, administrators frequently encounter varying forms of resistance to change, shaped by the diverse cultural orientations of teachers and stakeholders. Teachers with a collectivist orientation may resist reforms perceived to disrupt group harmony, shared traditions, or long-standing practices, while reform-oriented colleagues who advocate innovation may experience resistance from peers who prioritize stability and continuity. These differing responses underscore the need for culturally responsive leadership and adaptive change management strategies that acknowledge diversity while fostering shared commitment to school improvement.

The lack of systematic research on how administrators experience and manage these continuous policy and program changes limits the ability to design targeted interventions, professional development, and support systems that can enhance school effectiveness and learner outcomes. Moreover, while research on educational change management has grown, limited attention has been given to how school administrators manage resistance in multicultural, resource-constrained basic education settings. Most studies emphasize corporate or higher education contexts, overlooking the unique interplay of cultural diversity, community expectations, and systemic limitations in elementary and secondary schools.

This study explored the lived experiences of school administrators in the context of change management. It sought to understand how leaders shape organizational culture, balance policy mandates with local realities, and promote the acceptance of reform among teachers and staff. The study ultimately generated insights into the cultural and contextual dimensions of educational leadership, providing contributions to both theory and practice through context-sensitive approaches that support sustainable school development.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the lived experiences of school administrators in change management?
2. How do school administrators describe the context of their experiences?
3. How do school administrators view themselves in the future?

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Research Design**

This study employed transcendental phenomenology as advanced by Moustakas, which is concerned with uncovering the essence and significance of lived experiences [28] by setting aside preconceived notions and focusing on participants' descriptions of their reality. Transcendental phenomenology is concerned with describing the essence of a phenomenon as experienced by individuals, achieved through intentional reflection and the systematic setting aside of the researcher's preconceived assumptions, a process known as epoché or bracketing. The central aim of this design is not to explain or theorize causality but to arrive at a rich description of the universal meanings embedded in lived experiences. This approach is appropriate for the present study because it allows for an in-depth exploration of how school administrators experience and make meaning of their experiences on change management within their specific cultural and organizational contexts.

### **2.2 Participants and Sampling Technique**

The participants consisted of six (6) public school administrators from elementary and secondary schools in Tboli, South Cotabato, including head teachers and Teachers-in-Charge. These administrators were selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria: (1) they had at least five (5) years of leadership experience, and (2) they had direct responsibility for implementing reforms and managing resistance among teachers and staff. This sampling strategy ensured that participants possessed sustained and reflective engagement with the phenomenon under investigation, consistent with phenomenological research standards.

### 2.3 Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview guide explicitly designed in alignment with Moustakas's phenomenological framework. The interview questions were open-ended and descriptive, encouraging participants to recount concrete experiences, feelings, and reflections related to change management. Questions focused on how they described their experiences, what contextual factors have shaped their experiences, and how these experiences influenced their future self-perception as a change manager. Probing questions were used to deepen descriptions and clarify meanings, supporting the phenomenological objective of uncovering the essence of experience.

### 2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

First, the researcher secured permission from the Graduate School of Sultan Kudarat State University and authorization from the Department of Education to ensure that the study aligns with institutional and ethical standards. After approval, participants were purposefully selected based on their direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation, as this enables the generation of rich, meaningful, and detailed accounts [20].

Before data collection began, participants were provided with clear and comprehensive information regarding the study's objectives, procedures, and potential risks. They were asked to provide voluntary, informed consent, thereby reinforcing the ethical integrity of the research. The researcher proceeded with individual face-to-face interviews; which allowed participants to articulate their experiences in their own words while providing the researcher with the flexibility to probe emerging insights.

Following each interview, audio recordings were transcribed verbatim to preserve participants' authentic voices and expressions [7]. The transcripts were then undergoing a systematic process of phenomenological analysis, focusing on identifying shared themes and patterns that illuminate the essence of the lived experience.

### 2.5 Data Analysis Procedure

In conducting the data analysis, the researcher used thematic analysis anchored on Braun and Clarke. Thematic analysis emphasizes the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within the data. It organized and detailed all the data. The process of thematic analysis covered six steps.

First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts to become deeply acquainted with the content and to notice emerging patterns. Transcribing verbal accounts completes the data collection process by converting them into written form.

Second, the researcher generated initial codes by identifying where and how patterns appear. Third, the researcher identified themes by grouping related codes into overarching themes that accurately represent the data. Even when specific themes do not appear to fit neatly, they are examined for their relevance. The researcher identified gaps or missing elements in the data. Fourth, during the review of themes, the researcher examined how each theme aligns with the data and the broader theoretical framework. If the analysis appears incomplete, the researcher revisits the data to refine or add necessary information.

Fifth, the researcher then defined and named each theme, clearly explaining what each represents, which aspects of the data it captures, and what makes each theme significant. Lastly, the researcher produced the report by selecting themes that provide meaningful insights into the data. Member checking was conducted, in which the researcher returned to participants to confirm whether the descriptions and interpretations accurately reflected their experiences.

### 2.6 Ethical Considerations

A permission letter from the researcher, duly noted by the research adviser, was obtained before the commencement of the study. Participants were prompted to submit a signed consent form or waiver before data collection began. To ensure privacy, aliases were used for all participants.

Participants were also informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time and may skip any questions that make them feel uncomfortable. The study was designed and conducted in accordance with the ethical principles established by SKSU. The researcher, built trust with the participants by ensuring anonymity and confidentiality in accordance with the law.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 The Lived Experiences of School Administrators in Change Management

Five (5) textural themes were identified, capturing the administrators' lived experiences of managing change as directly expressed in their narratives. These themes were derived through a systematic process of analyzing initial codes and clustering related patterns, reflecting the authentic "what" of the phenomenon from the participants' perspectives.

### Managing Contextual Challenges and Transitions

This textural theme captures their firsthand accounts of being transferred between schools, responding to policy shifts, and addressing immediate situational demands. Administrators described experiencing uncertainty, working with limited resources, and facing evolving expectations while implementing required changes. They recounted encountering pressure to adapt quickly, managing competing responsibilities, and making leadership decisions in unfamiliar or changing contexts. These descriptions reflect the concrete events, situations, and conditions that constituted the administrators' lived experience of managing change, as expressed directly in their narratives. These ideas are reflected in the participants' statements, as they expressed:

*"When you transfer from one school to another... there are some changes that we are going to conduct if there are reasons to change." [P1]*

*"As a school head in a far-flung area, kailangan po natin i-deliver iyong quality education... especially na may problema kami sa financial... pero gagawa talaga tayo ng paraan." [P2]*

Emotional intelligence, culturally responsive leadership, and strategic adaptability as essential competencies for school leaders navigating change [2]. These competencies were not merely articulated as leadership attributes but were enacted through administrators' day-to-day responses to resistance, uncertainty, and contextual constraints. Administrators demonstrated emotional intelligence by regulating their own emotions and responding empathetically to teachers' concerns, while culturally responsive leadership was reflected in their sensitivity to diverse values, beliefs, and school contexts during change implementation. Furthermore, their capacity to modify leadership approaches in response to evolving challenges underscores strategic adaptability as a lived and practiced competence. This finding is further supported by Adaptive Leadership Theory, which emphasizes leaders' ability to adjust strategies when confronted with complex, non-routine problems. The administrators' strategic flexibility exemplifies adaptive leadership in practice, enabling them to navigate resistance constructively, sustain collaboration, and lead effectively amid uncertainty.

### Promoting Quality Education and Resourcefulness

This theme described administrators' experiences in sustaining commitment to maintain learning standards despite shortages in resources and funding. In their narratives, they recounted engaging in creative practices, problem-solving activities, and improvised strategies to address learners' needs. Participants described working within persistent challenges while continuing to prioritize instructional quality and learner outcomes. Their accounts reflect experiences of making do with available resources, adjusting plans to fit existing conditions, and continuing instructional initiatives despite constraints. These descriptions capture the concrete actions and situations that constituted the administrators' lived experience of promoting quality education, as expressed directly in their narratives. As the participants described:

*"As a school head... we will find ways to provide the needs of learners in school." [P2]*

*"Instead of imposing change, I listened... involved them in the process, and gradually turned resistance into cooperation." [P5]*

Successful change management requires organizational conditions; like team collaboration and adaptive learning environments, that enable continuous improvement rather than one-time structural reforms [1]. Administrators described resourcefulness as a necessary response to contextual challenges, particularly when implementing new curriculum requirements or digital learning systems with scarce resources. Moreover, professional identity evolves through engagement with challenges; an insight reflected in the administrators' narratives [13].

### Empowering Teachers and Building Capacity

This theme describes administrators' experiences of mentoring teachers, involving them in decision-making processes, and facilitating professional development activities. In their narratives, they recounted providing guidance, encouragement, and opportunities for skill development as part of their leadership practice. Participants described engaging teachers in planning and implementation efforts and addressing teachers' concerns during periods of change. Their accounts reflect experiences of working closely with teachers to strengthen competence, confidence, and participation in school initiatives. These descriptions capture the specific actions, interactions, and

situations that constituted the administrators' lived experience of supporting teachers during change, as expressed directly in their narratives. The participants shared that:

*"For me, as a...school manager... provide ko yung mga pangangailangan nila sa school." [P3]*

*"...I listened to teachers' ideas. Involve them in the process... That experience showed me that leadership is about trust, empathy, and collaboration..." [P5]*

Cultural Dimension Theory highlights that individualist tendencies within certain teachers or administrators may manifest as personal hesitancy or resistance toward organizational reforms [11]. Participants' narratives illustrate how these individualist orientations shape responses to change, creating variability in engagement and decision-making. The distinction between collective and individual responses underscores the influence of cultural values on the lived experience of school leadership, demonstrating that administrators must navigate not only procedural and structural challenges but also culturally shaped attitudes toward collaboration, compliance, and innovation.

### **Collaborative and Trust-Based Leadership**

This theme describes administrators experience as engaging in dialogue, building trust, and involving others in shared decision-making processes. In their narratives, they recounted holding discussions, listening to differing perspectives, and working jointly with teachers to address concerns related to change initiatives. Administrators described experiencing cooperation and reduced resistance when trust and open communication were present. Their accounts reflect concrete interactions, conversations, and collaborative practices that formed part of their everyday leadership experiences during periods of change. These descriptions capture the relational events and situations that constituted the administrators' lived experience of collaborative leadership, as expressed directly in their narratives. As expressed by the participants:

*"That experience showed me that leadership is about trust, empathy, and collaboration, not authority. It also taught me that meaningful change begins with understanding people and inspiring them to believe in what's possible." [P5]*

*"One defining moment was leading a team through a major organizational restructuring, where I have to balance empathy with decisive action to keep morale strong. It stands out because I witnessed firsthand how transparent communication and trust can transform resistance into collaboration." [P6]*

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension Theory stressed that trust grows when leaders honor collectivist traditions such as "pakikipagkapwa" and consensus-building, which are deeply rooted in Filipino workplace culture [11]. As they cultivate collaborative relationships and relational trust, they redefine their identity from being procedural managers to becoming community builders and cultural mediators. This is consistent on Leader-Member Exchange (LMX) theory highlighting that relational trust transforms leaders into facilitators of community and cultural mediation [6].

### **Managing Resistance and Facilitating Change**

This theme describes administrators experiences encountering opposition, hesitation, or reluctance toward change initiatives. Participants described experiences of addressing teachers' concerns, responding to resistance, and guiding teachers through change processes. In their narratives, administrators recounted instances of applying firmness in enforcing required changes while also showing understanding and responsiveness to teachers' reactions. They described engaging in conversations, clarifying expectations, and adjusting approaches as they worked toward acceptance of change. These accounts reflect the concrete situations, interactions, and leadership actions that constituted the administrators' lived experience of managing resistance during change efforts, as expressed directly in their narratives. The participants described that:

*"As a change manager like in personal life and in the school. For instance that, if the school is, kung ang [if the] school na [that], when you transfer from, another school, from school to another school, if the situation on the part of your school to be assumed on duty. So, there are some changes that we are going to conduct. If there are some reasons to change." [P1]*

*"I guess for me, when I...When I see my course teachers and in terms of management, it's their own full potential. And of course, when I push them to their limits in order for them to... to be the best person that they're going to be in the future in line with the teaching and learning process." [P4]*

Resistance should not be construed merely as an obstacle to reform but as an integral and informative component of the change process, signaling underlying concerns, uncertainties, and unmet needs among stakeholders. Rather than impeding progress, resistance offers school leaders a critical opportunity to listen attentively, reflect, and adapt leadership strategies in ways that are responsive to contextual realities [8]. When approached constructively, resistance becomes a diagnostic lens through which administrators can better understand the emotional, cultural, and professional dimensions of change.

Moreover, teachers' resistance often reflects deeper contextual issues, such as fears of incompetence, loss of professional identity, increased workload, or misalignment between reform initiatives and classroom realities. These concerns cannot be resolved through technical directives alone; instead, they require leadership approaches grounded in relational trust, open dialogue, and shared meaning-making [17]. Administrators who engage teachers through honest communication, participatory decision-making, and empathy are better positioned to transform resistance into collaboration.

### **3.2 The Description of the Context of School Administrators' Lived Experiences in Change Management**

Ten (10) structural themes emerged, illustrating how the administrators' experiences unfolded within the broader contextual, cultural, emotional, and organizational environments that shaped their practice of change management. These themes were derived through a systematic process of coding, clustering, and analyzing patterns across participants' narratives, capturing the essential structures that frame, constrain, and enable leadership actions and decisions. Collectively, they reflect the authentic conditions and relational dynamics in which administrators navigated resistance, promoted teacher development, and implemented reforms.

#### **Foundations of Leadership Identity**

This theme describes the structural conditions through which administrators experienced managing change, specifically through an evolving sense of leadership identity shaped by ongoing interactions with supervisors, teachers, and learners within the school context. Administrators described experiencing leadership as filtered through their developing self-conception as school leaders, which influenced how responsibilities were understood, challenges were approached, and professional growth was pursued. In their narratives, participants described how decisions, priorities, and teacher support initiatives were enacted within this evolving leadership identity. They recounted experiences of navigating change and addressing resistance while simultaneously balancing organizational demands with concern for the well-being and professional development of teachers and learners. These descriptions illuminate how administrators' leadership experiences unfolded within a relational and contextual process in which identity development formed the structural foundation for how leadership was exercised and sustained. As described by the participants:

*"Well, of course, the people who are typically connected to me as a school leader is my superior and almost giving me a challenge to... to have the improvement of the school so that I can manage in a very nice way to improve the school. The person behind this is our supervisor." [P1]*

*"I think it's the teachers and learners. They are the people na naging connected for me. Tsaka sila po yung mga nag-gabay sa akin kung paano ko po ma-foresee at matanaw ko na ano po ang gagawin po sa paaralan para bilang lider magtagumpay ito." [P3]*

Leadership identities are shaped by the normative pressures, expectations, and cultural norms inherent in different professional contexts [9]. This indicates that administrators' perceptions of leadership are not formed in isolation but are deeply contextualized, with their experiences, interactions, and environmental demands playing a critical role in the development and expression of their leadership identity.

#### **Impact on Relationships and Others**

This theme describes the structural aspects of administrators' experiences of leadership during change, specifically within relational environments marked by trust, collaboration, and mutual influence. Administrators described experiencing leadership through ongoing interactions with teachers and other school stakeholders, in which

dialogue, shared decision-making, and collective engagement shaped their responses to change initiatives. In their narratives, participants recounted how collaboration, trust-building, and negotiation of differing perspectives created the conditions under which resistance arose and was addressed. They described how these relational structures influenced the ways decisions were made, reforms were implemented, and acceptance of change developed over time. These accounts illuminate the relational and contextual structures that framed administrators' lived experiences of leading change, as expressed directly in their narratives. The participants expressed that:

*"Actually, I think sa mga guro, malaking tulong kung naging [it's the teachers, it's a big help] significant sila sa aking [in my] life. Kasi, kumbaga, hindi lang ako ang nagtuturo sa kanila para maging [Because, I'm not alone teaching them to become] effective, maging [become] efficient teachers. Sila din naging... ang tumuturo sa akin. [they teach me how to be a good leader,] what to do, and what we are going to do in our school to become successful in our school." [P3]*

*"It really affects significantly because in that case, you're going to push people to reach... Of course their full potential, the limits that they are not doing only for the sake of compliance but also for them to be able to be on top of what they are doing." [P4]*

Leadership effectiveness during periods of disruptive change extends beyond strategic planning and technical expertise; it is fundamentally anchored in relational trust and emotional support [29]. In times of uncertainty and rapid transformation, teachers and staff often experience anxiety, vulnerability, and role ambiguity. Leaders who demonstrate empathy, provide emotional reassurance, and maintain open lines of communication create psychological safety, enabling stakeholders to engage more openly with change initiatives rather than resist them. Moreover, relational leadership serves as the ethical foundation of transformative change, emphasizing dignity, inclusivity, and shared responsibility within school communities [19]. Human-centered leadership approaches recognize that resistance is frequently rooted in emotional and relational disruptions rather than procedural deficiencies. By prioritizing dialogue, respect, and mutual understanding, administrators mitigate resistance while fostering inclusive environments where diverse voices are acknowledged and valued.

### **Leadership Development and Growth**

This theme describes the structural conditions through which administrators experienced leadership development and professional growth during change, specifically as a continuous learning process requiring adaptability, reflection, and skill refinement. Administrators described experiencing leadership as an ongoing process of acquiring, honing, and expanding the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and behaviors necessary to guide their schools effectively. In their narratives, participants recounted how navigating challenges, promoting quality education, and fostering resourcefulness provided opportunities for ongoing professional growth. They described how the demands and supports within their school environments shaped the ways they learned, adapted, and developed capacities to lead effectively. These accounts illuminate how leadership development and growth functioned as a structural dimension of administrators' lived experiences in managing change. As the participants described:

*"Actually, being a change manager, it affects of course my type or my kind of leadership because in this case, you're going to adapt the situation. What kind of leadership you are in your previous institution may not be successful in other institutions or in other schools. So therefore, I really need to adapt the change and also be adopted by the teachers and stakeholders." [P4]*

*"Being a change manager has made me more adaptable and resilient, associating my role with continuous learning and the ability to turn uncertainty into growth." [P6]*

Administrators' experiences in resource-constrained settings demand a high level of **resilience**, while simultaneously serving as catalysts for the development of expanded professional capacities [15]. Operating within environments characterized by limited material resources, staffing constraints, and increasing accountability pressures requires leaders to engage in continuous problem-solving, strategic prioritization, and adaptive decision-making. These experiences, while challenging, contribute to administrators' professional growth by strengthening their capacity to innovate, remain flexible, and sustain educational quality under constrained conditions.

Furthermore, such contexts highlight the evolving nature of **leadership competencies**, emphasizing that environments undergoing reform and innovation necessitate ongoing **professional development** to ensure effective change management and the promotion of quality education [25]. Continuous learning enables administrators to refine leadership skills, respond to emerging demands, and align instructional and organizational practices with reform goals. In this way, resource constraints do not merely limit leadership action but also create conditions that foster resilience, reflective practice, and the continuous enhancement of leadership competence essential for sustainable school improvement.

### Coping Strategies in Change Management

This theme describes the structural conditions through which administrators employed coping strategies during change, specifically as they navigated stress, uncertainty, and pressure. Administrators described experiencing leadership by employing problem-solving, emotional regulation, and seeking social support to maintain functionality, resilience, and effectiveness. In their narratives, participants recounted how these coping strategies shaped the ways they adapted to new processes, policies, and expectations, allowing them to respond to emerging challenges while sustaining leadership effectiveness. They described how these structural conditions provided a framework within which they expanded their capacities, managed resistance, and influenced the people and systems around them. These accounts illuminate the relational and contextual structures that framed administrators' lived experiences of coping during periods of change. The participants described that:

*"When there is hardship on how to deal with the financial matters of the school and how to improve the school without financial support..." [P1]*

*"Of course. It is the change in learning for the children, for the learners, in order that they can read or write. After the end of school year or moving on to another grade level." [P2]*

School administrators during the pandemic found that leaders actively used coping mechanisms; such as problem-solving, emotional regulation, and seeking social support, to manage heightened stress and uncertainty [6]. Within schools, this context serves as the foundation that allows administrators to navigate resistance, empower teachers, sustain quality education, and foster adaptive, resilient, and collaborative learning communities.

### Challenges in Leading Change

This theme describes the structural conditions through which administrators experienced challenges in leading change, specifically as they navigated systemic factors such as policy overload, resistance, and competing administrative demands. Administrators described experiencing leadership in contexts where reforms were shaped not only by technical requirements but also by human dynamics, contextual constraints, and emotional complexities. In their narratives, participants recounted how these systemic conditions influenced how they managed transitions, addressed resistance, and enacted change initiatives. These descriptions illuminate the structural and contextual factors that framed administrators' lived experiences of leading schools through multifaceted and non-linear reform processes. The participants expressed that:

*So, for me, challenges is...Nakapagbigay sa akin ng mga dagdag karunungan upang yung mga [can give me additional wisdom so that] negative impact ay ma [can be] adapt para sa mabuti. Yung mga [for good. That the] problem, kasi hindi yan na kailangan na matakbuhan, kailangan yan na iharapin at bigyan ng solusyon ng mga problema.[because you cannot run away from problems, you need to face and find solutions for all the problems]." [P1]*

*"Actually, as a school manager, there are so many problems and challenges in our school. For example, There are so many memorandum or different orders that the division give to the school. Kaya yan po, nahihiapan ang mga [that is why it's challenging in the part of the] teachers kung paano namin i-adapt yun, kung paano namin...gagawin yan. Pero [on how to adapt it and how we implement] as a school manager, we provide some, for example, as a school manager, I encourage the teachers to do their best, to perform well." [P4]*

School leaders must interpret and respond to contextual challenges; such as policy shifts, resource gaps, and community expectations, when implementing reforms [22]. Within this context, effective leadership requires not only strategic planning but also relational intelligence, adaptability, and resilience, enabling administrators to guide schools through challenges, foster teacher engagement, and ensure that reforms translate into meaningful improvements for learners and the wider school community.

### **Resources and Administrative Demands**

This theme describes the structural conditions through which administrators experienced leadership amid limited resources and administrative demands, specifically as material, human, and organizational constraints shaped their actions and decisions. Administrators described experiencing leadership while managing workload, resource scarcity, and the operational responsibilities inherent in running a school. In their narratives, participants recounted how these conditions influenced how they promoted quality education, exercised resourcefulness, and navigated contextual challenges and transitions. These descriptions illuminate how structural limitations and administrative demands framed the administrators' lived experiences, shaping the strategies, priorities, and capacities through which they led their schools. The participants described that:

*“Yung ano talaga bilang [as a] school head, hindi talaga na natin maiwasan na magkakaroon ng mga problema [we cannot deny that sometimes we encountered problems] in terms of especially finances, paano ma-deliver yung [how to deliver the] quality education doon sa taas. Siguro [there in far flung areas.]” [P3]*

*“Actually, as a school manager, there are so many problems and challenges in our school. For example, There are so many memorandum or different orders that the division give to the school. Kaya yan po, nahihiapan ang mga [that is why it's challenging in the part of the] teachers kung paano namin i-adapt yun, kung paano namin...gagawin yan” [P4]*

The availability of resources and the demands of administration significantly shape how leaders experience change and implement reforms, influencing decision-making, efficiency, and the overall quality of education [4]. Within this context, resourcefulness, strategic planning, and organizational skill become essential components of effective change management, enabling administrators to implement reforms successfully, empower teachers, and maintain high-quality educational outcomes.

### **Emotional Experiences of Leadership**

This theme describes the structural conditions through which administrators experienced leadership as emotionally charged, specifically encompassing feelings of satisfaction, frustration, fulfillment, and self-doubt. Administrators described experiencing leadership in ways that made their emotions central to decision-making, interpersonal interactions, and overall effectiveness in managing schools. In their narratives, participants recounted how these emotional experiences shaped how they navigated resistance, engaged with teachers, and adapted to evolving demands within their school contexts. These accounts illuminate how emotional responses functioned as a structural dimension of administrators' lived experiences, influencing the strategies, priorities, and relational dynamics through which leadership was exercised. The participants expressed that:

*“Well, when you do your job holistically and you have performed very good performance. So, at the end of the day, you are very satisfied with what you have done in your life. So, that is the feeling of happiness. na, [that] what can you say, hindi mabayaran ng kahit anong halaga. [cannot be repay by any amount].” [P1]*

*“About feelings, there are some feelings that, naging dismayado or kung baga, naging ano. Sa aking nararamdam ko sa sarili ko na naging dismayado ako kasi parang hindi ko nabigay yung 100% ko bilang isang change manager para magtagumpay or mapunang ang isang bagay sa paaralan para maging matagumpay. [I become dismayed or I feel within me that I dismayed because I failed to give 100% as a change manager for the success of our school].” [P3]*

Administrators' emotional states shape how they respond to challenges, interact with teachers, and make decisions [21]. This implies that affective responses are not merely personal experiences but also shape professional learning, resilience, and the capacity to grow from episodes of organizational change, reinforcing the relational and human-centered dimensions of leadership.

### **Bodily and Psychological Responses to Leadership**

This theme describes the structural conditions through which administrators experienced leadership as embodied and psychologically demanding, specifically manifesting through stress, fatigue, and heightened self-awareness. Administrators described experiencing leadership in ways that their physical and mental states were intertwined with the responsibilities, pressures, and demands of their roles. In their narratives, participants recounted how these bodily and cognitive reactions shaped their capacity to navigate transitions, manage resistance, and sustain ongoing school initiatives. These descriptions illuminate how physical and psychological responses formed a structural dimension of administrators' lived experiences, influencing decision-making, relational interactions, and adaptive leadership practices. The participants expressed that:

*"I guess, when it comes to this matter, well, of course, first is that you are...For me, I'm really eager to change people's lives, not just in accordance with their job. For me, actually it has an impact when it comes to my psychological aspect it's because whether or not you achieve the goals of the school because of your management style, it will actually have a significant impact in my life. Kasi baka hindi maabot [Maybe it may fail]. So, ibang usapan na yun. [I guess it's it's different topic]. "[P4]*

*"I've become aware of how my body responds to different situations, tensions, and restlessness during challenges and lightness and energy when seeing positive results. Recognizing these cues helps me pause, stay mindful, and respond with clarity and patience." [P5]*

Bodily and psychological responses are closely intertwined with the emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of leading, particularly during periods of intense stress and organizational change [14]. This underscores that effective leadership is not only strategic but also involves managing one's own well-being to maintain resilience, decision-making capacity, and the ability to support staff and sustain school improvement initiatives.

### **Commitment to Institutional Success and People-Centered Leadership**

This theme describes the structural conditions through which administrators experienced leadership as grounded in commitment to institutional success and people-centered responsibility, specifically encompassing dedication to organizational goals while prioritizing the well-being, development, and engagement of teachers, learners, and other stakeholders. Administrators described experiencing leadership in ways that their sense of duty and relational obligations shaped how they made decisions, guided school initiatives, and supported staff and students. In their narratives, participants recounted how this commitment influenced the cultivation of trust, the empowerment of teachers, and the strategic use of resources to achieve meaningful educational outcomes. These accounts illuminate how commitment to institutional goals and people-centered leadership functioned as a structural dimension of administrators' lived experiences, guiding their practices, fostering relational harmony, and sustaining both organizational effectiveness and community well-being. The participants described that:

*"I think there are some thoughts na...[that...] An idea na [that] stand out sa akin, [for me,] for example, kung paano ko po na ang paaralan, kung paano ko po i-manage para mapunta sila sa mabuting kalagayan ng mga bata. yung mga guro, [how to manage the school for the pupils and teachers to be in good situation or comfort] how I will give them some extra knowledge to make them an effective teachers, to teach the learners para maging mabuting [to become good] citizen sa [in the] community." [P3]*

*"What stands out most in my thought as a change manager is that real change begins with people, not plans. No matter how good a strategy may be, it will not succeed unless people feel valued, understood, and involved in the process. Leadership is about influence, trust, and empathy. And change is continuous. Requiring patience and adaptation. I also value the*

*encouragement I receive from mentors and strive to inspire and empower others in the same way.”[P6]*

Leaders who prioritize relationships, collaboration, and personalized support cultivate environments that foster both learning and organizational effectiveness [25]. In the context of school administration, such relationally grounded leadership enables teachers to feel valued, supported, and empowered, which in turn enhances their engagement, instructional quality, and willingness to embrace change. By actively investing in collaborative practices and attending to the professional and emotional needs of staff, administrators create conditions that not only facilitate the successful implementation of reforms but also promote a culture of trust, resilience, and continuous improvement. These findings underscore that leadership effectiveness extends beyond policy compliance or procedural management; it is embedded in the quality of relationships and the capacity to support, motivate, and develop others within the school community.

### **Joy and Fulfillment**

This theme describes the structural and experiential dimension through which administrators experienced positive emotional outcomes, specifically arising from witnessing teacher growth, learner success, and collaborative progress within their schools. Administrators described feeling satisfaction, accomplishment, and a sense of purpose as they observed the impact of their leadership on teachers, learners, and the wider school community. In their narratives, participants recounted how these positive emotions reinforced their professional identity, motivated ongoing capacity-building, and validated the implementation of creative and resourceful strategies. These accounts illuminate how joy and fulfillment functioned as a structural dimension of administrators' lived experiences, shaping their commitment to leadership, sustaining resilience, and fostering continued engagement in change management and school improvement initiatives. As described by the participants:

*“Of course, when you see the people around you, are doing their duties and responsibilities in accordance with the issuances that we have. And of course, when you see that they have joy in their faces, having reached their full potential, and you have pushed them to reach their limits in their teaching and learning process.”[P4]*

*“The joy of being a change manager lies in empowering people, promoting growth, building trust, and creating lasting impact.”[P6]*

The intrinsic theory of motivation suggests that individuals engage in certain behaviors or activities because they find them personally interesting or satisfying, rather than because of the potential external rewards or pressures [26]. Intrinsic motivation is considered to be self-driven and is characterized by feelings of enjoyment, interest, and satisfaction in the activity itself. This context underscores that affective experiences are not only personally rewarding but also essential in sustaining leadership effectiveness, fostering resilience, and promoting meaningful educational outcomes.

### **3.3 Future Self-Perception of the School Administrators in Change Management**

Three (3) themes emerged to describe the school administrators' future self-perception as change managers. These themes were derived from the initial and clustered themes, reflecting both the textural “what” of their experiences; how they envision themselves as leaders, and the structural “how” of their anticipated leadership practices; the conditions, relationships, and strategies through which they plan to enact change. Collectively, these themes capture administrators' reflections on the kind of leaders they aspire to become, illustrating a synthesis of personal growth, relational engagement, and strategic visioning in guiding their schools through ongoing and future reforms.

#### **Adaptive Leader**

This theme reflects the administrators' future self-perception as adaptive leaders, describing how they envision themselves responding to shifting circumstances, emerging challenges, and complex problems. Administrators articulated experiences of anticipating change, adjusting strategies, and continuously learning and growing to meet the evolving demands of their schools. Their narratives emphasized that adaptive leadership involves not only flexibility and resilience but also the capacity to engage, empower, and inspire others, transforming uncertainty into opportunities for collective growth. In the lived experience of these leaders, adaptability is both a personal orientation and a relational practice, guiding decision-making, shaping professional identity, and enabling administrators to navigate future challenges while fostering a responsive and supportive school environment. These accounts illuminate how perceptions of future adaptive leadership constitute an essential dimension of the lived

experience, integrating personal growth with the ongoing development of the school community. The participants expressed that:

*"My insight and learning is that we need to adapt in every situation that we are in. Because if we're not going to do so, we might fail when it comes to leadership, when it comes to reaching the goals of a particular institution. So for us to be able to be on top of our goals, we need to...push everything to the limits. But of course, we need also to be considerate when it comes to the stakeholders." [P4]*

*"Well, for that question, my insights as a change manager center on the value of adaptability, empathy, and continuous growth in navigating life's transitions." [P6]*

The principles of adaptive leadership primary characteristics of adaptive leaders include flexibility, empathy, innovation, and long-term vision [27]. This suggests that while some leaders may view change as a daunting need, an adaptive leadership attitude promotes viewing change as a chance for favorable results inside an organization.

### **People-Centered and Empowered Leader**

This theme reflects the aspects of administrators' future self-perception as people-centered, empowered leaders, describing how they envision themselves prioritizing the well-being, growth, and engagement of teachers, learners, and other stakeholders. Administrators expressed experiences of fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and trust within their school communities, emphasizing relational interactions that support professional development and individual agency. Their narratives highlighted that empowering others involves creating environments where team members feel valued, capable, and motivated to contribute meaningfully to shared goals. In the lived experience of these leaders, people-centered leadership is both a guiding principle and a practiced reality, shaping decisions, interactions, and school culture. These accounts illuminate how the aspiration to be a people-centered, empowered leader constitutes an essential dimension of administrators' future-oriented self-perception, integrating personal leadership growth with the collective flourishing of the school community. As described by the participants:

*"Okay, being a change manager has taught me that real change is people-centered. Success depends on empathy, trust, and communication. I've learned that resistance, feedback, leadership is about empowerment and challenge or challenges are opportunities to growth in short my life as a change manager has shown me that meaningful change is as much about nurturing people and the relationships as it is about system and processes." [P5]*

*"Okay, given my experiences as a change manager, I see myself growing as a leader who inspire and empower others. And of course, I am here to guide teams through meaningful change while mentoring future leaders and fostering environments where people feel valued and motivated by continuously developing my skills. I hope to create a lasting positive impact on both the lives of those I work with." [P4]*

In human-centered leadership, the importance of empathy, psychological safety, and relational trust in enhancing organizational performance and teacher well-being is important [26]. Similarly, empowering leadership underscores how shared decision-making, capacity-building, and distributed responsibilities enhance motivation, professional growth, and collective commitment to change [10].

### **Goal-oriented Visionary Leader**

This theme reflects the dimensions of administrators' future self-perception as goal- and vision-oriented leaders, describing how they experience and anticipate guiding their schools toward long-term objectives. Administrators expressed the lived reality of establishing clear goals, articulating a compelling vision, and aligning daily actions, strategies, and available resources with broader institutional priorities. Their narratives highlight that leadership involves inspiring commitment, fostering coherence, and cultivating shared purpose among teachers, learners, and stakeholders. In their envisioned future, goal- and vision-oriented leadership integrates strategic focus with relational engagement, ensuring that decisions and actions are purposeful, coordinated, and meaningful. These accounts illuminate how the aspiration to be a goal- and vision-oriented leader constitutes an essential component of

administrators' future self-perception, shaping both their personal development and the collective direction of the school community. As expressed by the participants:

*"I think as a change manager, I think someday, I become a successful school principal. I will continue my goals. I continue ang napagsimulan ko na maging gabay sa mga [what I have started to guide] teachers, and learners para maging matagumpay sila [for them to succeed]. "[P3]*

*"Siguro bilang lider, kailangan talaga natin magpuporsige sa buhay para maibigay kung ano yung dapat. [Maybe as a leader, we need to become determined to give and provide what is needed]. "[P2]*

Visionary and strategic leadership underscores the importance of school leaders in cultivating a clear sense of direction, articulating a compelling purpose, and aligning organizational efforts toward a shared mission [16]. Effective leaders not only define long-term goals but also translate these aspirations into coherent strategies that guide everyday practices. By communicating purpose with clarity and consistency, administrators foster shared understanding and commitment among teachers and stakeholders, enabling collective ownership of reform initiatives. Moreover, visionary leadership plays a critical role in mobilizing stakeholders by linking individual roles and contributions to broader institutional goals. This alignment strengthens coherence across the organization, reduces fragmentation during periods of change, and enhances collective motivation. Through strategic foresight and purposeful communication, school leaders are able to navigate complexity, sustain momentum, and ensure that reforms are not only implemented but meaningfully embedded in school culture.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Effective change management is inherently both strategic and relational, grounded in administrators' capacity to manage complex, dynamic, and often challenging school environments. The study confirms that successful change management emerges from the interplay of structural conditions; such as cultural norms, organizational demands, resource constraints, and relational dynamics, and lived experiences, including emotional, cognitive, and professional responses. Leadership in schools is therefore not static; it is a continuous, reflective, and adaptive process that balances organizational objectives with the needs, growth, and well-being of teachers, learners, and the broader community.

Administrators' future self-perception as adaptive, people-centered, and goal-oriented leaders demonstrates that effective leadership requires flexibility, relational engagement, and strategic vision. Leaders who cultivate trust, collaboration, and empowerment create conditions in which resistance is addressed constructively, professional growth is encouraged, and educational reforms are implemented sustainably. In this sense, the human-centered and systemic dimensions of leadership are inseparable, shaping not only what administrators do but also how they enact their roles within complex school ecosystems.

The study highlights that sustainable school improvement depends on a delicate balance of personal competencies, relational capacities, and organizational strategies. Administrators who embody these qualities are able to transform challenges into opportunities, align short-term actions with long-term goals, and foster environments of collective learning, resilience, and continuous improvement.

While the study is contextually bound to a specific set of schools, its insights are highly relevant for policy, professional development, and school leadership programs, emphasizing the need for interventions that strengthen relational leadership, adaptive decision-making, and capacity-building strategies. Ultimately, the integration of structural and lived experiences underscores that effective educational leadership is systemically grounded, human-centered, and forward-looking, providing a foundation for meaningful, sustainable, and inclusive school transformation.

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