

Leadership Skills of Middle Managers and Their Impact on Organizational Effectiveness in Selected Higher Education Institutions in Manila

Dr. Jeffrey B. Villena

Graduate School, Eulogio “Amang” Rodriguez Institute of Science and Technology, Manila, Philippines

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the leadership skills of middle managers and their influence on organizational effectiveness in selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Manila. A mixed-methods research design was employed, combining survey questionnaires administered to school administrators, faculty, and non-teaching personnel with semi-structured interviews providing deeper insights into leadership practices and institutional challenges. Findings revealed that middle managers' leadership skills were generally highly evident, particularly in self-management, reflective thinking, emotional intelligence, and authentic leadership. Organizational effectiveness was also assessed as high, with adaptability and innovation, organizational culture, and leadership and governance emerging as the strongest dimensions. Significant differences were observed among respondent groups, with administrators consistently providing higher ratings than faculty and non-teaching personnel. Correlation analysis indicated positive relationships between leadership skills and organizational effectiveness, although these were not statistically significant. Interviews highlighted recurring challenges, including limited financial management capacity, slow adoption of innovative practices, weak communication and strategic alignment, and underprioritized professional development opportunities. The study concludes that middle managers play a pivotal role in sustaining institutional performance, yet targeted interventions are necessary. Recommendations include structured leadership development programs, transparent resource management, enhanced communication mechanisms, and continuous professional growth initiatives to strengthen leadership capacity and ensure long-term organizational sustainability in HEIs.

Keywords: Leadership Skills, Middle Managers, Organizational Effectiveness, Higher Education Institutions

INTRODUCTION

The higher education sector, encompassing teaching, research, extension services, and administrative functions, relies heavily on the leadership of administrators and middle managers to align institutional goals with the daily efforts of faculty and non-academic staff. Positioned as vital conduits, middle managers translate policies into practice, motivate personnel, and coordinate academic and administrative operations. Their ability to inspire, guide, and support employees directly influences the effectiveness of HEIs, shaping both individual performance and collective outcomes such as innovation, collegiality, and organizational sustainability. Leadership, therefore, emerges as a central factor in ensuring that HEIs fulfill their mandate to deliver quality education, generate research, and contribute to national development.

In the Philippine context, HEIs face the dual challenge of remaining globally competitive while meeting local educational demands. These circumstances underscore the need for middle managers who embody managerial competence and transformational leadership qualities, fostering trust, strengthening engagement, and encouraging employees to prioritize collective institutional goals. By examining leadership skills through this lens, the study generates evidence-based insights to inform the development of competencies aligned with organizational needs and employee welfare.

This study is anchored on Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985), which posits that leaders inspire

followers to move beyond transactional exchanges by articulating a compelling vision, stimulating intellectual growth, and offering individualized support. Transformational leadership has been consistently associated with higher job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, and sustainable productivity in universities (Fonkeng & Abangma, 2024; Salinas & Salazar, 2025), while enhancing engagement and adaptability when leaders demonstrate authenticity, mentoring, and vision-setting (Sharma & Singh, 2024). In the context of HEIs in Manila, this framework provides a valuable lens for analyzing how middle managers' leadership skills influence organizational effectiveness, showing that strong leadership enhances trust, collaboration, and institutional performance, whereas weak leadership diminishes morale and hinders outcomes. This study addresses a notable research gap in the Philippine higher education context: while numerous studies have examined transformational leadership in broad organizational settings, limited empirical evidence exists regarding the specific leadership competencies of middle managers and their measurable impact on organizational effectiveness within HEIs in Manila.

METHODOLOGY

The study on the leadership skills of middle managers and their impact on organizational effectiveness in selected Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Manila employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture both measurable outcomes and in-depth perspectives. The quantitative component used structured survey questionnaires to assess leadership skills and organizational effectiveness, while the qualitative component involved semi-structured interviews to gain deeper insights into how middle managers influence institutional performance. This design allowed the researchers to triangulate findings, enhancing validity and providing a comprehensive view of leadership dynamics within HEIs.

The reliability of the survey instruments was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients ranging from 0.85 to 0.92 across all leadership and organizational effectiveness dimensions, indicating high internal consistency. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA for group comparisons, and Pearson correlation to examine relationships between leadership skills and organizational effectiveness. Qualitative data from interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and insights.

Using purposive sampling, the study selected 40 middle managers, 80 faculty, and 50 non-academic staff from three HEIs in Manila. Stratified sampling principles guided the process to ensure that perceptions from administrators, teaching personnel, and support staff were adequately represented. Purposive sampling was employed because it enables the selection of participants with direct involvement in leadership and organizational processes, ensuring relevance to the research problem (Miciano & Miciano, 2024; Torres, 2023). Stratification further improved the reliability and precision of findings by allowing meaningful comparison across institutional roles.

Data for this study were collected through standardized survey questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The survey consisted of closed-ended questions and Likert-scale items to measure leadership competencies such as vision-setting, communication, decision-making, empathy, and collaboration, alongside organizational effectiveness indicators such as employee engagement, collegiality, productivity, and institutional sustainability. This approach allowed for systematic collection of quantifiable data across a broad sample, revealing patterns and trends in perceptions of leadership and effectiveness.

To complement the survey, semi-structured interviews were conducted with a purposively selected group of administrators, faculty, and staff. Open-ended questions focused on how middle managers exercise leadership skills, the challenges they face in balancing managerial and leadership functions, and their perceived influence on organizational effectiveness. By triangulating quantitative and qualitative data, the study not only identified measurable relationships but also captured nuanced insights into leadership practices. This methodological integration enhanced credibility and provided a holistic understanding of how the leadership skills of middle managers shape organizational effectiveness in Manila HEIs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sub-problem No. 1: How do the school administrators, Faculty and Non-teaching Personnel assess the Leadership Skills of Middle Managers?

Table 1 Assessment on Leadership Skills of Middle Managers

Indicators	School Administrators		Faculty		Non-Teaching Personnel		Composite		Rank
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	
1. Ability to embrace their own vulnerability	4.23	HE	4.17	E	4.18	E	4.20	HE	10
2. Ability the Dig Deep	4.11	E	4.19	E	3.92	E	4.07	E	11
3. Ability to admit mistakes	4.94	HE	4.89	HE	4.45	HE	4.76	HE	1
4. An aptitude to reflective thinking	4.94	HE	4.67	HE	4.08	E	4.57	HE	5.5
5. Ability to communicate a compelling vision	4.90	HE	4.45	HE	4.40	HE	4.58	HE	3.5
6. Demonstrate self-understanding	4.69	HE	4.50	HE	4.55	HE	4.58	HE	3.5
7. Demonstrate self-management	4.81	HE	4.63	HE	4.40	HE	4.61	HE	2
8. Ability to lead authentically	4.81	HE	4.54	HE	4.15	E	4.50	HE	9
9. Use deep listening skills	4.75	HE	4.64	HE	4.33	HE	4.57	HE	5.5
10. Display emotional intelligence	4.76	HE	4.53	HE	4.38	HE	4.56	HE	7
11. High level relationship management skills	4.75	HE	4.55	HE	4.29	HE	4.53	HE	8
Overall Weighted Mean	4.70	HE	4.52	HE	4.29	HE	4.50	HE	

Legend:

5	4.20 - 5.00	Highly Evident	(HE)
4	3.40 – 4.19	Evident	(E)
3	2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Evident	(ME)
2	1.80 – 2.59	Least Evident	(LE)
1	1.00 – 1.79	Not Evident	(NE)

As presented in Table 1 on the assessment of leadership skills in public integrated schools, it was rated highly evident by school administrators and faculty, and highly evident by non-teaching personnel, as reflected by the

computed weighted mean values of 4.70, 4.52, and 4.29, respectively. Consequently, it resulted in an overall weighted mean of 4.50, verbally interpreted as highly evident.

Ranking the indicators revealed the following results: “Ability to admit mistakes” (WM = 4.76) ranked 1, highlighting the importance of acknowledging errors to foster growth and trust; “Demonstrate self-management” (WM = 4.61) ranked 2; “Ability to communicate a compelling vision” and “Demonstrate self-understanding” (WM = 4.58) ranked 3.5; “An aptitude to reflective thinking” and “Use deep listening skills” (WM = 4.57) ranked 5.5; “Display emotional intelligence” (WM = 4.56) ranked 7; “High level relationship management skills” (WM = 4.53) ranked 8; “Ability to lead authentically” (WM = 4.50) ranked 9; “Ability to embrace their own vulnerability” (WM = 4.20) ranked 10; and “Ability to Dig Deep” (WM = 4.07) ranked 11.

This indicates that school leaders possess strong competencies in self-management, emotional intelligence, authentic leadership, and communication of vision, which are critical for guiding teams and fostering a positive organizational culture. The lower-ranked indicators suggest areas for further development, particularly in encouraging vulnerability and resilience in decision-making.

The results are supported by Nguyen (2024), who emphasized that effective school leadership requires a balance of self-awareness, emotional intelligence, and reflective practices to cultivate a supportive and high-performing educational environment. Leadership that embraces authenticity, accountability, and strategic vision contributes to both staff motivation and institutional effectiveness.

Sub-problem No. 2: Is there a significant difference among the assessments of the three groups of respondents as to Leadership Skills of Middle Managers?

Table 2 Test of Significant Difference in Leadership Skills Assessment of Middle Managers among School Administrators, Faculty, and Non-Teaching Personnel in HEIs in Manila

Variables	In Group	Mean	F-value	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Ability to Embrace Vulnerability	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.20	0.29	0.749	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Ability to Dig Deep	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.07	1.56	0.221	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Ability to Admit Mistakes	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.76	8.76	0.001*	Reject H_0	Significant
Reflective Thinking	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.57	15.32	0.000*	Reject H_0	Significant
Ability to Communicate Compelling Vision	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.58	8.18	0.002*	Reject H_0	Significant
Self-Understanding	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.58	1.08	0.346	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Self-Management	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.61	6.12	0.005*	Reject H_0	Significant
Ability to Lead Authentically	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.50	7.54	0.003*	Reject H_0	Significant
Use Deep Listening Skills	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.57	4.18	0.021*	Reject H_0	Significant

Display Intelligence	Emotional	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.56	2.74	0.073	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
High-Level Management Skills	Relationship	Admin vs Faculty vs NTP	4.53	3.85	0.039*	Reject H_0	Significant

Note: One-way ANOVA, $\alpha = 0.05$; $p < 0.05$ = significant

As shown in Table 2, the results of the ANOVA reveal that there is a statistically significant difference between the assessments of school administrators, faculty, and non-teaching personnel across several dimensions of leadership skills.

For ability to admit mistakes, school administrators reported a mean score of 4.76, followed by faculty at 4.89, and non-teaching personnel at 4.45. In reflective thinking, administrators scored 4.94, faculty 4.67, and non-teaching personnel 4.08. Significant differences were also observed in communicating a compelling vision (4.90 vs. 4.45 vs. 4.40), self-management (4.81 vs. 4.63 vs. 4.40), authentic leadership (4.81 vs. 4.54 vs. 4.15), deep listening skills (4.75 vs. 4.64 vs. 4.33), and high-level relationship management skills (4.75 vs. 4.55 vs. 4.29). The computed F-values for these variables were statistically significant, with p-values below the 0.05 threshold, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis.

Conversely, no significant differences were observed in embracing vulnerability (4.23 vs. 4.17 vs. 4.18), digging deep (4.11 vs. 4.19 vs. 3.92), self-understanding (4.69 vs. 4.50 vs. 4.55), and emotional intelligence (4.76 vs. 4.53 vs. 4.38), indicating that all groups had similar perceptions in these areas.

These findings suggest that school administrators generally perceive leadership practices more positively than faculty and non-teaching personnel, likely reflecting their closer involvement in decision-making, leadership responsibilities, and strategic planning. Faculty and non-teaching personnel, on the other hand, may experience gaps in communication, inclusivity, and engagement, which could account for the lower ratings in certain dimensions.

Overall, the results underscore the importance of bridging perceptual gaps through more participatory and inclusive leadership approaches. Addressing these differences can enhance shared understanding, foster a cohesive school culture, and promote more effective leadership practices across all stakeholder groups.

How do the three groups of respondents assess the organizational effectiveness?

Table 3 Assessment of Organizational Effectiveness

Indicators	School Administrators		Faculty		Non-Teaching Personnel		Composite		Rank
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	
1. Goal Attainment	4.40	HE	4.14	E	3.96	E	4.17	E	4
2. Resource Utilization	4.33	HE	3.93	E	4.19	E	4.15	E	5
3. Internal Processes and Systems	4.34	HE	3.95	E	4.11	E	4.13	HE	7
4. Adaptability and Innovation	4.42	HE	4.07	E	4.21	HE	4.23	HE	1
5. Employee Development and Satisfaction	4.32	HE	3.98	E	4.12	E	4.14	HE	6
6. Stakeholder Satisfaction	4.36	HE	3.88	E	3.98	E	4.07	HE	8

7. Organizational Culture and Climate	4.38	HE	4.08	E	4.20	HE	4.22	HE	2.5
8. Leadership and Governance	4.42	HE	4.07	E	4.20	HE	4.22	HE	2.5
Overall Weighted Mean	4.39	HE	4.04	E	4.14	HE	4.17	HE	

Legend:

5	4.20 - 5.00	Highly Evident	(HE)
4	3.40 – 4.19	Evident	(E)
3	2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Evident	(ME)
2	1.80 – 2.59	Least Evident	(LE)
1	1.00 – 1.79	Not Evident	(NE)

As presented in Table 3 on the assessment of organizational effectiveness in public integrated schools, it was rated highly effective by school administrators and non-teaching personnel, and effective by faculty, as reflected by the computed weighted mean values of 4.39, 4.14, and 4.04, respectively. Consequently, it resulted in an overall weighted mean of 4.17, verbally interpreted as highly effective.

Ranking the indicators revealed the following results: “Adaptability and Innovation” (WM = 4.23) ranked 1, highlighting the organization’s strength in responding to changes and promoting creative solutions; “Organizational Culture and Climate” and “Leadership and Governance” (WM = 4.22) both ranked 2.5, emphasizing the positive work environment and effective leadership practices; “Goal Attainment” (WM = 4.17) ranked 4, indicating that the school is generally successful in achieving its objectives; “Resource Utilization” (WM = 4.15) ranked 5; “Employee Development and Satisfaction” (WM = 4.14) ranked 6; “Internal Processes and Systems” (WM = 4.13) ranked 7; and “Stakeholder Satisfaction” (WM = 4.07) ranked 8, reflecting an area with potential for further improvement.

This indicates that the school demonstrates strong effectiveness in fostering innovation, cultivating a positive organizational climate, and maintaining sound leadership and governance practices. The lower-ranked indicators, particularly stakeholder satisfaction and internal processes, suggest areas where strategic attention could further enhance overall performance.

The results are supported by Alzouebi et al. (2025), who emphasized that effective school leadership and strong stakeholder engagement are crucial for fostering a culture of innovation, which in turn enhances organizational effectiveness, promotes a positive organizational climate, and improves overall institutional performance.

Is there a significant relationship between Leadership Skills and Organizational Effectiveness?

Table 4 Significant Relationship between Leadership Skills of Middle Managers and Organizational Effectiveness

Variables	r-value	Strength of Relationship	p-value	Decision	Interpretation
Leadership Skills vs Goal Attainment	0.682	High Correlation	>0.05	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Leadership Skills vs Resource	0.655	High Correlation	>0.05	Fail to	Not

Utilization				Reject H_0	Significant
Leadership Skills vs Internal Processes & Systems	0.639	High Correlation	>0.05	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Leadership Skills vs Adaptability & Innovation	0.712	High Correlation	>0.05	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Leadership Skills vs Employee Development & Satisfaction	0.648	High Correlation	>0.05	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Leadership Skills vs Stakeholder Satisfaction	0.621	High Correlation	>0.05	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Leadership Skills vs Organizational Culture & Climate	0.701	High Correlation	>0.05	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant
Leadership Skills vs Leadership & Governance	0.703	High Correlation	>0.05	Fail to Reject H_0	Not Significant

Note: The Pearson Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient was used at a 0.05 level of significance.

As shown in Table 4, the results reveal a high positive correlation between leadership skills of middle managers and the various dimensions of organizational effectiveness among school administrators, faculty, and non-teaching personnel in the institution.

Among the dimensions assessed, Adaptability and Innovation obtained the highest correlation coefficient of 0.712, suggesting that leadership skills, such as self-management, reflective thinking, and authentic leadership, positively influence the institution's capacity to adapt to changes, innovate processes, and implement new initiatives. This indicates that leaders who actively demonstrate these competencies can inspire and guide employees to respond effectively to evolving challenges.

The next highest correlations were observed in Leadership and Governance ($r = 0.703$) and Organizational Culture and Climate ($r = 0.701$), highlighting that leaders who effectively communicate vision, embrace vulnerability, and manage relationships contribute to a healthy organizational climate and strong governance structures.

Other dimensions, including Goal Attainment, Resource Utilization, Employee Development and Satisfaction, Stakeholder Satisfaction, and Internal Processes and Systems, also exhibited high correlation values ranging from 0.621 to 0.682, indicating positive relationships with leadership skills, though slightly lower than the top dimensions.

Since all p-values were greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis was not rejected across all dimensions, indicating that these relationships, while strong, are not statistically significant. The lack of statistical significance may be attributed to the modest sample size, which could have affected the statistical power to detect significant effects despite high correlation values.

These findings imply that leadership skills have a promising influence on organizational effectiveness, but additional factors or larger sample sizes may be necessary to establish statistical significance. Institutions that strengthen leadership development initiatives are more likely to see positive impacts on innovation, governance, culture, and overall organizational performance.

What are the problems encountered relative to the leadership skills and organizational effectiveness?

Table 5 Assessment of Problems Encountered Relative to the Leadership Skills and Organizational Effectiv-

ness in Higher Education Institutions in Manila

Indicators	School Administrators		Faculty		Non-Teaching Personnel		Composite		Rank
	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	WM	VI	
1. Insufficient financial management and budgeting skills among some leaders.	3.25	ME	3.28	ME	3.26	ME	3.26	ME	1
2. Monitoring and communication of progress toward objectives are inconsistent.	2.20	LE	2.18	LE	2.22	LE	2.20	LE	12
3. Adjustments to unit goals in response to institutional changes are limited.	3.25	ME	3.27	ME	3.25	ME	3.26	ME	2
4. Difficulty in fostering a positive, inclusive, and collaborative school culture.	2.35	LE	2.30	LE	2.28	LE	2.31	LE	10
5. Limited encouragement of innovation and creativity in teaching and learning practices.	3.22	ME	3.23	ME	3.20	ME	3.22	ME	3
6. Community engagement activities of the unit are limited.	1.80	LE	1.78	VLE	1.75	VLE	1.78	VLE	17
7. Limited strategic leadership in guiding school direction and goals.	3.20	ME	3.18	ME	3.21	ME	3.20	ME	4
8. Weakness in consistently promoting effective teaching and learning.	2.40	LE	2.42	LE	2.38	LE	2.40	LE	9
9. Facilities and equipment are not always maintained or maximized.	1.95	LE	1.90	LE	1.92	LE	1.92	LE	15
10. Some departments struggle to consistently meet performance targets.	2.25	LE	2.28	LE	2.30	LE	2.28	LE	11
11. Staff support to achieve outcomes is sometimes inadequate.	3.19	ME	3.22	ME	3.18	ME	3.20	ME	5
12. Outcomes are not always fully evaluated to confirm goal achievement.	2.15	LE	2.12	LE	2.10	LE	2.12	LE	13
13. Communication and interpersonal engagement with staff and stakeholders need improvement.	2.05	LE	2.00	LE	2.08	LE	2.04	LE	14
14. Outstanding performance is not consistently recognized or rewarded.	1.70	VLE	1.68	VLE	1.65	VLE	1.68	VLE	19

15. Sustainable practices in managing resources are insufficiently emphasized.	1.85	LE	1.82	LE	1.80	LE	1.82	LE	16
16. Professional development opportunities for educators and administrators not fully prioritized.	3.18	ME	3.16	ME	3.14	ME	3.16	ME	6
17. Challenges in overseeing school operations and ensuring efficient use of resources.	3.12	ME	3.14	ME	3.10	ME	3.12	ME	8
18. Departmental goals are not always well aligned with institutional priorities.	3.12	ME	3.17	ME	3.15	ME	3.15	ME	7
19. Partnerships with industry stakeholders are not sufficiently strengthened.	1.65	VLE	1.62	VLE	1.60	VLE	1.62	VLE	20
20. Student concerns and feedback are not always addressed promptly.	1.75	VLE	1.72	VLE	1.70	VLE	1.72	VLE	18
Overall Weighted Mean	2.50	LE	2.49	LE	2.48	LE	2.49	LE	

Legend:

5	4.20 - 5.00	Highly Encountered	(HE)
4	3.40 – 4.19	Encountered	(E)
3	2.60 – 3.39	Moderately Encountered	(ME)
2	1.80 – 2.59	Least Encountered	(LE)
1	1.00 – 1.79	Very Least Encountered	(VLE)

As shown in Table 5, the assessment of problems encountered relative to leadership skills and organizational effectiveness in higher education institutions revealed that school administrators, faculty, and non-teaching personnel identified issues ranging from moderately to very least encountered. The overall weighted mean of 2.49 was verbally interpreted as Least Encountered, suggesting that most leadership and management challenges are not critical, although certain concerns rated as Moderately Encountered (ME) moderately affect institutional effectiveness.”

Ranking the indicators highlighted the following: “Insufficient financial management and budgeting skills among leaders” (WM = 3.26) ranked 1, reflecting the importance of financial competence for operational efficiency; “Limited adjustments of unit goals in response to institutional changes” (WM = 3.26) ranked 2; “Limited encouragement of innovation and creativity in teaching and learning practices” (WM = 3.22) ranked 3; “Limited strategic leadership in guiding school direction and goals” and “Inadequate staff support to achieve outcomes” (WM = 3.20) tied for rank 4.5; “Underprioritized professional development opportunities” (WM = 3.16) ranked 6; “Misalignment of departmental goals with institutional priorities” (WM = 3.15) ranked 7; and “Challenges in overseeing school operations and ensuring efficient resource use” (WM = 3.12) ranked 8. The remaining indicators, including weaknesses in promoting effective teaching, communication gaps, and stakeholder engagement, were rated as very least encountered.

These results indicate that the most pressing issues revolve around financial management, strategic direction, professional development, and innovation, all critical for sustaining institutional adaptability and competitiveness. Lower-ranked indicators suggest that while other concerns exist, they have a less immediate impact on overall organizational performance.

These findings align with Johnson (2023), who emphasized that effective leadership in higher education requires aligning institutional goals with adaptive strategies, enhancing financial and human resource management, and fostering innovation to ensure sustainable organizational performance.

Interview Results

Based on the interviews with selected administrators, faculty, and non-teaching personnel, leaders in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) were described as demonstrating consistent commitment to institutional functions, particularly in coordination, supervision, and sustaining operational routines. Respondents emphasized that leadership provides support for academic planning and administrative continuity, with comments such as, “The dean regularly checks our program implementation plans,” and, “Our heads coordinate schedules and monitor compliance effectively.” These observations are consistent with recent research showing that effective higher education leadership is grounded in consistency, relational coordination, and institutional support (Sumena et al., 2025).

Despite these strengths, participants identified several limitations that undermine leadership effectiveness. A recurring concern was weak financial management and resource allocation practices. Faculty and staff expressed dissatisfaction with budget delays and unclear spending priorities, sharing sentiments such as, “Budgets are often delayed or insufficient for labs and instructional needs,” and, “We lack transparency in how funds are spent across departments.” These perspectives affirm earlier findings that transformational leaders’ financial stewardship plays a critical role in institutional sustainability and resource optimization in HEIs (Etomes et al., 2024).

Another major concern was the limited adaptability and innovation of some leaders. Interviewees observed that leadership often adheres to traditional protocols and demonstrates reluctance in adopting new approaches: “Changes in curriculum or process adjustments are rarely immediate,” and, “Innovation is not championed at higher levels.” This aligns with research advocating for agile and complexity-informed leadership styles to help higher education institutions respond more effectively to uncertainty and change (Beresford-Dey, 2024).

Issues of communication and strategic alignment were also highlighted. Faculty reported that “department priorities sometimes do not match the central vision,” while administrators acknowledged that “unit goals are rarely cascaded effectively.” Such feedback reflects findings that underscore the importance of clear communication, goal congruence, and alignment of departmental objectives with institutional strategy to ensure organizational effectiveness (Capito, 2025).

Finally, limited opportunities for professional growth and capacity-building were cited as persistent challenges. Respondents stressed the need for structured leadership training, coaching, and exposure to best practices. As one faculty member stated, “We rarely get leadership workshops tailored to higher education contexts.” This observation resonates with recent literature highlighting the importance of servant leadership and leadership maturity, which view continuous development as indispensable for building adaptive and responsive leaders in academia (Adams, 2025).

Overall, the interview results reinforce the survey findings by illustrating that while leadership in HEIs reliably supports institutional operations, persistent issues in financial management, innovation, communication, alignment, and professional development continue to hinder leadership excellence. These findings suggest the need for targeted interventions—such as tailored leadership programs, transparent financial systems, stronger communication frameworks, and sustained professional training to strengthen leadership capacity and promote long-term organizational effectiveness in HEIs.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, middle managers in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Manila are generally perceived by administrators, faculty, and non-teaching personnel as demonstrating strong leadership skills, particularly in self-management, reflective thinking, emotional intelligence, and authentic leadership. These competencies were rated highly evident, indicating that middle managers play a pivotal role in sustaining coordination, fostering collegiality, and guiding institutional processes. Organizational effectiveness was likewise rated highly, with adaptability and innovation, organizational culture, and leadership and governance emerging as the strongest dimensions, highlighting that HEIs are capable of responding to change while maintaining stable institutional performance.

The analysis further revealed significant differences in the assessment of leadership skills across groups, with administrators consistently providing higher ratings than faculty and non-teaching personnel. This suggests perceptual gaps regarding inclusivity, communication, and engagement in leadership practices. Despite these differences, correlation results showed a high positive relationship between leadership skills and organizational effectiveness, particularly in adaptability, governance, and culture. However, the relationships were not statistically significant, indicating that while leadership skills have a substantial influence, other institutional factors may also contribute to overall effectiveness.

Complementing these results, interviews with administrators, faculty, and staff reinforced that leadership reliably supports operational continuity and academic planning but highlighted recurring challenges in financial management, innovation, communication, and professional development. These concerns reflect persistent barriers to achieving leadership excellence and sustaining institutional performance.

Building on these findings, HEIs in Manila demonstrate a strong foundation of leadership capacity through middle managers, but strategic improvements are necessary. Recommended interventions include tailored leadership development programs, transparent financial practices, enhanced communication frameworks, and expanded professional growth opportunities. Implementing these measures is essential to strengthen leadership effectiveness, bridge perceptual gaps among stakeholders, and ensure long-term organizational sustainability and competitiveness in the higher education sector.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following concise recommendations are proposed:

1. Higher education institutions may implement structured leadership development initiatives for middle managers that focus on financial management, strategic communication, and innovation adoption to enhance organizational effectiveness and adaptability.
2. Providing sustained and relevant professional development opportunities for middle managers may strengthen their leadership competencies, improve decision-making capabilities, and increase their overall contribution to institutional sustainability.
3. Institutions may ensure transparency and accountability in the distribution and utilization of resources to build trust, enhance operational efficiency, and provide equitable support across all organizational levels.
4. Encouraging participatory and inclusive decision-making processes may bridge perceptual gaps among administrators, faculty, and non-teaching personnel, thereby fostering collaboration, mutual understanding, and a stronger organizational culture.
5. Future research may employ advanced statistical techniques, such as regression analysis or structural equation modeling, and integrate objective institutional performance indicators such as retention rates, research output, and accreditation status—to rigorously examine causal relationships and minimize response bias in assessing leadership skills and organizational effectiveness.

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