

Embracing Humility: A Case Study on the Transition of Former School Leaders to Subordinate Roles

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Abstract. This study explores former school leaders' experiences and coping mechanisms transitioning to subordinate roles within educational settings. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with three purposively selected participants who previously held leadership positions and are now employed in subordinate roles within schools. Participants were licensed educators who met specific inclusion criteria, including prior leadership experience. Thematic analysis of the interview data revealed that these individuals faced emotional challenges, such as identity shifts and feelings of loss, but also demonstrated growth through humility and adaptability. Key coping mechanisms included building support networks, sharing knowledge, and managing time effectively. The findings emphasize the role of flexibility and resilience in navigating role transitions, highlighting their importance in promoting a collaborative and enriching educational environment.

Keywords: Coping mechanisms; Emotional challenges; Leadership transition; Resilience; School leaders.

1.0 Introduction

Shifting from a leadership role to a subordinate position represents a profound professional and personal transformation, often fraught with emotional, social, and identity-based challenges. Although much research has explored the ascent into leadership, less attention has been devoted to the experiences of individuals who step down from such positions and transition into subordinate roles. This gap in the literature is particularly significant for school leaders, as their experiences of redefining professional identity and renegotiating their contributions within their educational communities remain underexplored. Understanding this transition is crucial to ensuring smooth leadership shifts and enabling former leaders to maintain positive and impactful roles within their institutions.

Scholars have begun to acknowledge the complexity of this transition. For example, Maxwell and Riley (2016) observed that former school leaders at Mountain Valley High School in Canada encountered emotional and professional difficulties when adapting to subordinate positions. Similarly, Colbert et al. (2015) noted that school leaders at Bangkok Patana School in Thailand faced significant challenges when transitioning to subordinate roles due to the high expectations and authority associated with their leadership positions. Leaders in such settings are often seen as visionaries and key decision-makers, complicating their ability to step back into supporting roles. In

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Bukidnon, Philippines, Amakiy (2017) identified similar struggles among former school leaders in adjusting to the follower role, emphasizing the importance of trust, collaboration, and perception management in ensuring successful transitions. The need to relinquish control while navigating new team dynamics highlights the complexities of moving from leadership to followership in diverse educational contexts.

Moreover, cultural and contextual factors significantly shape former school leaders' challenges. Cansoy and Parlar (2018) identified the disempowerment and frustration that former Turkish school principals experienced as they struggled with diminished authority and limited resources after transitioning from leadership roles. This loss of influence can make it difficult for them to adapt to the follower role, especially in environments where decision-making power is concentrated in leadership. In International Baccalaureate (IB) schools, Gibson (2024) emphasized the balancing act between local and global perspectives, further complicating former leaders' transition. These individuals, accustomed to fostering cultural competence and global mindedness, may find it particularly challenging to adapt to less authoritative roles while managing the conflicting demands of their school environments.

Gender also plays a significant role in shaping these transitions. Setlhodi and Ramatsui (2024) highlighted the resilience required by women leaders in challenging school environments, particularly in contexts lacking adequate structural support. For such leaders, stepping back from leadership positions might expose them to lacking the necessary resources and social support that enabled their success, making the transition to a follower role especially daunting. Similarly, Kuzmanic et al. (2024) illustrated the administrative tensions faced by school principals in Chile, where leaders must balance regulatory compliance, resource management, and stakeholder expectations. Transitioning to a follower role in such contexts could lead to difficulties reconciling their new responsibilities with their past experiences of high-stakes decision-making.

Emotional resilience and stress management are critical in navigating this transition. (Casimiro, 2019) found that the stress and burnout experienced by school leaders in Lebanon and Uganda underscored the need for coping strategies such as shared responsibilities and strong support systems. For former leaders, the emotional toll of stepping down from leadership may be alleviated by developing collaborative networks and engaging in sense-making and sense-giving processes. Olanrewaju and Omeghie (2024) noted that former leaders could effectively use these processes to align their actions with their schools' values and cultural orientation, thus easing their transition into subordinate roles.

As studied by Norman and Pahlawati (2024), the concept of adaptive control offers an intriguing metaphor for this transition. Just as adaptive control systems respond flexibly to changing conditions, former school leaders must adjust their behaviors and expectations to align with new organizational goals. By embracing adaptability and role clarity, as emphasized by Zettna et al. (2024), former leaders can mitigate feelings of disempowerment and frustration, ensuring that they contribute meaningfully in their new roles. Similarly, Eidson (2024) argued that building supportive networks and embracing mentorship opportunities can provide former leaders with the security and confidence necessary for a smoother transition, helping them regain their professional footing and resilience.

Despite the growing body of research on leadership transitions, there remains a lack of comprehensive studies that compare how school leaders navigate the shift to subordinate roles across various cultural and organizational contexts. The literature highlights numerous challenges, but there is a need for further investigation into how cultural differences, institutional frameworks, and leadership structures shape the effectiveness of these transitions. By examining best practices and strategies across diverse environments, future research can help identify ways to support former leaders in managing trust, collaboration, and shared leadership complexities.

This research seeks to address the gaps in the literature by exploring how school leaders transition from leadership to subordinate roles across different cultural and organizational contexts. Specifically, it examines the influence of cultural, institutional, and leadership structures on the challenges and opportunities former school leaders face in this transition. The findings of this study will provide valuable insights for educational institutions, policymakers, and practitioners, offering strategies for fostering smoother leadership transitions and supporting the ongoing contributions of former leaders to their schools.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative research approach, specifically employing a case study design to explore the experiences of former school leaders transitioning to subordinate roles within educational settings. Qualitative research is well-suited for this inquiry as it facilitates an in-depth understanding of participants' lived experiences and captures the emotional, cognitive, and professional complexities encountered during such transitions (Creswell, 2013). A case study design was selected to allow for a detailed exploration of individual narratives and the multifaceted dynamics of their professional experiences (Gustafsson, 2024). This design enabled the researchers to probe into the nuanced motivations, adaptive strategies, and identity shifts experienced by former leaders, thereby contributing to a broader theoretical understanding of leadership transitions within education.

2.2 Research Participants

The study employed purposive sampling, targeting participants who could provide rich, information-dense insights into the phenomenon of interest (Wan, 2019). The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) former school leaders who had transitioned to subordinate roles within the last year, (2) individuals who had held leadership positions for a minimum of five years, and (3) participants willing to engage in detailed reflection and discussion about their experiences. A sample of three participants was deemed appropriate for this case study, which is in line with Creswell (2007) recommendation for qualitative research involving in-depth, context-rich data. The small sample size was intentional to allow for a detailed exploration of each participant's experience, ensuring the generation of comprehensive qualitative data. Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant to elicit detailed, descriptive accounts of their transition experiences.

2.3. Research Instruments

In this study, the researchers utilized an adapted online interview question. The researchers employed an open-ended interview guide in gathering the data which allowed the participants to express their experiences and perspectives in detailed. This method provided rich qualitative insights into the process of transitioning from leadership to subordinate roles and emphasized their personal reflections on humility and adaptation within educational settings.

2.4 Data Collection Procedure

Data collection commenced following the acquisition of informed consent from all participants. Semi-structured interviews, guided by an interview protocol, were conducted to facilitate focused yet flexible discussions (Creswell, 2013). This approach allowed for exploring key themes while enabling participants to introduce new insights organically. Interviews were audio-recorded with the participant's consent and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and facilitate in-depth analysis. Follow-up interviews were conducted, where necessary, to clarify or expand upon emergent themes. This iterative process enhanced the richness of the data and allowed for a deeper exploration of participants' transition experiences. Data triangulation through multiple interviews supported the depth and validity of the findings of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

2.5 Data Analysis

The transcribed interview data were analyzed using Colaizzi's Descriptive Phenomenological Method (King, 2015). This method involved a systematic, seven-step process, beginning with thoroughly reading the transcripts to gain familiarity with the content. Significant statements about participants' transition experiences were then identified and extracted. These statements were subsequently grouped into meaning clusters and further refined into common themes. The essence of each participant's experience was distilled into a rich, descriptive narrative that encapsulated their motivations, challenges, and adaptive strategies. The final phase of analysis involved synthesizing these narratives into a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon, thereby offering theoretical insights into leadership identity transitions within educational contexts.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were rigorously adhered to throughout the research process to ensure the protection and rights of participants. Before participation, all individuals were thoroughly informed about the study's purpose, their rights as participants, and the significance of their contributions in advancing knowledge on leadership transitions. Participation was entirely voluntary, and participants were made aware that they could withdraw

from the study at any stage without penalty. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed, with all personally identifiable information being anonymized in the data. Informed consent was obtained through a formal consent form outlining the study's objectives and participants' rights, including the right to withdraw. Furthermore, member checking enabled participants to review and verify their interview transcripts, ensuring that the data accurately represented their perspectives and experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

2.7 Rigor of the Study

To enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the study, the researchers employed several strategies aligned with established qualitative research standards. Credibility was ensured through member checking, allowing participants to validate the researchers' interpretations of their experiences, thereby enhancing the accuracy and authenticity of the findings (Vella, 2024). Dependability was addressed by maintaining a detailed audit trail documenting all methodological decisions, including data collection and analysis procedures, ensuring transparency and replicability (Twycross & Shields, 2005). Confirmability was prioritized by minimizing researcher bias through reflective journaling and by engaging participants in iterative dialogues about their narratives, ensuring that the findings reflected the participants' lived experiences rather than the researchers' preconceptions (Soysal & Türkmen, 2024). This participant engagement process also enriched the analysis by incorporating multiple layers of meaning, deepening the study's interpretive insights.

2.8 Role of the Researchers

The researchers assumed the role of primary instruments for both data collection and analysis. To mitigate bias and maintain objectivity, the researchers disclosed the absence of any pre-existing relationships with the participants prior to conducting the interviews. This disclosure fostered trust and encouraged open, candid communication. During the interviews, the researchers adopted a non-directive, attentive listening approach, allowing participants to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and experiences without interruption. Reflexive practices, including maintaining reflective journals, were employed to continuously monitor and critically evaluate the researchers' positionality, thus minimizing potential influences on the data interpretation.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Experiences of Former School Leaders Adapting to Subordinate Roles

Leadership transitions were pivotal moments in the professional lives of individuals, particularly for those who experienced the shift from being leaders to followers. This case study explored the experiences of former school leaders as they navigated the complexities of adapting to subordinate roles after stepping down from leadership positions. The research delved into their challenges and adjustments and how their previous leadership experiences influenced their approach to their new roles. By examining these transitions, the study provided insights into the dynamics of role adaptation, identity reconstruction, and the broader implications for organizational culture and leadership development in educational settings.

Harnessing Identity Shifts

The first contribution to teachers' significant experiences is that leadership is often associated with authority, but effective leadership can also be harnessed within subordinate roles (Bundy et al., 2016). In organizational dynamics, particularly in educational settings, individuals transitioning from leadership positions to subordinate roles often bring valuable skills to influence the group positively. They can offer guidance, share insights, and support current leaders while remaining mindful of their new responsibilities (Chatzipanagiotou & Katsarou, 2023). This shift requires a deep understanding of leadership and followership, recognizing that the roles are complementary rather than opposing. Participants from in-depth interviews have shared their responses. They mentioned:

"... when we become followers, it feels like everything has flipped. It is hard, and sometimes there are, you know, misunderstandings. You might feel inferior because you used to be the one giving orders, but now it is the other way around, and you are the one following." – P1

"... shifting from the role of a leader to a follower would not be very easy because of some standards, but following the idea of being a follower, I still must humble myself, and the experiences are not easy; it means following time management. It is in the time management that I see some difficulties." – P2

“... when I was in the public school as a school head, I was a leader from public to private. In private, I am only an assistant, a lower position than before. So, during this time, I feel so hard. I struggle too much because the employees of the public and private have the same...or...different attitude.” – P3

Former leaders in subordinate roles can understand the complexities of decision-making, strategic thinking, and team management from their past experiences. They can use these skills to contribute to a collaborative environment, where they can support the vision of the current leaders and work towards shared goals (Randles & Finnegan, 2021).

However, this process also involves a period of adjustment, as former leaders must learn to balance their prior authority with their new role, adapting to follow directions while offering valuable contributions without overstepping boundaries.

Struggle with Authority Compliance

Struggling with authority compliance often arises when individuals transition from leadership roles to follower positions, as they are used to giving orders rather than following them. This shift can create a sense of discomfort and even inferiority, as they now must take direction from others. Misunderstandings can happen when they try to adjust to their new role, especially when their previous habits of leading clash with the expectations of following. Learning to comply with authority becomes challenging, as it requires adapting to a new dynamic, letting go of control, and finding balance in their responsibilities (Tomascik et al., 2021). Participants from in-depth interviews have shared their responses. They stated:

“... since you become a leader, you will know it is difficult if your followers do not follow. That is why when I became a follower, of course, I made sure that I obeyed my leader so that I would not give them a headache; that is one of the advantages if you were once you are a leader: you know how to adjust, and you can adapt directly so you try to be your best not to hurt your leader or not to disobey them.” – P1

“... the significant experiences I encountered were before; I did not mind my time as a leader; I could go anywhere I liked. So, this time, I must take some responsibilities as an instructor, and so I have to follow their schedules, but their schedules are not similar as mine, so that is one the biggest experiences that I had.” – P2

“... that is the problem... In the public sector, you are there for good once you have a permanent position. Even if the situation is not too bad or the issue is not serious, in public service, you can get kicked out quickly if people start talking about you or gossiping. They will immediately look for reasons to get rid of you.” – P3

The process of adjusting to a follower role is often accompanied by misunderstandings, particularly when former leaders unintentionally resist authority or struggle to align with the expectations set by current leaders. Their previous experiences might influence their behavior, making it difficult to fully embrace the follower position. The internal conflict between wanting to lead and needing to follow can result in miscommunication or friction, as they may unknowingly challenge the authority they are now meant to support (Fürstenberg et al., 2023).

Managing Expectations and Role Clarity

Managing expectations and role clarity is crucial when transitioning between positions, especially when moving from leadership to subordinate roles. In any organization, clearly defined roles help ensure smooth functioning and reduce misunderstandings. When someone steps into a new role, they need to clearly understand what is expected of them and how their responsibilities fit within the larger organizational framework. Without this clarity, confusion and frustration can arise, leading to difficulties in fulfilling their duties effectively (Howard & Dhillon, 2021). Participants from in-depth interviews have shared their responses. They mentioned:

“... the feeling of being inferior is there, especially because you used to be the one on top, with your colleagues following you. Now, you are following them, which is a big change. One of the challenges is adapting to this new role while ensuring you do your tasks properly. It cannot be easy if you disobey your superiors. It is also hard to adjust to the school's culture, so you need to be adaptable and think of new ways to handle things.” –P1

“... another challenge is the accomplishment of the implementation of some plans. Before, everything was there, all I needed to is to make up the plans being implemented, but this time, I am the one to implement it, and it is more specific.” – P2

With the responses of participants 1 and 2 as former leaders, managing expectations can be particularly challenging. They may still be urged to assert control or offer guidance based on their experiences. However, to succeed in their new position, they must learn to adapt to the expectations of their follower role, and this means understanding the boundaries of their authority and knowing when to step back and follow the directives of current leaders (Karam & Kitana, 2020). Clear communication about their new responsibilities is key to easing this transition and avoiding potential conflict.

Restructuring Time Management and Autonomy

Restructuring time management and autonomy is essential for individuals transitioning from leadership to subordinate roles. As leaders, they may have had more control over their schedules and decisions, managing their time based on personal priorities and broader organizational goals (Leithwood et al., 2020). However, once they move into subordinate roles, their autonomy decreases, and they must follow the schedules, deadlines, and instructions set by others. This shift can create challenges in managing time effectively, as they must now balance their tasks within someone else's leadership framework. Participants from in-depth interviews have shared their responses. They mentioned:

“... the hardest part is getting along with your bosses, and it is also tough to connect with your colleagues, especially when you quickly switch from being a leader to a follower. However, as teachers, we need to be very adaptable and flexible, which makes it a challenge.” – P1

“... the most difficult was time management and adjustment because sometimes I did certain functions that are not supposed to be mine kasi I am already in the follower role.” – P2

In these new dynamic responses of the participants, their context as individuals must learn to restructure their approach to time management. They need to adapt to a more reactive role, where they prioritize tasks assigned to them rather than setting the agenda themselves. This requires discipline and flexibility, as they may no longer have the same freedom to decide how and when to complete tasks. By developing better organizational skills and learning to follow timelines established by others, they can maintain productivity while adjusting to their new level of autonomy (Odumeru & Ogbonna, 2013). Moreover, successful time management in a follower role does not mean losing the ability to work independently. While autonomy may be reduced, individuals can still take initiative within the boundaries of their tasks, demonstrating reliability and efficiency. By restructuring their mindset, they can find ways to stay proactive, manage their time wisely, and contribute meaningfully to the organization, even in a less autonomous position. This approach helps them perform well and ensures smoother collaboration with the current leaders (Raza & Sikandar, 2018).

Emotional and Psychological Adjustments

Emotional and psychological adjustments are significant challenges for individuals transitioning from leadership to follower positions. The shift can evoke a range of feelings, including loss, frustration, and even anxiety. Former leaders may struggle with their new identity, as they must redefine their self-worth and purpose within the organization. This change can lead to feelings of inferiority and self-doubt as they grapple with their place in the team and how to contribute effectively (Osaysa, 2020). Individuals need to acknowledge these emotions as valid and seek support from colleagues or mentors during this transitional period. Participants from in-depth interviews have shared their responses. They mentioned:

“... sometimes, we might disagree with our leader, and there are rules that we think should be different. However, we are now followers, so we must follow what they say. This can be not easy, especially if you are not used to being a follower. However, as I mentioned, in different jobs, there will always be people who lead and those who follow. We also need to accept our role in this.” – P1

... it seems very easy, but if you are doing it, it is not easy because you must weigh yourself and ask your boss for permission on the things to do. So, you need to follow within the goals and standards of the school.” – P2

The responses of participants 1 and 2 navigate this emotional landscape; individuals must also focus on developing resilience and coping strategies. Self-reflection can help them understand their feelings and adjust their mindset to embrace their new role. Building a strong support network within the organization can provide the encouragement and guidance needed to adapt to the changes (Jacobs & Keegan, 2022). Open communication with peers and supervisors can also facilitate a smoother transition, allowing former leaders to express their concerns and receive constructive feedback. By actively working on their emotional well-being, they can mitigate anxiety and build a more positive outlook on their new responsibilities (Brown et al., 2021).

Furthermore, emotional and psychological adjustment is crucial for maintaining motivation and job satisfaction. By learning to accept their new role and embracing the opportunity to grow, individuals can find fulfillment in their work as followers. This transition period can lead to personal and professional development as they gain new skills and perspectives that enhance their contributions to the team. With time and effort, they can transform their initial challenges into valuable experiences, fostering a sense of belonging and purpose within the organization (Balasubramanian & Fernandes, 2022).

3.2 Coping Mechanisms of Former School Leaders Adapting to Subordinate Roles

Transitioning from a leadership position to a follower role presents a complex and challenging journey for educators. This process necessitates a substantial shift in mindset, emotional resilience, and a willingness to embrace humility. In today's educational landscape, adaptive leadership is particularly vital, as it equips educators to navigate the rapid technological advancements and dynamic social changes defining the millennial era (Sartini et al., 2024). Former school leaders must often lower their pride and let go of their previous status to effectively adapt to their new roles. Respondents expressed the importance of humility, indicating that it is crucial to acknowledge one's place in the hierarchy and to embrace a supportive role.

Being Humble

This involves recognizing and setting aside personal ego or superiority to foster humility and collaboration. This includes acknowledging the value and expertise of colleagues and understanding that leadership is not solely about authority but about contributing to a collective effort.

"I usually do my task without any murmuring or complaints if I can do it and usually accept the task as a follower, so I made set adjustments. The thing is, you need what do you call this, humility; if you are given a task, do not take it as a punishment or a burden, accept it and do your part professionally." -P1

"I think it is innate to us; our value system is very important, and that is the value of humility. Even though I became once a leader of DepEd, I bring the value of humility. It means being humble, knowing that somebody already knows better than you do; you must accept that. It helped me to become more productive because I saw all these instructions when I was a leader, but this time, I am the one who is doing the instructions." -P2

"we must lower down our pride. ngano man maghunahuna pa ta ug pataas nga under nata then ang atong purpose is to help. dili ta pa pride, walaon nato ang pride." -P3

Transitioning from leadership to subordinate roles in educational settings requires former school leaders to redefine their identities, which is crucial for mitigating feelings of inadequacy and fostering collaboration (Carrington et al., 2024). This process involves recognizing the influence of past roles and embracing new identities that prioritize collective growth over individual status. By doing so, these educators can contribute positively to school culture, enhancing the educational experience for colleagues and students alike (Sarong, 2024).

Moving on from a former position entail transitioning from previous leadership roles to embrace new identities as followers in educational settings. This journey requires individuals to reflect on past experiences, acknowledge their evolving roles, and adapt to new responsibilities.

"I have to accept my role so, for that, it would be very difficult since we always have this as our motivation, and we have to focus on our purpose, what would be our part so really for the good of our students and for the good of the institution that keeps me motivated and aside from that we should always put in mind that the work that we are having now is the dream of

others, so we need to be inspired to that as long as we are still here, we need to do our task, and we need to set goals, and we need to see to it our journey has focus.” – P1

“My experience as a teacher before had helped me adapt and adjust to my new role. At this time, I realized that I needed to be at the bottom and meet other teachers where they were. I need to go down with their level.” – P2

“During this time, I realized I needed to step down and meet other teachers where they were. I needed to lower myself to their level.” – P3

Former school leaders transitioning to administrative roles often encounter significant challenges, including feelings of isolation from their peers and the necessity of establishing new professional relationships. These difficulties need self-reflection and personal growth as they adapt to new roles (Cassar et al., 2020). Similarly, transitioning from practitioner to scholar, particularly for former school leaders moving into academia, involves adjusting to unfamiliar organizational structures while redefining their professional identity. This process necessitates a thorough reflection on past experiences and the development of new skills and connections vital for success in an academic environment (Kaiser & Bailey, 2022).

Accepting New Roles and Responsibilities

This involves embracing the transition from leadership to follower positions within educational environments. This process requires educators to recognize their changed status and adapt to the dynamics of their new roles. By accepting these responsibilities, former leaders can cultivate a collaborative atmosphere that values input from all team members.

“for me, I usually do my task without any murmuring or any complaint as long as I can do it and usually accept the task as a follower, so I made set adjustments.” – P1

“I always consider time management and flexibility as a form of personal adjustment para hindi mahirapan sa mga changes lalo na sa new job description na ibinigay.” – P2

Educators can effectively navigate role changes by developing strategies that align with the evolving educational landscape. This includes adopting innovative pedagogical approaches and fostering a culture of collaboration and shared leadership within educational settings. Research indicates that teachers can successfully respond to environmental changes and role transformations throughout their career development (Garger et al., 2022). Understanding the dynamics of role transition through interdisciplinary theorizing can further support educators as they navigate these changes. This involves recognizing the complexity of the reorientation process and the steps associated with moving from leadership to followership (Geels, 2021).

Seeking support and building relationships with colleagues is vital for former leaders transitioning to subordinate roles. Establishing a network of support fosters an environment where collaboration thrives, allowing individuals to share knowledge and experiences.

Asking for Help

This refers to recognizing one's limitations and actively seeking assistance from colleagues or peers to navigate challenges. For former school leaders, this practice becomes essential as they transition away from leadership positions and embrace new responsibilities. Educators can share their experiences and insights by reaching out for support and fostering a collaborative environment that enhances personal and professional growth.

“we should not take it as our responsibility; we should also ask help from our colleagues, and if there is collaboration, our work will become light, and we need not pretend that we do not need help because it is a good way of making your work light and you will not be burden with if there are many tasks that have been given to you. If you have what we call the technique of asking collaboration from your colleagues, everything would be running smoothly, especially with your responsibilities.” – P1

“It is important that you know somebody to ask, especially if they are also ahead of you because I had some colleagues ahead of me. So, I asked them, and they helped me align my way of acting, kasi hind mo maaalis yung position mo noon, but I need

to come up myself, and I said no because I realized na hindi na pala ako leader. It is my confidant or close person who reminded me of this role, and if I have some clarifications or questions, I ask them.” – P2

“You have to be friends with them if possible, kailangan e friend nimo sila tanan kay they will also teach you how to do things, and mo volunteer na jud na sila mam, basta you are friendly, you are kind with them.” – P3

Asking for help involves recognizing one's limitations and embracing vulnerability, which can be particularly challenging in cultures prioritizing self-reliance. Despite this difficulty, seeking assistance is a courageous act that can lead to substantial personal and professional growth (Hopp et al., 2024). In educational contexts, actively seeking help can facilitate sharing experiences and insights, fostering a collaborative environment that benefits all stakeholders. This culture of collaboration enhances not only individual development but also the overall effectiveness of the educational community (Zhang et al., 2022). Addressing and overcoming this stigma is crucial for cultivating a supportive culture where individuals feel comfortable seeking assistance (Lilley, 2023).

Building Friendships

This involves fostering genuine connections and rapport with colleagues in educational settings. For former school leaders transitioning to subordinate roles, cultivating these relationships is crucial for creating a supportive and collaborative environment. Educators can share insights, seek assistance, and enhance communication by engaging with peers personally, ultimately enriching the learning community.

“So, let us not be shy to ask, and let us not be proud; I noticed this because I have become a leader. Now there is already a big transition, so we need to accept that you need your colleagues and that they will help to do our work well.” – P1

“It is important that you know somebody to ask, especially if they are also ahead of you because I had some colleagues ahead of me. So, I asked them, and they helped me in aligning my way of acting.” – P2

“you have to be friends with them, if possible, kailangan e friend nimo sila tanan kay they will also teach you how to do things, and mo volunteer na jud na sila mam, basta you are friendly, you are kind with them.” – P3

Former school leaders can effectively adopt coping strategies such as sharing leadership responsibilities and fostering a culture of trust to enhance collaboration and alleviate stress. These approaches have been successfully implemented in diverse cultural contexts, including Lebanon and Uganda, where school leaders have utilized them to manage burnout and improve work environments (Nehme, 2019). Building friendships plays a vital role in this process, as it involves cultivating genuine connections and rapport with colleagues within educational settings. For former school leaders transitioning to subordinate roles, nurturing these relationships is essential for creating a supportive and collaborative atmosphere (Bailey et al., 2023).

Sharing of Knowledge

This involves exchanging skills, insights, and experiences among colleagues, fostering professional growth and collaboration. For former school leaders transitioning to subordinate roles, this process is essential in helping others learn from their expertise while adapting to new responsibilities. By sharing their knowledge, former leaders contribute to a continuous improvement and teamwork culture within educational settings.

“My experience as a teacher before helped me adapt and adjust to my new role. I realized I needed to step down and meet other teachers where they were. By sharing my insights, I can support their growth as well.” – P2

“It is important to build friendships with everyone. When you are kind and friendly to all, people will help you voluntarily. You learn a lot from these interactions, and it enhances the collaborative spirit.” – P3

Former school leaders transitioning to subordinate roles can profoundly enrich educational settings by sharing their knowledge, skills, and experiences. This collaborative process promotes professional growth, fosters teamwork, and cultivates a culture of continuous improvement within the institution (Upadhyaya, 2024). By leveraging their expertise, former leaders not only facilitate the learning of their colleagues but also adapt to their new responsibilities more effectively. Their insights can inspire innovation and best practices, ultimately contributing to a more effective educational environment (Kasau et al., 2022).

Managing Time Effectively

It allows school leaders to balance the demands of teaching, new responsibilities, and personal commitments. Your study on former school leaders adapting to subordinate roles found that time management is crucial in ensuring a smooth transition.

"I always consider time management and flexibility as forms of personal adjustment so that I do not struggle with the changes, especially with the new job description that has been given to me." - P2

Adaptability and effective time management are closely connected, particularly when transitioning into new roles, such as moving from a leadership position to a follower role. Just as adaptability helps expatriate teachers navigate unfamiliar environments and maintain psychological well-being (Ocampo et al., 2022), managing time effectively allows individuals to cope better with changing responsibilities. By allocating time wisely, former school leaders can prioritize tasks, reduce stress, and prevent burnout, enhancing their overall job satisfaction and positive functioning (Davis et al., 2024).

Being Flexible

This refers to adapting to changing circumstances and new information in a dynamic environment. In educational settings, flexibility is crucial for leaders and teachers, as it allows them to respond effectively to unexpected challenges, diverse student needs, and evolving institutional demands. Embracing flexibility fosters resilience and encourages innovation, enabling educators to adjust their approaches, curricula, and strategies to enhance learning outcomes.

"For me, I usually do my task without any murmuring or any complaint as long as I can do it and usually accept the task as a follower, so I made set adjustments." - P1

"It has always been my passion in teaching to do better and train those new to the field. And I also need to be flexible and accept the changes." - P2

Flexibility in educational leadership is important for adapting to different environments, addressing diverse student needs, and fostering innovation. This adaptability enables leaders and educators to respond effectively to unexpected challenges and evolving institutional demands, ultimately enhancing learning outcomes. The following sections explore the importance of flexibility in educational leadership, strategies for fostering adaptability, and the challenges faced in implementing flexible leadership (Niemeyer-Rens et al., 2022).

Practicing Adaptability

This involves cultivating the ability to adjust one's thoughts, behaviors, and strategies in response to new challenges and environmental changes. This adaptability allows them to navigate their new identities, embrace different responsibilities, and contribute effectively within the school community.

"It is trying to have a harmonious relationship with your colleagues, especially with your leaders. It might be very difficult to adapt, but we need to be adaptive, and as a follower, we need to be set for the good of our institution." - P1

"I had support from my colleagues when I was in my leadership role. They did not give advice but said, "Wait until you experience it." So, the keywords here are adjustment, adaptability, and flexibility for the changes." - P2

Adaptability is the ability to adjust cognitive, behavioral, and emotional responses in the face of change and uncertainty. This concept is closely linked to psychological flexibility, which encompasses accepting negative thoughts and feelings while actively pursuing goal-oriented actions that align with one's values (Waldeck et al., 2020). The development of adaptability involves learning from experiences and interactions with the environment, and it can be assessed through various competencies, strategies, and priorities. Cultivating this adaptability is essential for achieving personal and professional goals, enabling individuals to navigate challenges effectively and maintain resilience in dynamic contexts (Nejad et al., 2021).

3.3 Lessons and Insights of Former School Leaders Adapting to Subordinate Roles

A lesson is a valuable insight and experience gained by former school leaders as they transition from leadership roles to follower positions. These lessons often involve humility, adaptability, and the importance of collaboration. Former leaders learn to navigate their new responsibilities by reflecting on past experiences, managing their time effectively, and embracing new roles. These lessons help them contribute meaningfully to their educational environment, fostering personal growth and supporting the institution's overall success.

Showing Humility

This refers to the ability of former school leaders to set aside their previous authority and embrace their new roles as followers within educational environments. This involves recognizing that leadership is now in the hands of others, accepting guidance, and being open to learning from colleagues.

"It is important not to be proud of having been a leader. Instead, you must be humble enough to approach and work harmoniously with your colleagues." – P1

"Nothing is impossible if you humble yourself. The knowledge and skills I had as a leader may not fully apply now, and by humbling myself, I have been able to build better relationships and continue contributing." – P2

When leaders practice humility in a cultural or professional context, they strengthen the bonds within their teams, promoting inclusivity and shared growth, both essential for personal and organizational success. These traits help former leaders transition smoothly into subordinate roles, making meaningful contributions while supporting an inclusive and cooperative work environment (Black et al., 2024).

Adapting to Change

This involves adjusting to new circumstances, roles, or environments, especially when transitioning from familiar leadership to subordinate roles. In educational settings, this adaptation requires individuals to embrace new responsibilities, modify their behavior, and adopt a flexible mindset.

"I adapted by learning from younger colleagues, especially regarding technology. This openness to change allowed me to grow even in my new role as a follower." – P1

"I needed to adjust to my new work schedule and job description. Certain skills from my leadership role no longer applied, and I had to shift my mindset to follow rather than lead." - P2

Adaptive leadership is essential for navigating the evolving demands of millennial students and integrating technology. Leaders must engage in continuous professional development and revise curricula to stay aligned with modern needs. Singh (2020) emphasizes that these strategies are critical for fostering a collaborative, inclusive school culture that supports educators and students. Through effective adaptation, former leaders can thrive in subordinate roles, contributing positively to their educational environments while promoting collective growth.

Maintaining Professionalism

This involves consistently upholding ethical standards, demonstrating respect, and exhibiting a commitment to excellence, even transitioning from leadership to subordinate roles. In educational settings, former leaders must continue to set a positive example for colleagues and students, honoring their responsibilities while supporting their new leaders.

"Even though I am no longer a leader, I maintain a professional attitude. I always perform my duties diligently and never allow my work to embarrass my reputation." – P1

"I follow the rules and job description closely, ensuring I fulfill my responsibilities without comparing myself to others. Professionalism is important, no matter what position you hold." – P2

Professionalism is deeply intertwined with integrity, which extends beyond mere legal compliance to encompass ethical and moral conduct. This connection is essential in building and maintaining public trust and confidence in any profession (Baciu, 2024). Integrity involves upholding political and institutional values in the public sector

while ensuring legal and transparent practices in the private sector. It forms the foundation of ethical professional behavior and decision-making (Chen, 2024).

Insights refers to the deep understanding and realizations that former school leaders gain as they transition into subordinate roles within educational settings. These insights often revolve around humility, collaboration, and adaptability. These insights also help them navigate new challenges, manage time efficiently, and build stronger relationships, ultimately enhancing their professional growth and the success of the educational environment.

Embracing Lifelong Learning

It reflects a commitment to personal and professional growth, adapting to new challenges, and staying current with advancements in one's field. In educational settings, lifelong learning enables educators, especially those transitioning from leadership to subordinate roles, to remain relevant, improve their practices, and contribute meaningfully to their teams and institutions (Niyomves et al., 2024).

"I have realized that nothing is permanent in this world because you may be a leader at one time, but you cannot always stay the same. Whatever your future, sometimes they will not always materialize." - P1

"Now that I am working as an instructor, I realize that there were many loopholes that I did not recognize when I was once in a higher position. This experience also made me realize that we need to go down so that we ourselves could also experience their role." - P2

Lifelong learning is crucial in the context of educators transitioning from leadership to subordinate roles, as it fosters a growth mindset that encourages continuous knowledge and skill acquisition (Owusu-Agyeman, 2024). Embracing lifelong learning means recognizing the need to adapt to new challenges and remain current with educational advancements. This commitment enhances their professional capabilities and enables them to contribute more effectively to their teams and institutions (Eikeland et al., 2024).

Recognizing Diverse Perspectives

This practice is essential for fostering an inclusive atmosphere where everyone feels respected and heard. Acknowledging diverse perspectives enables collaboration and promotes empathy among colleagues, especially in educators transitioning from leadership to subordinate roles.

"You can still treat your colleagues as friends despite holding a higher position than them. You should not be proud of it because life is not constant; it is only temporary." - P1

"I communicate with them and tell them they can see it better at their level. I also realized that theories are far different from actual practice as a teacher." - P2

The professional image of a leader is pivotal in shaping perceptions and determining the effectiveness of an educational institution. Leaders who project a positive image through their expertise, strong leadership qualities, and strategic thinking can significantly impact the institution's development and its interactions with the community (Kovalchuk, 2023).

Embracing Change with Resilience

This helps school leaders develop the ability to adapt positively to new circumstances and challenges, particularly when transitioning from leadership roles to follower positions within educational settings. This resilience enables individuals to face uncertainties and obstacles with a constructive mindset, facilitating personal growth and professional development.

"You must adapt to the situation and avoid doing things that could destroy your image and profession. It would be best if you handled your profession professionally." - P1

"This transition has improved my professional growth and personal development because it made me realize that age does not matter. That nothing is too late for me to improve the educational system." - P2

Resilience is the ability to effectively cope with, absorb, recover from, and adapt to changes or stressors while ensuring desired outcomes. This involves enhancing anticipatory, absorptive, adaptive, and transformative capacities, which are crucial for educators navigating role transitions (Shackleton et al., 2024). In challenging contexts, such as during times of conflict, resilience empowers teachers to manage emotional stress and continue delivering high-quality education despite adversities. Developing resilience requires identifying factors that influence it and implementing effective models to strengthen it, which is essential for maintaining psychological well-being and fostering a positive learning environment (Hackey, 2023).

4.0 Conclusion

The experiences of former school leaders transitioning to subordinate roles reveal that their motivation and coping mechanisms are important to their successful adaptation. This study indicates that these individuals are driven by a desire to remain impactful within the educational system, even when their roles change. Their level of motivation significantly influences their ability to navigate the challenges associated with their new positions. While highly motivated former leaders are likely to engage deeply and adapt effectively, those who struggle with their identity may face difficulties in their transition.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that emotional satisfaction is needed when personal values are aligned with professional responsibilities. Former leaders who find joy in collaboration and mentorship may derive greater satisfaction from their roles than those focused solely on authority or recognition. The study emphasizes that the motivations behind these transitions are complex and multifaceted, shaped by different factors, including previous leadership experiences.

Future research may explore the longitudinal effects of such transitions on educational outcomes and the workplace. Exploring the experiences of a larger and more diverse sample of former leaders across various educational contexts could enrich the findings and allow for more comprehensive conclusions. Moreover, investigating the support structures and professional development opportunities available to former school leaders may inform strategies that enhance their transition experiences. By focusing on the significance of mentorship and peer support, educational institutions may foster a more collaborative and resilient environment for all teachers, ultimately benefiting the entire school community.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Cedar Agua was responsible for the conceptualization and design of the study, as well as the collection and analysis of data. He took the lead in drafting the manuscript and provided final approval for the version to be published. Princes Joy G. Arambala and Meralou Idulsa contributed significantly by conducting a thorough literature review and assisting in the data analysis and interpretation. They also played a role in critically revising the manuscript and approving the final draft. Dr. Edroslyn J. Fernandez focused on the methodology design and supervised the research process. She also reviewed and edited the manuscript, ensured its quality, and gave the final approval for publication.

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There is no conflict of interest in this research

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