Strategies and Practices of Women Leaders in the VUCA World: The Case of President Ramon Magsaysay State University

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INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly changing global landscape, characterized by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity, and Ambiguity (VUCA), effective leadership is important in the educational sector. Within this context, the role of women leaders in educational institutions is of particular interest and significance. Despite the traditionally male-dominated nature of leadership roles, an increasing number of women are assuming leadership positions in educational institutions worldwide. This study explores the unique challenges and opportunities faced by women leaders in the VUCA world of educational leadership.

Women leaders possess a unique set of skills that are particularly well-suited for navigating the complexities of the VUCA world. These skills enable women leaders to foster innovation, build resilient teams, and navigate ambiguity with confidence. Effective leadership is important to achieve an organizational goal. The world of work is rapidly evolving thus, women leaders must cope with the changing world, and to cope with the fast-changing world, it is important to redesign its management styles. In President Ramon Magsaysay State University, women hold 70% of the key positions. The designation of women to key positions is not only a response to Sustainable development Goal 5 which is Gender Equality and women empowerment, but also based on the credentials and the ability of women to lead the organization. Likewise, the university believes that women empowerment is important as the organization is committed to deliver holistic services to the students.

The preference for women leaders in educational institutions can be attributed to several factors. Firstly, women leaders are often perceived as more inclusive and collaborative, which is essential for fostering a positive organizational culture and enhancing team performance (Wooley 2021). Additionally, women leaders are more likely to adopt transformational leadership styles, which have been shown to be particularly effective in driving organizational change and adaptation in VUCA environments. Furthermore, the increasing diversity of student populations in educational institutions has created a greater demand for leaders who can effectively understand and respond to the needs of diverse stakeholders, making women leaders an attractive choice for top management.

Despite their unique strengths, women leaders face numerous challenges in the VUCA world of educational leadership. These challenges may include gender bias and discrimination, limited access to networks and resources, and societal expectations regarding gender roles and leadership (Eagly & Carli, 2017). Additionally, women leaders may experience imposter syndrome or feelings of self-doubt in male-dominated environments, which can undermine their confidence and effectiveness as leaders (Chrystyl & Chang 2020). Furthermore, the intersectionality of gender with other aspects of identity, such as race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status, can compound these challenges for women leaders from marginalized backgrounds.

In navigating the VUCA world, PRMSU women leaders adopt a variety of management styles that are responsive to the dynamic and uncertain nature of the educational landscape. Adaptive leadership, which emphasizes flexibility, resilience, and continuous learning, is particularly well-suited for addressing complex challenges and seizing emerging opportunities. Additionally, transformational leadership, characterized by visionary leadership, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, can empower teams to embrace change and achieve collective goals in the face of uncertainty (Ramakrishnan 2021). By combining

elements of adaptive and transformational leadership, women leaders can effectively navigate the complexities of the VUCA world while empowering their teams to thrive.

Using a qualitative case study design this study investigated the leadership traits of PRMSU women leaders, it also examined the management styles of female leaders and their experiences. Further this study investigated the responses of the subordinates in embracing the VUCA world under the leadership of the female leaders.

Central Research Question: what are the strategies and Practices of Women Leaders of PRMSU?

Specific Research Questions:

1. What are the leadership traits of PRMSU women leaders?

2. What are the management styles of female leaders under the VUCA world?

3. What are the responses of the subordinates in embracing the VUCA world?

4. What are the experiences of female university leaders?

5. What are the challenges of Women leaders in navigating the VUCA world?

Research Paradigm

Women empowerment theory will serve as the research paradigm of the study. The theory argued that there is women empowerment when women are involved in the process of decision making to change their level of self-confidence, especially about women's status and how women make decisions. Empowerment also raises the status of women through education, awareness, literacy, and training. Women's empowerment equips and allows women to take life-determining decisions. (Hur, 2016)

According to the theory, a woman develops feelings of personal power, command, and self-sufficiency over material and inherent choices she must make. Further, empowerment takes place on interpersonal level. Here, a woman influences the decision-making power of another woman through their contact and working together. In the case of President Ramon Magsaysay State University, through collaboration and cooperation, women leaders can influence each other's decision.

In PRMSU, women empowerment goes beyond mere rhetoric, it involves providing its women leaders with the tools, knowledge, and resources necessary for them to adapt to the VUCA world. Empowerment enables women to challenge traditional gender roles and societal expectations. Through education, skills training, and mentorship programs, provided by the university, women can develop the confidence to pursue their aspirations and overcome systemic barriers. Furthermore, creating supportive environments that validate women's experiences and perspectives can strengthen their confidence and sense of self-worth.

Women empowerment is not just a theoretical concept but a transformative force that has the potential to reshape societies and institutions. By fostering confidence, self-esteem, and leadership among women, empowerment initiatives can create more equitable and inclusive communities where all individuals can thrive particularly in the academia. However, achieving meaningful empowerment requires sustained commitment, resources, and collaboration across sectors. By grounding understanding of women empowerment in this theoretical principle the institution can work towards building a more just and equitable world for all.

METHODOLOGY

Method of Research

The study used the qualitative research design to have an in-depth understanding of the experiences of women leaders of PRMSU in navigating the VUCA world. Qualitative research design is known to

provide richly detailed understanding about a chosen topic and additional quotations of actual conversations done during the in-depth (face to face) interviews with the respondents.

Descriptive case study was used to explain real-life events of women leaders. A qualitative approach is appropriate for this study to have a deeper understanding of the practices and strategies of PRMSU women leaders. Moreover, it is also because the study does not involve quantifiable variables. Qualitative research is defined as an in-depth study of non-quantifiable phenomena such as human experiences and behaviors; it is empirical research where the data are not in the form of numbers (Ounch,1998). The qualitative research was consisted of three parts.

First, a key informant interview with the women leaders of the university was conducted in order to study the experiences and the reactions of the subordinates towards female leadership.

Secondly, a focus group discussion with at least 15 women leaders was also conducted to obtain information about the personal or group feelings, opinions, and perceptions of the participants. The FGD were broken into two sessions.

Lastly, an interview with the head of the university was necessary to examine the basis of appointing and designating women in higher positions. Articles from credible scholars, books, journals, and published documents will also be endeavored.

For this study, there were 15 participants from the total of 38 women leaders occupying high positions in the university. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling. It must be noted that the primary consideration in purposive sampling is the researcher's judgment as to who can provide the accurate information in order to achieve the objectives of the study. This type of sampling is useful when a researcher wants to construct a historical reality, describe a phenomenon, or to develop something on which only a little is known. (Kumar, 2005)

The researchers personally conducted the data gathering and collection for this study. The researchers observed the necessary protocols required for the data gathering. The researchers personally transcribed the interviews and made thematic analysis on the results that are relevant to the study. Thematic analysis is a widely used qualitative data analysis method. It is done by identifying the emerging themes from the data collected. According to Braun and Clarke (2006) it is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I. Leadership traits of PRMSU women leaders.

The participants highlighted the significance of assertiveness, collaboration, and democratic leadership in a collaborative setting. They strongly believe in openness to others and avoiding any sense of hierarchy, creating a close-knit group dynamic akin to a family. They stress the significance of following rules and ensuring others recognize their power. The participants also recognized their calm demeanor, which prevented them from raising their voices even when angry.

"as a leader, I need to use my "power" to assert my authority, you know power is not bad it is essential to show our authority to our subordinates"

"I am an emphatic leader.. we need to show empathy to our people so we could work harmoniously and I think they will open up to you if they knew you are open"

They carefully consider multiple factors, such as culture, situation, and the needs of the people. Participants answered that flexibility is important in this diverse work environment.

"our work environment is very different from before, some of our employees are not from this province and they have different culture"

"I think to understand each other we need to konow their culture so that we know how to adjust also, you know, we come from different places"

It is believed that there is no universally perfect leadership style. They assert their qualifications, and diligent efforts set them apart and deserve recognition.

II. Management styles of female leaders in the VUCA world.

The participants also showcased their leadership styles, which focused on discipline and timeliness. They asserted that a blend of democratic, collaborative, and occasionally authoritarian leadership styles is crucial, particularly in a diverse work environment. They also emphasized the significance of establishing a robust presence within the group and being adaptable to respond to changes effectively.

"There is no perfect leadership style, it should be a mixture of style, you can't be a democratic leader only, you should be authoritarian sometimes"

" me, I have been a leader for 15 years and I use different technique in leading my people you need to consider a lot of factors like culture, situation"

The participants emphasized the importance of being flexible and adaptable when dealing with evolving situations, like the generation gap at PRMSU. They recognized that leadership styles are flawed, but they asserted that a blend of these styles is essential to address the varied requirements of the university.

III. Responses of the subordinates to in embracing the VUCA world?

The participants narrated their difficulty engaging with individuals due to their limited authority and need for prior experience in lower-level positions. However, they need help dealing with individuals, as they hold their position and leader in high regard.

"sometimes it is difficult to deal with my subordinates hence, I to deal with them easily I ask for a memo so that everyone will comply".

They also highlighted the significance of consultation and participation, regardless of hierarchy or position.

"in this VUCA world, we need each other especially in decision making, thus collaboration is very important"

"Even if we have the authority, sometimes we can get some inputs from our subordinates that is why we need their voice or participation in the decision-making process"

These leaders implied that a balanced approach to leadership is critical, with strictness as important as adapting to different cultures and earning trust, stressing the critical role of being both strict and compassionate.

"you must show them your authority so they will respect you, or else… "

"me as a leader, I could say I work well with my subordinates, I mean we have a good relationship, maybe because I am open to them and they could see that I am trying to reach out"

Likewise, it was narratively revealed that people often perceive men as adaptable and resolute in their decision-making. They tend to exhibit compassion more prominently, necessitating comprehending and adjusting to diverse cultures and situations in leadership.

IV. Experiences of female university leaders.

Women leaders narrated their leadership difficulties, especially in high-level management. Additionally, they emphasized the faculty's high regard for them and the importance of adjusting to the varied culture within the organization. They recognized that resistance to change can be difficult but stressed the significance of comprehending and embracing one another's distinctions.

" change is inevitable, I always say that to my subordinates, but you cant avoid people who resist change, maybe because of age? Or they just really want to stick to traditional"

Women leaders also recognized the intricate nature of the organization and the pressure it entails. They emphasized their dedication to backing the PRMSU administration and fostering harmonious relationships. They also discussed the generation gap, which poses a challenge in managing the differences among teachers in the present day.

" as a leader for almost twenty year, one observation in this university is the support to administration I think that is the reason why our university is thriving because there is no faction among the leaders"

" for me, I could say that we respect each other, and that is very important to build a strong organization.

"despite our diverse culture, we understand each other and we support each other, and I am always proud that I am one of the leaders of this university"

Regardless of their diverse backgrounds and genders, the leaders observed a strong respect demonstrated by men and women. They recognize the current volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous era the organization is in and are dedicated to supporting the administration.

V. Challenges of women leaders in navigating the VUCA world.

As explicitly stated, women leaders faced challenges in a dynamic world, encompassing issues such as acceptance, time management, and the delicate equilibrium between academic responsibilities and administrative duties. They have noted that making decisive decisions, handling situations diplomatically, and encouraging others to adapt while maintaining authority are crucial.

" One of the challenges for me is for the people to accept change, especially the senior employees I some, (I am not saying all) still prefer the traditional way of teaching"

" it very challenging to manage diverse people, this tested my leadership style, I used different strategies to win the trust and respect of my subordinates"

Meanwhile, they also narrated that managing time effectively can be challenging, as it may imbalance academic responsibilities and administrative duties. They likewise noted that understanding cultural differences in the workplace is crucial for effective communication and to prevent misunderstandings.

"well, maybe because we came from different places, sometimes we have misunderstanding or miscommunication, and that is challenging also, as a leader, I need to be flexible and adapt to the people"

Relatively, they have posited that time management can be a challenge, especially for staff members who are new to their roles and may need more experience with quality assurance. Women leaders must consistently stay informed about the ever-changing dynamics of the work environment.

"it is difficult to be a working mom, you need to balance work and motherhood, but as I said, it is just a matter of time management"

Ultimately, women leaders encountered many obstacles when juggling family and work responsibilities. However, they must stay dedicated and foster a constructive work atmosphere.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was focused on women leadership in the Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, and Ambiguous (VUCA) world of work in President Ramon Magsaysay State University.

1. The study revealed that assertiveness, collaboration, and democratic values are the leadership traits of women leaders in PRMSU. The women leaders of PRMSU believe that power is important to lead and to assert their authority. Likewise, the study finds that collaboration is important in the achievement of the organizational goals as it helps improve productivity and gives employees a sense of purpose in the organization. The participants highlighted the significance of adjusting to the needs of their team and cultivating a collaborative environment It is also interesting to note that PRMSU women leaders are value oriented. In this study, the participants stressed how values affect the performance of an organization, thus the participants claimed that leaders must be value laden.

2. Leadership and leadership style is complex because it is an expression of the leader's own behavior, thoughts, experience, and culture. It can be surmised that women leaders of PRMSU have no particular leadership style as they believe that there's NO "one-size-fits-all" leadership style, particularly in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. The women leaders asserted that a blend of democratic, collaborative, and sometimes authoritarian leadership styles is essential, specifically in a diverse work environment.

3. Organizational culture helps improve workflows and guides the decision-making process. It also helps teams overcome barriers of ambiguity. Thus, the study revealed that women leaders of PRMSU are aware of the organizational culture. It was found that one of the reasons why employees are engaged is because the leaders understand and accept each other's differences.

4. In our society, men are brought up with a mindset to make them feel superior and privileged than women. This superiority complex phenomenon is still prevalent in the organizational landscape of PRMSU. The study showed that despite the authority vested to women leaders, some still suffer from criticism. However, women who have strong personality and who assert their power can balance the situation. Further, women leaders of PRMSU are compassionate, it was also found that because of compassion and empathy, women leaders gained the trust and respect of male subordinates.

5. The participation of women in positions of power and decision-making is relevant in PRMSU however, being a woman leader who occupies vital position in the organization is not easy. Women leaders in PRMSU are confronted with challenges especially is embracing the VUCA world. They study shows that some faculty and even some officials refuse to accept change. Another challenge is the acceptance that they are being led by a female leader.

6. Another interesting finding is balance between academic work and administrative work. In PRMSU, most of the female leaders are also members of the teaching staff. Because of heavy administrative work, teaching is being sidelined. But because they are committed, they manage to balance teaching and admin work. Work life balance is one of the biggest challenge of women leaders. Because of work commitment and passion, sometimes they neglect their families.

7. Communication is essential in management especially in this complex world of work. Effective communication means providing acknowledgement to the members of the organization that ensures they feel heard and understood. In this study however, communication is a challenge to every women leaders. As we live in a fast-changing world, communication has also evolved. With the rise of technology, instant messaging, video conferencing, and social media platforms are being utilized as a form of communication. However, in this study it was revealed that online communication leads to miscommunication.

8. Complex and fulfilling experiences are the common experiences of the women leaders of PRMSU under the VUCA world. One of the experiences of the female leaders is the diverse culture. The participants argued that it is not easy to manage people who have diverse culture thus it is important to be flexible. It is worth to note that people in PRMSU respect their leaders. For the women leaders they feel a sense of fulfillment if the employees show high regards to their leaders. Additionally, they study shows that leaders are loyal and dedicated to the current administration.

In summary, women leaders of PRMSU are typical leaders that face obstacles and challenges. As normal individuals they sometimes feel the need to balance between life and work. Leaders juggle the demands of career

and personal life. It is also evident in this study that all women leaders have high qualification and each of them has its own unique character. Their love for work, dedication, and passion are the reasons why they thrive.

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