

LEADING THROUGH CRISIS: ADAPTIVE AND TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP IN BASIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study examined crisis leadership among Basic Education school heads in Bulacan, with emphasis on leadership preparedness and practices anchored in Adaptive Leadership and Transformational Leadership theories. An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, wherein quantitative data were first collected to determine the level of crisis leadership preparedness across five leadership dimensions: crisis planning and delegation, crisis implementation and people management, crisis communication and monitoring, crisis motivation and democratic leadership, and crisis accountability, transparency, and professional growth. Qualitative data were subsequently gathered through interviews and written responses to explain the quantitative findings. Results revealed a very high level of crisis leadership preparedness across all dimensions, with no significant differences based on school type, level handled, years of service, or school population. Qualitative findings showed that school heads managed crises through proactive planning, clear delegation, flexible implementation, people-centered leadership, shared decision-making, and continuous communication, although professional growth practices were largely informal. The integration of findings highlights the complementary roles of adaptive leadership in addressing uncertainty and transformational leadership in sustaining trust and motivation. Based on these results, a Crisis Leadership Action Framework was proposed to guide school heads before, during, and after crisis situations, emphasizing structured leadership training, reflective professional growth, inclusive communication, democratic practices, and policy alignment to strengthen organizational resilience and learning continuity.

Keywords: Crisis Leadership, Adaptive Leadership, Transformational Leadership, School Heads, Basic Education.

Introduction

Educational leadership has been increasingly challenged by environments shaped by uncertainty, disruption, and rapid change. Across the globe, schools encountered crises such as pandemics and natural disasters that call for abrupt policy reforms. According to Flores & UNESCO (November, 2023), close to 80% of the world's student population - 1.3 billion children and youth - were affected by school closures in 138 countries. These moments did not just interrupt governance; they reshaped it. What was previously just routine administration management is now evaluated and tested until it becomes something heavier and more complex. Leadership is no longer just supervision. In these current times, it now involves navigation and must have stability. Mazurkiewicz (2021) discussed in his paper that the human approach to leadership in responding to both challenges and expectations needs to be transformed. These changes have important implications for school leaders' future mindsets, behaviors, and supporting structures during crisis incidents (McLeod & Dulskey, 2021).

In the Philippine basic education context, crisis leadership has become a recurring and unavoidable responsibility due to frequent exposure to typhoons, flooding, earthquakes, and public health emergencies, as well as shifts in educational policies and delivery modalities. School heads are expected to make high-stakes decisions under pressure while ensuring safety, continuity of learning, and stakeholder coordination.

Despite the growing body of literature, existing studies largely focus on descriptive accounts of leadership practices, with limited empirical examination of how crisis leadership preparedness aligns with adaptive and transformational leadership frameworks in actual school settings. Furthermore, there is a lack of mixed-methods research that integrates quantitative measures and qualitative insights, particularly within the Philippine context, and insufficient attention to how school leaders translate crisis experiences into sustained professional growth.

Grounded in these gaps, this study examined crisis leadership among Basic Education school heads in Bulacan, focusing on leadership preparedness and

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practices anchored in Adaptive Leadership and Transformational Leadership theories. Specifically, it aimed to assess preparedness across key leadership dimensions, examine differences based on selected profile variables, and explore leadership experiences to inform the development of a crisis leadership framework. This study contributes to educational leadership literature by integrating adaptive and transformational leadership frameworks in crisis contexts, while providing practical insights and a proposed framework that may inform leadership training, policy development, and crisis management practices in basic education.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Adaptive Leadership Theory and Transformational Leadership Theory as complementary frameworks for examining crisis leadership among Basic Education school heads. Adaptive leadership emphasizes the capacity to mobilize stakeholders to address complex, uncertain challenges through flexibility, shared problem-solving, and continuous learning (Heifetz et al., 2009; Bellibaş & Karaferye, 2025; ASCD, 2023). In contrast, transformational leadership focuses on inspiring and motivating individuals toward shared goals through trust, democratic practices, accountability, and individualized support, particularly during periods of disruption (Burns, 1978; Bass, 1985; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2005; Fahy et al., 2024). In this study, adaptive leadership explains how school heads respond to evolving crisis demands, while transformational leadership explains how they sustain engagement, trust, and collaboration among stakeholders. These frameworks were operationalized through leadership preparedness and practices in planning, implementation, communication, motivation, accountability, and professional growth (Sheena et al., 2025).

Conceptual Framework

This study assumes that crisis leadership preparedness among Basic Education school heads is influenced by selected profile variables, including type of school, level or department handled, years of service, and school population, and is reflected across five leadership dimensions: crisis planning and delegation, crisis implementation and people management, crisis communication and monitoring, crisis motivation and democratic leadership, and crisis accountability, transparency, and professional growth. Grounded in adaptive and transformational leadership theories, the framework posits that while profile variables may shape leadership experiences, preparedness is primarily demonstrated through leadership practices that enable school heads to respond effectively to crises, sustain stakeholder engagement, and support organizational resilience,

ultimately informing the development of a Crisis Leadership Action Framework.

Statement of The Problem

This study examined crisis leadership among Basic Education school heads in Bulacan and sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the level of crisis leadership preparedness of school heads in Bulacan in terms of:
 - 1.1 Crisis Planning and Delegation;
 - 1.2 Crisis Implementation and People Management;
 - 1.3 Crisis Communication and Monitoring;
 - 1.4 Crisis Motivation and Democratic Leadership; and
 - 1.5 Crisis Accountability, Transparency, and Professional Growth?
2. Is there a significant difference in the level of crisis leadership preparedness of school heads when grouped according to:
 - 2.1 Type of school;
 - 2.2 Level or department handled;
 - 2.3 School size; and
 - 2.4 Number of years as school head?
3. How do school heads describe their leadership experiences, practices, and lessons learned in managing crisis or emergencies in relation to adaptive and transformational leadership?
4. What crisis leadership framework or action plan may be developed for Basic Education school heads in Bulacan based on the findings of the study?

Scope and Delimitation

This study examined crisis leadership among Basic Education school heads in the province of Bulacan, covering those handling grade school, junior high school, and senior high school departments in both public and private schools. It focused on assessing crisis leadership preparedness across five dimensions: crisis planning and delegation, crisis implementation and people management, crisis communication and monitoring, crisis motivation and democratic leadership, and crisis accountability, transparency, and professional growth, using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. Quantitative data were used to determine preparedness levels and differences when grouped according to type of school, level or department handled, years of service as school head, and school population, while qualitative data described leadership experiences, practices, and lessons learned during crisis situations. The study was delimited to the perspectives of school heads and did not include other stakeholders, did not seek to establish causal relationships, and did not evaluate the effectiveness of specific crisis interventions;

thus, findings are context-specific and should be interpreted within the setting of basic education schools in Bulacan.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods research design, in which quantitative data were collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data to explain and contextualize the results. This approach was used to provide a deeper understanding of crisis leadership preparedness by complementing numerical findings with the lived experiences and reflections of school heads. The quantitative phase utilized a descriptive-comparative design to determine the level of preparedness and examine differences across selected profile variables, while the qualitative phase explored leadership experiences, practices, and lessons learned during crisis situations. The integration of both phases allowed for a more comprehensive analysis of crisis leadership in basic education settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2021).

Participants/Respondents of the Study

The quantitative participants of the study were 43 Basic Education school heads from public and private schools in the province of Bulacan, handling grade school, junior high school, and senior high school departments. Participants were selected using convenience sampling, based on accessibility and willingness to participate. Although a larger number of school heads were initially identified, only those who consented and completed the survey were included in the final analysis. For the qualitative phase, 12 school heads were purposively selected from among the quantitative respondents. The selection ensured variation in school type and level handled, with representation from public and private schools and across basic education levels. This approach allowed leadership experiences to be examined across different school contexts while maintaining alignment with the quantitative findings.

Instrument of the Study

The primary quantitative instrument used in this study was an adapted survey questionnaire based on the Emergency Educational Leadership Scale developed by Salibo (2025), which measured crisis leadership preparedness across five dimensions: crisis planning and delegation, crisis implementation and people management, crisis communication and monitoring, crisis motivation and democratic leadership, and crisis accountability, transparency, and professional growth, using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. To ensure contextual relevance, the instrument underwent content validation by five experts in educational leadership, language, and

research, and revisions were made based on their feedback. It was then pilot tested, and reliability analysis yielded a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.874, indicating high internal consistency. The qualitative instrument consisted of semi-structured interview questions designed to elicit leadership experiences, practices, and reflections related to adaptive and transformational leadership during crisis situations.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection was conducted in two phases. During the quantitative phase, survey questionnaires were distributed to school heads either in printed form or through online platforms, depending on respondent availability and preference. Participants were given adequate time to complete the questionnaires, and completed responses were collected thereafter for analysis. Following the quantitative analysis, the qualitative phase was conducted to explain and enrich the survey findings. Semi-structured interviews were carried out through face-to-face meetings or online platforms, while some participants opted to submit written narratives. Interviews were conducted with consent, recorded when permitted, and transcribed for analysis. Field notes were also taken to support data interpretation.

Data Analysis and Statistical Treatment

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, to determine the level of crisis leadership preparedness across the five dimensions, while tests of normality indicated non-normal distribution, necessitating the use of non-parametric tests such as the Mann-Whitney U test for differences based on type of school and the Kruskal-Wallis H test for comparisons across level handled, years of service, and school population; all analyses were conducted using SPSS with a significance level set at $p < .05$. Qualitative data, on the other hand, were analyzed through thematic analysis involving repeated reading, coding, categorization, and theme development, with emerging themes compared to quantitative findings to establish convergence and complementarity, and overall integration occurring during interpretation to explain observed quantitative patterns (Creswell, 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were observed throughout the conduct of the study. Prior to data collection, permission to conduct the research was secured from the appropriate authorities. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and their right to withdraw at any point without penalty. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents before administering the survey and conducting interviews.

Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through the use of codes and pseudonyms, and no identifying information was included in the presentation of findings. All data were stored securely and accessed only by the researchers. The study ensured that participants' responses were

reported accurately and respectfully, safeguarding their rights, dignity, and welfare throughout the research process.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Level of Crisis Leadership Preparedness of Basic Education School Heads in Bulacan

Dimension	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Crisis Planning and Delegation	4.30	0.45	Very High
Crisis Implementation and People Management	4.26	0.50	Very High
Crisis Communication and Monitoring	4.31	0.41	Very High
Crisis Motivation and Democratic Leadership	4.43	0.48	Very High
Crisis Accountability, Transparency, and Professional Growth	4.04	0.32	High
Overall	4.27	0.43	Very High

The results indicate a very high overall level of crisis leadership preparedness among school heads. High preparedness was observed across all dimensions, suggesting that school heads are generally capable of planning for crises, managing people and resources, communicating effectively, and motivating stakeholders during emergency situations. Among the dimensions, Crisis Motivation and Democratic Leadership obtained the highest mean, indicating that people-centered and values-driven leadership practices are strongly

emphasized during crises. In contrast, Crisis Accountability, Transparency, and Professional Growth, while still rated high, ranked lowest among the dimensions, suggesting that structured reflection and leadership development during crises are less consistently institutionalized. The high ratings in planning, implementation, and communication further echo studies highlighting the importance of responsiveness, resilience, and strategic coordination in crisis contexts (Mazurkiewicz, 2021; McLeod & Dulsky, 2021; UNESCO, 2023).

Table 2: Differences in Crisis Leadership Preparedness of School Heads

Grouping Variable	Statistical Test	Test Value	p-value	Interpretation
Type of School	Mann–Whitney U	171.50	.188	Not Significant
Level/Department Handled	Kruskal–Wallis H	5.46	.141	Not Significant
Years of Service as School Head	Kruskal–Wallis H	1.56	.669	Not Significant
School Population	Kruskal–Wallis H	2.29	.514	Not Significant

The results show no statistically significant differences in crisis leadership preparedness when school heads were grouped according to type of school, level handled, years of service, and school population. These findings suggest that crisis leadership preparedness is not influenced by institutional or demographic characteristics. Instead, preparedness appears to be shaped by leadership practices and contextual learning experiences shared across school settings.

The findings imply that professional experiences during crises may serve as equalizing factors, allowing school heads to acquire and apply leadership skills in comparable ways across diverse contexts. This supports recent discussions on integrated crisis leadership, where both transformational and situational responses emerge consistently among leaders facing shared disruptions (Sheena et al., 2025; Salibo, 2025).

Qualitative Findings on Crisis Leadership Practices

The qualitative findings generated five major themes that explain and support the quantitative results. These themes reflect how school heads enact crisis leadership in real school contexts and how adaptive and transformational leadership principles are applied in practice.

Crisis Planning and Delegation emerged as a core leadership practice. School heads described proactive planning, the establishment of contingency measures, and clear role delegation through committees. These practices explain the very high preparedness ratings in crisis planning and delegation and reflect adaptive leadership, where leaders anticipate uncertainty and mobilize stakeholders to respond collectively. Recent studies affirm that adaptive leadership enables school heads to respond proactively to complex and rapidly changing conditions by organizing people,

resources, and strategies toward shared goals (Alene et al., 2025; Bellibaş & Karaferye, 2025).

Reflective Practice and Professional Growth highlighted how crisis situations served as learning experiences for school heads. Participants reported reflecting on leadership decisions and adjusting practices based on past experiences. However, reflection and professional growth were largely informal, which explains the relatively lower quantitative rating of this dimension. This finding indicates a need to institutionalize reflective leadership processes to strengthen long-term crisis preparedness. This is consistent with recent literature emphasizing that effective crisis leadership requires continuous learning, evaluation, and professional development, which are often underdeveloped when not formally embedded in leadership systems (Sott, 2025; Salibo, 2025).

Crisis Communication, Monitoring, and Inclusivity emphasized the importance of timely and transparent communication during crises. School heads utilized multiple communication platforms to disseminate information, monitor learning continuity, and gather feedback. These practices support the very high quantitative ratings in communication and monitoring and demonstrate both adaptive leadership through continuous adjustment and transformational leadership through trust-building. Recent studies support this finding, highlighting that effective crisis leadership relies on clear communication, stakeholder engagement, and inclusive decision-making processes that sustain trust and organizational resilience (Ammony, 2024; Nazib et al., 2025).

Adaptive and transformational leadership practices were evident in shared decision-making, flexible work arrangements, and collaborative problem-solving. School heads reported involving teachers in decision-making and prioritizing well-being during crises. These practices explain why Crisis Motivation and Democratic Leadership emerged as the strongest dimension and highlight how transformational leadership sustains morale while adaptive leadership supports responsiveness to change. This finding is supported by recent research, which shows that transformational leadership enhances collaboration, motivation, and resilience among school stakeholders, while adaptive leadership enables leaders to respond effectively to dynamic and uncertain conditions (Nazib et al., 2025).

Accountability, Policy Alignment, and Systems Strengthening focused on ethical governance and

institutional readiness. School heads emphasized clear role assignment, policy alignment with DepEd and local government guidelines, and the integration of crisis protocols into school systems. While accountability practices were evident, professional growth mechanisms during crises were less structured, reinforcing the quantitative findings.

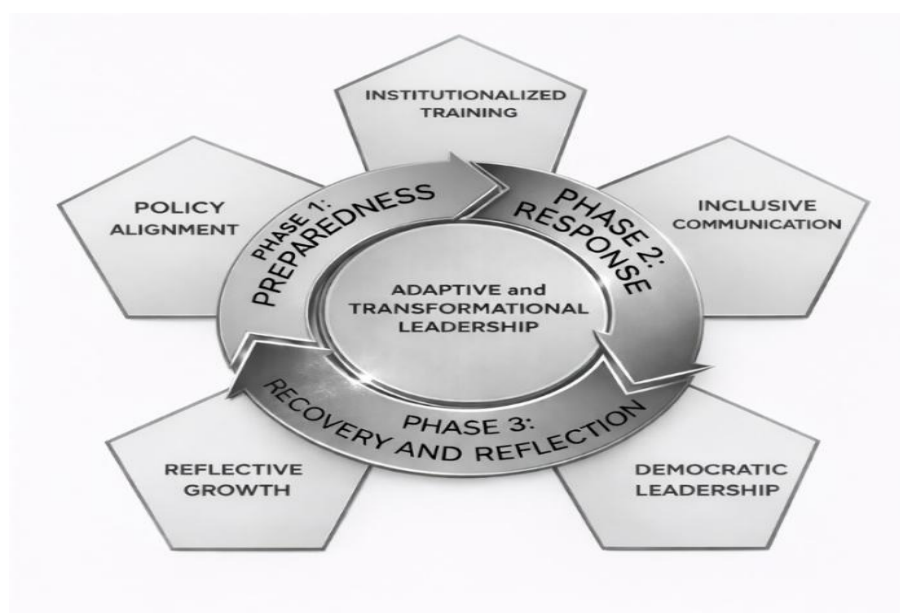
The integration of findings indicates that crisis leadership among Basic Education school heads in Bulacan is characterized by high preparedness, people-centered leadership, and adaptive responsiveness. The absence of significant differences across profile variables reinforces the idea that effective crisis leadership is shaped more by leadership practices and contextual demands than by institutional characteristics. Adaptive leadership enables flexibility and learning under uncertainty, while transformational leadership sustains trust, motivation, and shared purpose. However, the limited institutionalization of reflective professional growth highlights an area for improvement, which informed the development of the proposed Crisis Leadership Action Framework.

Proposed Crisis Leadership Action Framework

Based on the integration of quantitative and qualitative findings, a Crisis Leadership Action Framework for Basic Education School Heads was developed and is presented in Figure 1. The framework synthesizes the key leadership practices identified in the study and organizes them into a cyclical process encompassing preparedness, response, and recovery phases of crisis leadership. Rather than presenting linear or causal relationships, the framework illustrates how leadership practices interact and reinforce one another across different stages of crisis situations.

The framework highlights five core leadership components: institutionalized crisis leadership training, reflective professional growth and learning, inclusive communication and monitoring systems, democratic and people-centered leadership, and policy alignment with systems strengthening. These components reflect both adaptive leadership, which emphasizes flexibility, responsiveness, and learning under uncertainty, and transformational leadership, which sustains trust, motivation, and shared purpose during crises. The visual representation emphasizes that effective crisis leadership is continuous and dynamic, shaped by experience, reflection, and collaboration rather than by school type, size, or years of service. As such, the framework serves as a practical guide for school heads in navigating crises while sustaining learning continuity and organizational resilience.

Figure 1: Crisis Leadership Action Framework for Basic Education School Heads



Conclusion

This study examined crisis leadership among Basic Education school heads in Bulacan using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design anchored on Adaptive Leadership and Transformational Leadership theories. The findings showed a very high level of crisis leadership preparedness across all leadership dimensions, indicating that school heads are generally well-prepared to manage crisis situations and sustain learning continuity. Crisis leadership emerged as a consistent leadership function rather than a reactive response to emergencies.

No significant differences were found in crisis leadership preparedness when school heads were grouped according to type of school, level handled, years of service, and school population. This suggests that effective crisis leadership is not determined by institutional or demographic characteristics but is shaped by leadership practices and contextual demands shared across school settings.

Qualitative findings revealed that school heads demonstrated crisis leadership through proactive planning, clear delegation of roles, flexible implementation strategies, people-centered leadership, and continuous communication with stakeholders. Adaptive leadership enabled responsiveness to uncertainty, while transformational leadership sustained trust, motivation, and collaboration during crises. However, reflective professional growth practices were largely informal, indicating the need for more structured leadership development. These conclusions informed the proposed Crisis

Leadership Action Framework for Basic Education school heads.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed to strengthen crisis leadership in basic education schools. Institutionalized crisis leadership training may be developed for school heads to strengthen preparedness across contexts. Training may focus on adaptive and transformational leadership competencies, particularly decision-making under uncertainty, people-centered leadership, ethical governance, and coordinated crisis response. Structured training may help formalize competencies currently developed through experience.

Reflective professional growth mechanisms may be strengthened during and after crisis situations to address the informal nature of leadership reflection. Schools may establish processes such as post-crisis reviews, leadership debriefings, and reflective learning sessions to capture lessons learned and support continuous improvement in crisis leadership practices.

Inclusive communication and monitoring systems, democratic leadership practices, and policy support for crisis preparedness may be strengthened to sustain effective crisis leadership. Schools may enhance communication strategies to ensure timely and accurate information reaches stakeholders during prolonged or complex crises. School heads are encouraged to continue shared decision-making and people-centered practices that promote trust, motivation, and responsibility. At the system level, integrating crisis leadership competencies into

standards, evaluation systems, and succession planning may support long-term preparedness, accountability, and organizational resilience.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in this manuscript. Results have been deduced objectively; nothing influenced this result by any individual, monetary, or institutional interests. In effect, utmost endeavors were in order to conduct a bias-free operation of gathering and analyzing the data into interpretation and producing a study based on merit, away from research inconsistencies.

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