

Transformational Leadership in National Government Organizational Change

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the role of transformational leadership in driving organizational transformation within selected National Government Agencies in Metro Manila. Using a descriptive-qualitative research design, in-depth interviews were conducted with ten public administrators holding supervisory and managerial positions. Thematic analysis revealed that administrators understand transformational leadership as a vision-driven, ethical, and people-centered approach that emphasizes trust, motivation, and employee development. However, the practice of transformational leadership is constrained by bureaucratic rigidity, hierarchical decision-making, political influences, and resistance to change within public-sector organizations. The findings further indicate that sustaining transformational leadership requires enabling conditions such as institutional support, leadership autonomy, continuous leadership development, and collaborative organizational cultures. Overall, the study highlights that transformational leadership in the public sector is shaped not only by individual leadership capabilities but also by systemic and institutional factors. The findings contribute context-specific insights into public-sector leadership and underscore the importance of aligning governance structures with transformational leadership practices to achieve sustainable organizational transformation.

Keywords: Transformational leadership; organizational transformation; public sector governance; national government agencies; qualitative research.

1. INTRODUCTION:

Organizational transformation has become an imperative for public-sector institutions as governments confront increasing demands for efficiency, transparency, responsiveness, and sustainability. National government agencies are no longer insulated from pressures arising from digitalization, fiscal constraints, citizen expectations, and crisis-driven governance environments (Elmatsani et al., 2024). In metropolitan governance contexts such as Metro Manila, these pressures are intensified by population density, inter-agency coordination challenges, and the need for rapid policy implementation. As a result, leadership has emerged as a critical mechanism through which public organizations navigate institutional reform and transformation.

Within public administration scholarship, leadership is widely recognized as a determinant of organizational effectiveness, employee commitment, resilience, and adaptive capacity. Research conducted across public-sector settings demonstrates that leadership behavior significantly shapes how civil servants respond to organizational change, particularly in bureaucratic and politically constrained environments (Harb et al., 2020; Profiroiu & Nastăcă, 2022). Contemporary governance challenges have further highlighted the limitations of

purely transactional or compliance-based leadership approaches, emphasizing the need for leadership models capable of motivating employees, fostering innovation, and sustaining transformation efforts.

Transformational leadership has gained prominence as a leadership model particularly suited to organizational transformation in the public sector. Rooted in the work of Burns (1978) and further developed by Bass and Avolio (1997), transformational leadership is characterized by idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration. Empirical studies in public administration indicate that transformational leadership enhances organizational commitment, strengthens ethical climates, and promotes alignment with institutional missions (Harb et al., 2020; Mañas-Rodríguez & Alcaraz-Pardo, 2017). These attributes are essential in government organizations where transformation often requires cultural change rather than structural adjustment alone.

Despite the documented effectiveness of transformational leadership, evidence suggests that public-sector organizations frequently remain dominated by transactional leadership styles. Studies conducted in crisis and non-crisis contexts show that transactional leadership tends to prevail due to its alignment with hierarchical structures, centralized decision-making, and rule-based

accountability systems (Despoteris & Kriemadis, 2024). However, even in environments where transactional leadership is dominant, transformational leadership consistently demonstrates the strongest positive relationship with leadership effectiveness, employee satisfaction, and discretionary effort (Despoteris & Kriemadis, 2024).

The practice of transformational leadership in government is further constrained by institutional and structural barriers. Research highlights rigid bureaucratic procedures, limited managerial autonomy, weak leadership development systems, and insufficient policy support as major obstacles to transformational leadership implementation (Hill et al., 2024). In public universities and local government institutions, the absence of enabling governance frameworks has been shown to restrict leaders' ability to articulate shared visions, foster participation, and sustain innovation-oriented change. These findings underscore the importance of examining transformational leadership within its broader governance and institutional context.

Leadership capacity also plays a critical role in determining whether public-sector reforms translate into meaningful organizational transformation. Studies on decentralization and governance reforms indicate that structural changes alone are insufficient without leadership capable of mobilizing stakeholders, managing resistance, and building organizational commitment (Monastyrskyi et al., 2025). Transformational leadership is particularly relevant in such contexts because it facilitates sense-making, strengthens organizational identity, and promotes long-term adaptability in complex administrative environments.

In the Philippine context, particularly within National Government Agencies operating in Metro Manila, empirical research on transformational leadership and organizational transformation remains limited. While national reform initiatives emphasize digital transformation, performance-based management, and innovation, existing studies are largely quantitative and provide limited insight into how public administrators experience and enact transformational leadership in practice. There is a notable absence of qualitative evidence capturing leadership narratives, sense-making processes, and contextual constraints within Philippine national government institutions.

Given these gaps, this study seeks to examine the role of transformational leadership in driving organizational transformation in National Government Agencies in Metro Manila. Using a descriptive-qualitative research design, the study will conduct in-depth interviews with ten public administrators to explore their perceptions, experiences, and leadership practices related to organizational transformation. By foregrounding the perspectives of public administrators, the study aims to generate context-sensitive insights into how transformational leadership is enacted within Philippine national government agencies and how it shapes transformation processes in complex urban governance settings.

Research Questions

1. How do administrators in selected national

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government agencies in Metro Manila understand and interpret transformational leadership in the context of public sector governance?

2. What challenges and constraints do administrators encounter in exercising transformational leadership while leading organizational transformation in national government agencies?

3. What enabling conditions, leadership strategies, and organizational supports do administrators identify as essential in sustaining transformational leadership and organizational transformation in the public sector?

Methodology Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-qualitative research design to explore the role of transformational leadership in driving organizational transformation within National Government Agencies (NGAs) in

Metro Manila. A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate given the study's objective to understand how public administrators interpret, experience, and exercise transformational leadership in real governance contexts. Qualitative designs are particularly suited for examining complex social phenomena where meanings, perceptions, and contextual influences are central to analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The descriptive-qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth examination of leadership practices without imposing pre-existing theoretical categorizations, thereby ensuring that findings emerged from participants' narratives and lived experiences within the public sector (Sandelowski, 2000).

Participants

The participants of the study consisted of **ten (10) public administrators** currently holding supervisory, managerial, or executive positions in selected National Government Agencies in Metro Manila. Participants were selected using **purposive sampling**, a non-probability technique commonly used in qualitative research to identify individuals with direct experience and substantive knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Inclusion criteria required that participants: (a) occupy a leadership or administrative role, (b) have direct involvement in organizational change or transformation initiatives, and (c) possess a minimum of three years of service within their respective agencies. This sampling strategy ensured that participants could provide rich, contextually grounded insights into transformational leadership within national government institutions.

Table 1. Biographical Sketch of the Participants

Participant	Sex	Age Range	Highest Education	Current Position	Years in Public Service	Years in Management	Type of Agency
P1	Male	50–55	Doctorate	Direct	26+	15+	Regional
					year		
P2	Female	45–50	Master's	Assistant	11	10–15	Service
				Direct	year	years	Oriented
P3	Male	40–45	Master's	Division	16–20	8–10	Regional
				Chief	year		
P4	Female	55–60	Doctorate	Regional	26+	16+	Service
				Head	year		Oriented

P5	Mal	48	Mast	Depar	21	12	Econ
			Head	year	years		
P6	Fe	42	Mast	Sectio	5-10	5	Regu
			Chief	year			
P7	Mal	50	Doct	Burea	26+	16+	Regu
			Direct	year			
P8	Fe	38	Mast	Divisi	11	5-8	Servi
			Head	year			Orien
P9	Mal	45	Mast	Assist	11-	10-	Econ
			Burea	year	years		
			Head				
P10	Fe	55	Doct	Senio	26+	15+	Servi
			Execu	year			Orien

Table 1 presents the biographical sketch of the ten administrator-participants included in the study. The participants comprise both male and female administrators aged between 38 and 60 years, with the majority possessing extensive experience in public service. Most held master's degrees, while several had completed doctoral-level education. In terms of leadership roles, the participants occupied key managerial and executive positions across regulatory, service-oriented, and economic government agencies.

Their years of public service and managerial experience indicate a high level of institutional knowledge and leadership exposure, providing a credible basis for the qualitative insights generated in the study.

Research Instrument

Data were gathered using a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the study's major research questions and the core dimensions of transformational leadership articulated by Bass and Avolio (1997). The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions

designed to elicit participants' understanding of transformational leadership, perceived challenges in its practice, and the enabling conditions that support leadership-driven organizational transformation. Semi-structured interviews were selected to provide consistency across interviews while allowing flexibility for probing, clarification, and the exploration of emergent themes (Kallio et al., 2016). The instrument was reviewed by qualitative research experts to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

Data Collection

Data collection was conducted through in-depth, one-on-one interviews with the selected public administrators. Interviews were carried out either face-to-face or via secure online platforms, depending on participants' availability and institutional protocols. Each interview lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' informed consent. Prior to data collection, participants were briefed on the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of their participation, and measures taken to ensure confidentiality and anonymity. Ethical considerations followed established qualitative research standards, including informed consent, the right to withdraw, and secure handling of audio recordings and transcripts (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data Analysis

The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). First, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data through repeated reading of verbatim transcripts. Second, initial codes were generated inductively to capture meaningful features of the data relevant to transformational leadership and organizational transformation. Third, related codes were clustered into preliminary themes reflecting shared patterns across participants' narratives. Fourth, themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence, internal consistency, and alignment with the research questions. Fifth, themes were clearly defined and named, emphasizing their relevance to public-sector governance and leadership practice. Finally, the themes were interpreted and synthesized to produce a coherent narrative explaining how transformational leadership is understood, constrained, and sustained within National Government Agencies. This analytical approach ensured methodological rigor, transparency, and depth in interpreting participants' experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun & Clarke, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Thematic analysis of the in-depth interviews with ten administrators from selected national government agencies in Metro Manila yielded three major themes corresponding to the study's research questions: (1) Administrators' Meaning-Making of Transformational Leadership, (2) Structural and Contextual Challenges in Practicing Transformational Leadership, and (3) Enabling Conditions for Sustaining Transformational Leadership in Public Sector Organizations.

Theme 1: Transformational Leadership as Vision-Driven and People-Centered Governance

(Understanding of Transformational Leadership)

Administrators commonly described transformational leadership as a leadership approach anchored on vision, values, and people development. Participants emphasized that transformational leadership in the public sector goes beyond authority and compliance, focusing instead on inspiring employees toward shared organizational goals. One administrator explained:

"For me, transformational leadership means being able to clearly communicate a vision and motivate people to believe that change is possible, even within a rigid government system" (P3). Another participant highlighted the moral and ethical dimension of leadership:

"In government, transformational leadership is closely tied to integrity. You cannot inspire people if they do not trust you or your intentions" (P7).

Several participants also associated transformational leadership with mentoring and empowering employees: "I see transformational leadership when leaders invest time in developing their people, not just in meeting targets but in helping them grow professionally" (P2).

These narratives suggest that administrators perceive transformational leadership as relational and values-

based, aligning with transformational leadership theory, which emphasizes idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration. In the context of public governance, such leadership is viewed as essential in fostering commitment amid bureaucratic constraints.

Administrators in this study consistently framed transformational leadership as a vision-driven, values-based, and people-centered leadership approach, emphasizing inspiration, integrity, and employee development rather than authority and rule compliance. This interpretation aligns closely with classical and contemporary conceptualizations of transformational leadership, which underscore idealized influence, inspirational motivation, and individualized consideration as core leadership behaviors (Burns, 1978; Bass & Avolio, 1997).

Participants' emphasis on ethical conduct and trust reflects findings from public-sector studies demonstrating that transformational leadership in government is inseparable from moral legitimacy and integrity. Harb et al. (2020) similarly found that idealized influence, particularly ethical role modeling, was the strongest predictor of organizational commitment among public servants. Likewise, Mañas-Rodríguez and Alcaraz-Pardo (2017) showed that transformational leadership fosters a positive organizational climate in public administration, which in turn enhances employees' psychological capital and engagement.

The administrators' narratives also highlighted mentoring and empowerment as defining features of transformational leadership. This supports empirical evidence indicating that transformational leadership in government strengthens employee development, motivation, and identification with organizational goals, particularly in bureaucratic environments where intrinsic motivation is critical for sustaining reform efforts (Profiroiu & Nastăcă, 2022). Within public governance contexts, such people-centered leadership is viewed as essential for mobilizing commitment amid institutional rigidity and limited incentives.

Theme 2: Bureaucratic Constraints and Resistance as Barriers to Transformational Leadership

(Challenges in Practicing Transformational Leadership) Despite recognizing the value of transformational leadership, administrators reported significant challenges in its application. A dominant theme was the constraining nature of bureaucratic structures, rigid policies, and hierarchical decision-making processes. One senior administrator noted: "Sometimes you want to innovate or introduce change, but the layers of approval and existing rules slow everything down" (P5). Political influences and external pressures were also identified as barriers: "Leadership in government is not just internal. Political dynamics and changing priorities often affect how far you can push transformational initiatives" (P9).

Resistance to change among employees emerged as another challenge:

"There are staff who are used to the old ways. Even if the intention is good, they resist because change disrupts their comfort zone" (P6).

Despite recognizing the value of transformational

leadership, participants described significant **structural and contextual constraints** that limit its practice. Bureaucratic procedures, hierarchical decision-making, rigid policies, and lengthy approval processes emerged as dominant barriers. These findings resonate with studies showing that public-sector leaders often operate within institutional environments that privilege compliance, risk aversion, and procedural accountability over innovation and flexibility (Despoteris & Kriemadis, 2024).

Political influence and shifting priorities were also identified as external constraints on transformational leadership. Similar observations have been documented in public governance literature, where political centralization and administrative dependence on political leadership restrict leaders' autonomy to pursue long-term transformational agendas (Monastyrskyi et al., 2025). During crisis contexts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, transactional leadership has been shown to dominate due to its alignment with control-oriented governance, even though transformational leadership remains more strongly associated with effectiveness (Despoteris & Kriemadis, 2024).

Resistance to change among employees further complicated leadership efforts. This aligns with findings from public universities and government institutions in developing contexts, where entrenched organizational cultures and fear of disruption undermine transformational initiatives (Hill et al., 2024). Collectively, these challenges reflect a persistent tension between transformational leadership ideals and the administrative realities of public-sector organizations, reinforcing the view that leadership effectiveness in government is shaped as much by institutional context as by individual capability.

Theme 3: Institutional Support and Leadership Capacity as Enablers of Transformation

(Enabling Conditions for Sustaining Transformational Leadership)

Participants identified several enabling conditions that support the practice and sustainability of transformational leadership. Strong institutional support, leadership development programs, and a culture of collaboration were frequently cited.

One participant emphasized organizational backing: "Transformational leadership becomes possible when top management provides trust and allows managers some level of autonomy" (P1).

Leadership development and continuous learning were also highlighted:

"Training and mentoring programs really help leaders develop the confidence and skills needed to lead change" (P8).

Collaboration and shared ownership of goals emerged as critical enablers:

"When employees feel included in decision-making, they become partners in transformation rather than obstacles" (P4).

These findings suggest that transformational leadership in public sector organizations is not solely

(Enabling Conditions for Sustaining Transformational Leadership)

Participants emphasized that transformational leadership

is **not solely an individual attribute**, but a practice enabled or constrained by institutional conditions. Organizational support from top management, leadership autonomy, and trust were identified as critical enablers. This finding is consistent with studies showing that transformational leadership thrives in governance systems that provide managerial discretion and supportive policy frameworks (Elmatsani et al., 2024). Leadership development and continuous learning were also highlighted as essential. Empirical research across public-sector contexts demonstrates that transformational leadership competencies can be cultivated through structured training, mentoring, and experiential learning, thereby strengthening leaders' capacity to manage change and uncertainty (Mañas-Rodríguez & Alcaraz- Pardo, 2017; Profiroiu & Nastăcă, 2022). Without such capacity-building mechanisms, leadership reform initiatives risk remaining symbolic rather than transformative.

Collaboration and participatory decision-making emerged as additional enablers, reinforcing the relational nature of transformational leadership. Studies on public-sector reform and decentralization emphasize that shared ownership, employee involvement, and cross-level collaboration enhance the sustainability of transformation efforts by reducing resistance and building collective commitment (Monastyrskyi et al., 2025). These findings suggest that transformational leadership in government is embedded within broader organizational cultures and governance arrangements, rather than exercised in isolation.

Taken together, the findings indicate that administrators in National Government Agencies possess a nuanced and theoretically aligned understanding of transformational leadership as a vision- oriented, ethical, and people-centered approach. However, the practice of transformational leadership is constrained by bureaucratic rigidity, political influences, and resistance to change, echoing patterns observed in public-sector leadership studies across different national contexts (Harb et al., 2020; Despoteris & Kriemadis, 2024). Enabling conditions such as institutional support, leadership development, and participatory cultures play a critical role in mitigating these constraints and sustaining

organizational transformation.

By situating administrators' lived experiences within the broader public governance literature, this study reinforces the argument that transformational leadership alone is insufficient without complementary systemic and institutional support mechanisms. The findings contribute to public- sector leadership discourse by demonstrating how transformational leadership is understood, challenged, and sustained within the specific context of national government agencies in Metro Manila, highlighting the importance of aligning leadership ideals with governance structures to achieve meaningful organizational transformation.

Conclusions, Recommendations and Limitations

This study concludes that public administrators in National Government Agencies in Metro Manila understand transformational leadership as a vision-driven, ethical, and people-centered approach essential for organizational transformation. However, the effective practice of transformational leadership is constrained by bureaucratic rigidity, political influences, and resistance to change. Sustaining transformational leadership requires supportive institutional structures, leadership capacity-building, and collaborative organizational cultures. National government agencies should institutionalize transformational leadership development programs and provide greater managerial autonomy to support innovation and change initiatives. Strengthening participatory decision- making and fostering collaborative organizational cultures may help reduce resistance to change. Continuous leadership training and mentoring are recommended to sustain transformational leadership practices in the public sector. This study is limited by its small sample size and qualitative design, which restrict the generalizability of the findings. Data were based on self- reported perceptions of public administrators, which may be subject to response bias. Future studies may benefit from including multiple stakeholder perspectives and employing mixed- methods approaches.

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