

How the Three Generations of Administrators Advanced an HEI, What Crises They Encountered, and How They Handled Them: A Qualitative Case Study

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examined how three generations of administrators advanced a faith-based higher education institution, the crises they encountered during their respective terms, and the strategies they employed to manage these challenges. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, the study involved three former administrators selected through purposive sampling. Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews using open-ended and probing questions. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and supported through triangulation involving employee interviews, institutional records, yearbooks, articles, and the researcher's observations. Manual thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and themes. The findings showed that the administrators advanced the institution through quality assurance and accreditation, faculty and staff development, spiritual development, collaborative governance, program and infrastructure development, and financial management. The major crises involved financial management difficulties, leadership and governance conflicts, operational inefficiencies, and concerns regarding staff qualifications. These challenges were addressed through teamwork and collaboration, clear communication and informed decision-making, structured planning and implementation, and institutional, personal, and spiritual support systems. The study concludes that collaborative governance, strategic planning, transparent communication, and stakeholder participation are essential to institutional stability, resilience, and continued advancement. It recommends longitudinal studies on the development and long-term effects of leadership practices and further investigation of how leadership styles respond to different generational groups. The study supports SDG 4 on Quality Education, SDG 9 on Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure, SDG 16 on Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions, and SDG 17 on Partnerships for the Goals. It contributes to educational, institutional, governance, technological, human resource, and cultural sustainability by informing leadership development, succession planning, crisis management, and institutional continuity.

Keywords: Collaborative Governance, Crisis Management, Faith-Based Higher Education, Institutional Advancement, Leadership Succession, Strategic Planning, Transformational Leadership

1. Introduction

Leadership is a critical determinant of the direction, culture, decision-making processes, and overall performance of higher education institutions. As institutions respond to changing educational demands, technological developments, regulatory requirements, workforce diversity, and sustainability concerns, administrators must provide leadership that supports institutional advancement while effectively managing crises. This study examines how three generations of administrators advanced a faith-based higher education institution, the crises they encountered during their respective terms, and the strategies they used to address these challenges. Grounded in transformational leadership theory, the study provides a comparative understanding of leadership experiences across different administrative periods and their implications for institutional development, crisis management, and leadership succession.

Leadership significantly influences the culture, decisions, and outcomes of educational institutions (Northouse, 2015). In higher education, effective leadership is particularly important because institutions operate within complex organizational, regulatory, financial, and social environments. Administrators are expected to maintain educational quality, strengthen institutional systems, motivate employees, support students, and respond to emerging challenges. University leaders also contribute to institutional advancement by cultivating a research culture, providing funding, disseminating research information, motivating personnel, establishing appropriate policies, promoting cooperation, facilitating research activities, and applying a humanistic approach to leadership (Watermeyer et al., 2021). However, carrying out these responsibilities requires leaders to navigate governance structures, accreditation requirements, political conditions, regulatory expectations, and policies that may affect institutional funding and operations (Watermeyer et al., 2021). Institutional advancement increasingly includes the integration of Education for Sustainable Development. This approach equips students with the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values needed to respond to sustainability-related challenges. Education for Sustainable

Development can improve academic performance, motivation, engagement, and problem-solving abilities while promoting a culture of sustainability within educational institutions (Bonilla et al., 2024).

Higher education institutions are also undergoing technological transformation. The development of smart universities involves the integration of technologies such as augmented reality, virtual reality, artificial intelligence, and biometric systems. These technologies can support immersive, interactive, inclusive, and personalized learning environments that respond to the diverse needs of students, including students with disabilities (Adipat & Chotikapanich, 2024). These institutional changes require administrators who can manage both continuity and transformation. Leaders must preserve the institution's mission and values while responding to new technologies, changing student expectations, workforce diversity, accountability requirements, and sustainability concerns.

Several interrelated themes emerge from the literature on leadership and higher education advancement. The first concerns leadership as a primary mechanism for institutional direction and development. Educational leaders influence organizational culture, establish priorities, create policies, allocate resources, and motivate institutional stakeholders. Their decisions directly affect the capacity of an institution to achieve its educational and organizational objectives (Northouse, 2015). The second theme concerns governance and accountability. Higher education leaders must work within complex governance systems while complying with standards established by accrediting, political, and regulatory bodies. These responsibilities require leaders to balance internal institutional priorities with external expectations regarding quality, accountability, funding, and policy implementation (Watermeyer et al., 2021). The third theme is sustainability-oriented education. Institutional advancement is not limited to increasing enrollment, expanding programs, or improving infrastructure. It also involves integrating sustainability principles into teaching, learning, decision-making, and institutional culture. Education for Sustainable Development strengthens students' engagement and problem-solving abilities while preparing them to respond to social, environmental, and institutional challenges (Bonilla et al., 2024). The fourth theme is technological transformation. Smart university development requires administrators to guide the adoption of emerging technologies and ensure that technological systems improve accessibility, inclusivity, personalization, and educational quality (Adipat & Chotikapanich, 2024). Such transformation requires strategic leadership because technology must be aligned with the institution's mission, available resources, employee capabilities, and student needs. The fifth theme involves generational diversity in educational leadership. Higher education administrators lead employees and stakeholders from different generations who may vary in communication styles, professional expectations, motivations, technological capabilities, and approaches to work. Effective leadership therefore requires identifying generational differences and formulating appropriate strategies for managing and motivating a diverse workforce (Çetin & Halisdemir, 2019). Leadership research must also consider individuals beyond formal administrative positions and examine relevant demographic and generational characteristics. Comparing administrators across generations can provide a more comprehensive understanding of how leadership approaches evolve and how different leaders respond to institutional challenges (Watermeyer et al., 2021). A qualitative case study of administrators from different generations can consequently reveal how they advanced their institution, what crises they faced, and how they managed those crises (Çetin & Halisdemir, 2019; Watermeyer et al., 2021).

Globally, higher education institutions face pressures associated with quality assurance, accreditation, technological disruption, regulatory compliance, sustainability, and changing student expectations. Administrators must guide their institutions through these conditions while maintaining academic quality and institutional stability. The transition toward sustainable and technologically enabled universities further requires leaders to integrate innovative systems without compromising inclusivity, institutional identity, or educational objectives (Bonilla et al., 2024; Adipat & Chotikapanich, 2024). At the national level, Philippine higher education institutions operate within regulatory, accreditation, financial, and organizational environments that require effective and adaptive leadership. Faith-based institutions face the additional responsibility of maintaining their religious identity, mission, and values while meeting contemporary educational and institutional requirements. At the local level, this study focuses on three past administrators from the same faith-based tertiary institution. Examining their experiences provides an institution-specific understanding of how leadership practices developed across three administrative generations. It also demonstrates how different leaders responded to the conditions, opportunities, and crises present during their respective terms.

The study is grounded in transformational leadership theory. This theory provides a lens for understanding the development of leadership styles and their application within educational institutions. It supports the examination of how administrators guide institutional change, influence stakeholders, address organizational difficulties, and advance a shared institutional direction. Within the study, transformational leadership serves as the basis for interpreting how the three generations of administrators advanced the faith-based institution and managed the crises encountered during their service. It also facilitates the comparison of leadership experiences across different administrative periods while recognizing the influence of institutional conditions and changing educational demands.

Previous studies have discussed the challenges experienced by individual leaders during specific terms of office. However, limited research has comparatively examined three generations of administrators by considering the institutional advances

they achieved, the crises they encountered, and the strategies they used to manage those crises. The gap is more evident within faith-based higher education institutions in the Philippines. Existing discussions do not sufficiently explain how leadership practices, institutional challenges, and crisis-management strategies may differ or remain consistent across successive generations of administrators in a mission-driven institution. Understanding these experiences is necessary for developing interventions that can support future administrators. A comparative examination can identify leadership practices that strengthened institutional advancement, reveal recurring organizational vulnerabilities, and provide guidance for leadership development and succession planning. The study may therefore contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex role of leadership in higher education and provide a foundation for future research and institutional best practices.

The study is primarily aligned with SDG 4 – Quality Education because effective leadership contributes to the quality, accessibility, continuity, and improvement of higher education. Leadership practices that support Education for Sustainable Development can enhance students' academic performance, motivation, engagement, and problem-solving abilities while strengthening a culture of sustainability (Bonilla et al., 2024). The study is also connected with SDG 9 – Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure through its consideration of institutional modernization and technological transformation. The transition toward smart universities requires leadership capable of integrating innovative technologies into inclusive and personalized educational environments (Adipat & Chotikapanich, 2024). Its examination of governance, accountability, institutional policies, and leadership succession supports SDG 16 – Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. Higher education institutions require clear governance systems, effective policies, accountable decision-making, and capable administrators to remain stable and responsive to internal and external challenges (Watermeyer et al., 2021). The study further relates to SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals because institutional advancement depends on cooperation among leaders, employees, governing bodies, students, and other stakeholders. Leadership that establishes cooperation and encourages collective participation strengthens the institution's capacity to achieve its goals and address crises (Watermeyer et al., 2021).

The study contributes to educational sustainability by identifying leadership approaches that can help maintain academic quality, institutional continuity, and responsiveness to changing educational needs. Examining the experiences of previous administrators can help future leaders understand how institutional decisions affect programs, employees, students, and organizational outcomes. It supports institutional and governance sustainability by providing insights into leadership development, strategic decision-making, crisis management, and succession planning. Institutions that understand their previous leadership experiences may be better prepared to preserve effective practices, address recurring weaknesses, and develop administrators capable of responding to future challenges. The study also contributes to technological sustainability by recognizing the responsibility of higher education leaders to guide institutional modernization and the adoption of emerging technologies. Technological advancement must be managed strategically to promote accessibility, inclusivity, personalization, and meaningful educational outcomes (Adipat & Chotikapanich, 2024). Its focus on different generations of administrators contributes to human resource and organizational sustainability. Understanding generational differences can help institutions design leadership and management strategies that respond to varied employee motivations, expectations, communication practices, and professional development needs (Çetin & Halisdemir, 2019). Finally, the study contributes to cultural sustainability by examining leadership within a faith-based institution. Institutional advancement in this context requires administrators to respond to contemporary educational demands while preserving the institution's mission, identity, and values. The study therefore connects educational leadership, governance, organizational management, technology, sustainability, and institutional culture within a single multidisciplinary inquiry.

This qualitative case study aims to explore the experiences and perspectives of three generations of administrators in advancing a faith-based higher education institution. It specifically examines how the leaders advanced the institution during their respective terms, the crises they encountered throughout their service, and the strategies they employed to manage those crises. The study seeks to answer three questions: How did the three generations of leaders advance the faith-based institution during their respective terms? What crises did they encounter during their periods of service? How did they handle these crises? By answering these questions, the study intends to generate insights that may inform leadership development programs, succession planning, crisis-management practices, and future research on institutional advancement in higher education.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study used a qualitative research design employing a case study approach. This design enabled an in-depth examination of leadership experiences and practices within the specific context of a tertiary institution. A case study is appropriate for investigating complex social phenomena, particularly when the researcher has limited control over the events being examined (Yin, 2018). The design allowed the researcher to explore how different leadership approaches contributed to institutional advancement and continuity. It also supported a detailed examination of the challenges encountered by the administrators and the strategies they employed during their respective terms of service (Yin, 2018).

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in a faith-based tertiary institution. The researcher was able to access the research site because he was teaching in the institution during the conduct of the study. He also had established contact with the participants because they had served as his superiors during their respective administrative terms. Before gathering the data, the researcher sent a formal letter to each prospective participant requesting voluntary participation in the study.

2.3 Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of three former administrators who had served as leaders of the same faith-based tertiary institution. Each participant represented a different generation of institutional leadership. The participants were selected because their experiences could provide relevant information about institutional advancement, administrative crises, leadership practices, and crisis-management strategies within the same organizational setting.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

The study employed purposive sampling in selecting the three former institutional leaders. This sampling method allowed the researcher to deliberately identify individuals whose experiences were directly relevant to the research questions and the organizational context being examined (Patton, 2015). The participants were selected based on their previous leadership roles in the institution and their capacity to provide detailed accounts of the institutional developments and challenges that occurred during their respective terms.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide composed of open-ended questions. The questions encouraged the participants to describe their experiences, perceptions, and insights regarding their leadership practices, contributions to institutional advancement, encountered crises, and responses to organizational challenges. Probing questions were also used to clarify ambiguous answers and obtain more detailed information from the participants (Patton, 2015). This interview approach allowed the respondents to discuss their leadership experiences extensively while ensuring that the information gathered remained aligned with the objectives of the study (Carless et al., 2000).

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher first sent formal letters to the three former administrators requesting their voluntary participation. After receiving their consent, individual in-depth interviews were conducted with each participant. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim to preserve the accuracy and completeness of the participants' responses. During the interviews, the researcher used open-ended and probing questions to gather detailed descriptions of the administrators' leadership experiences and decisions. Data triangulation was conducted by interviewing employees who had served under the administrators during their respective terms. The researcher also examined available yearbooks, articles, and institutional records and considered relevant observations obtained through his experience as an employee of the institution. Using multiple perspectives and sources supported a more comprehensive understanding of the leadership phenomenon being investigated (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data were analyzed through manual thematic analysis. Data analysis involved organizing, categorizing, and interpreting the participants' responses to identify underlying and explicit meanings and the structures that contributed to meaning-making within the gathered information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The analysis followed a structured process involving familiarization with the transcripts, initial coding, generation of themes, review of the identified themes, definition and naming of themes, and preparation of the findings (Caulfield, 2023). The responses of the three participants were compared to identify recurring patterns, similarities, and differences related to institutional advancement, encountered crises, and crisis-management strategies.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the conduct of the interviews. The participants were informed about the purpose of the research, the voluntary nature of their participation, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the research process. The collected data were securely stored and made accessible only to the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher also remained sensitive to the possibility that discussing leadership crises could cause discomfort or distress and was prepared to provide appropriate support and resources when necessary (Patton, 2015).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Institutional Advancement Across Three Generations of Administrators

3.1.1 Quality Assurance and Accreditation

The participants identified accreditation and quality assurance as major institutional accomplishments. One administrator reported that the institution attained Level I accreditation after initiating the accreditation process. The administrators also promoted higher faculty qualifications by encouraging college instructors to pursue master's and doctoral degrees. These findings indicate that the administrators treated accreditation as both external validation and a mechanism for continuous institutional improvement. Strengthening faculty qualifications also supported the institution's effort to meet academic standards and improve instructional quality. As Çetin & Halisdemir (2019), emphasized, effective leadership requires identifying generational differences and developing strategic plans for managing and motivating diverse employees.

3.1.2 Faculty and Staff Development

The participants emphasized the professional development of faculty and staff by supporting advanced studies and other opportunities for professional growth. One administrator also reviewed the institutional plantilla and observed that some regular employees had not reached the maximum salary level corresponding to their positions. The findings show that institutional advancement depended partly on developing and retaining qualified personnel. Supporting graduate education improved employee competence, while reviewing compensation demonstrated attention to fairness, motivation, and workforce stability.

3.1.3 Spiritual Development in Education

The administrators identified spiritual development among faculty and staff as an important institutional priority. They sought to establish an environment in which the institution's religious mission and values were reflected in the conduct and development of its employees. This result suggests that advancement in a faith-based institution was not limited to academic and administrative improvements. It also required maintaining the spiritual identity of the institution and integrating its values into the educational environment. Adipat & Chotikapanich (2024), associated institutional transformation with the development of immersive, interactive, personalized, and inclusive learning environments that accommodate diverse student needs.

3.1.4 Collaborative Governance

The findings showed that institutional advancement resulted from the combined efforts of the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty members, staff, students, parents, and alumni. The participants also reported conducting regular workers' meetings and openly communicating the institution's financial condition and policies. These practices demonstrate that collaborative governance increased stakeholder participation and strengthened transparency. Involving different constituencies in decision-making helped build trust, distribute responsibility, and align institutional actions with the interests of the broader academic community.

3.1.5 Program and Infrastructure Development

The participants reported expanding the institution's academic offerings by opening programs such as the Bachelor of Elementary Education, Bachelor of Secondary Education, and Bachelor of Arts. They also responded to the need for additional senior high school classrooms and teaching personnel. These findings indicate that program and infrastructure development were used to address growing educational demands. Expanding academic offerings increased opportunities for students, while improving classrooms and staffing provided the physical and human resources necessary to support institutional growth.

3.1.6 Financial Management

The administrators reported maintaining or improving the institution's financial condition through increased student enrollment, control of unnecessary expenditures, and planned recruitment of additional personnel. These measures were implemented to preserve financial stability while supporting institutional operations. The result demonstrates that financial management was essential to institutional advancement. Strategic enrollment initiatives, expenditure regulation, and controlled hiring allowed administrators to allocate limited resources more carefully and maintain the institution's ability to deliver its programs.

3.2 Crises Encountered by the Administrators

3.2.1 Financial Management Challenges

The participants described severe financial difficulties, including a negative working capital position of 78% when one administrator assumed office. Financial constraints also affected employee compensation, with one participant reporting that salary-related obligations were at approximately 70%. The administrators consequently sought funding through donations, industry support, enrollment initiatives, and other financial strategies. These findings reveal that inadequate

financial resources affected both institutional operations and employee welfare. The administrators had to balance immediate financial obligations with the need to sustain academic programs, salaries, and organizational development.

3.2.2 Leadership and Governance Issues

The participants reported leadership and succession problems within the institution and the broader church organization. They also encountered divisions and conflicts involving faculty members, administrators, and retired employees, which complicated decision-making and institutional relationships. The findings show that leadership crises were not solely administrative but also relational and structural. Internal factions and unclear succession arrangements required administrators to manage conflict, restore unity, and maintain institutional direction despite competing interests.

3.2.3 Operational Inefficiencies

The participants identified the absence of clear, written, and board-approved policies as a major operational problem. Inadequate orientation also caused confusion, while the lack of a previously established strategic plan resulted in fragmented implementation of research, extension, guidance, and other institutional functions. These results indicate that weak institutional systems increased inconsistency and inefficiency. Without clear policies, orientation procedures, manuals, and strategic plans, employees had limited guidance for implementing programs and carrying out their responsibilities.

3.2.4 Staff Development and Qualification

The administrators encountered concerns regarding whether employees assigned to specialized functions possessed the appropriate qualifications. One participant specifically questioned the competence of the personnel responsible for financial management. The institution responded in some instances by supporting teachers pursuing master's and doctoral degrees. The finding highlights the importance of matching employee qualifications with assigned responsibilities. Institutional operations may be weakened when personnel lack the necessary expertise, while continuing education and professional development can improve competence and service quality.

3.3 Strategies Used to Handle Institutional Crises

3.3.1 Teamwork and Collaboration

The participants emphasized that management required teamwork. They involved faculty members, staff, board members, and other stakeholders in addressing institutional problems and implementing solutions. The finding indicates that crisis management became more effective when responsibility was shared among organizational members. Collaborative action allowed leaders to obtain different perspectives, mobilize institutional resources, and strengthen commitment to agreed solutions. As Wang et al., (2024) noted, the ability to work collaboratively and effectively in teams is an essential skill that extends across disciplinary boundaries.

3.3.2 Clear Communication and Informed Decision-Making

The administrators reported communicating important decisions to employees, students, parents, alumni, and other constituencies. They considered transparency necessary for ensuring that stakeholders understood the institution's situation and the actions taken to resolve it. This result demonstrates that clear communication helped maintain trust during crises. Informing stakeholders reduced uncertainty, encouraged participation, and provided a stronger basis for collective and informed decision-making.

3.3.3 Structured Planning and Implementation

The participants repeatedly emphasized the importance of planning in responding to institutional difficulties. They viewed strategic planning as necessary for directing actions, organizing institutional functions, and ensuring that crisis responses were aligned with institutional goals. The finding suggests that structured planning reduced fragmented decision-making and provided a guide for implementation. It enabled leaders to anticipate possible difficulties, establish priorities, and coordinate institutional responses. As Bonilla et al., (2024) stated, Education for Sustainable Development enhances academic performance, motivation, engagement, and problem-solving abilities while fostering a culture of sustainability consistent with institutional goals.

3.3.4 Support Systems

The administrators relied on support from alumni, family members, board members, and other institutional stakeholders. They also identified prayer as a personal coping mechanism that provided encouragement, comfort, and guidance during stressful situations. These findings show that crisis management involved both organizational and personal sources of support. External encouragement strengthened the administrators' confidence, while spiritual coping reflected the faith-based character of the institution and helped leaders remain focused during periods of uncertainty.

3.4 Synthesis of Findings

The three generations of administrators advanced the institution through quality assurance, employee development, spiritual formation, collaborative governance, program and infrastructure expansion, and financial management. However, their leadership periods were also characterized by financial constraints, governance conflicts, operational weaknesses, and concerns regarding employee qualifications. Despite these difficulties, the administrators responded through teamwork, transparent communication, strategic planning, and support systems. The findings indicate that institutional advancement and crisis management were closely connected. Progress depended not only on implementing development initiatives but also on establishing collaborative, transparent, and structured leadership practices capable of sustaining the institution during periods of crisis.

4. Conclusion & Recommendations

The study concludes that the three generations of administrators played significant roles in advancing the faith-based higher education institution through quality assurance and accreditation, faculty and staff development, spiritual development, collaborative governance, program and infrastructure development, and financial management. Despite encountering financial difficulties, leadership and governance conflicts, operational inefficiencies, and staff qualification concerns, they managed these crises through teamwork, transparent communication, structured planning, and institutional and personal support systems. These findings emphasize that collaborative governance, strategic planning, and effective communication are essential to institutional stability, resilience, and continued advancement.

Future researchers are encouraged to conduct longitudinal studies to examine how leadership practices evolve over time and how previous administrative experiences influence long-term institutional development and decision-making. Further studies should also investigate how different leadership styles respond to various generational groups within higher education institutions to support the development of more appropriate leadership development and succession-planning programs.

The study was limited to a qualitative case examination of three former administrators from one faith-based tertiary institution. Consequently, the findings reflect the participants' experiences within a specific institutional context and administrative period and may not represent the leadership experiences of administrators in other higher education institutions.

Compliance with ethical standards

The study observed institutional ethical standards by securing the voluntary participation and informed consent of the three former administrators, explaining the purpose of the research and their right to withdraw, and protecting their anonymity and confidential information through secure data handling. The researcher also remained sensitive to possible participant discomfort and provided appropriate support when necessary. Ethical approval details, conflict-of-interest declaration, acknowledgments, and copyright ownership should be indicated by the author or institution, as applicable.

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