

The Role of Transformational Leadership in Driving Organizational Sustainability: Evidence- Based on the City of Pasig

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Abstract

Organizational sustainability in the public sector remains a critical challenge, particularly in environments characterized by leadership turnover, political transitions, and competing stakeholder demands. This study examines the role of transformational leadership in driving organizational sustainability within a Philippine local government unit. Using a qualitative case study design, the research explores how transformational leadership behaviors contribute to the continuity, institutionalization, and long-term viability of sustainability-oriented governance reforms. Data were gathered through key informant interviews with elected city officials and senior administrators directly involved in policy formulation and program implementation. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring leadership practices, values, and mechanisms that support sustainable governance outcomes. Findings reveal that transformational leadership manifests through visionary direction, ethical governance, participatory decision-making, and the embedding of sustainability principles into formal structures, policies, and organizational culture. Despite challenges such as political resistance, resource constraints, and administrative inertia, leaders who consistently model transformational behaviors were able to sustain reforms beyond electoral cycles. The study contributes to the leadership and sustainability literature by providing empirical evidence from a public sector context in a developing country. Practical implications for leadership development and institutional capacity-building in local governments are discussed.

Keywords: transformational leadership, organizational sustainability, public sector leadership, local government, qualitative study

Introduction

Organizational sustainability has become an increasingly important concern in both private and public institutions because organizations are now expected not only to perform effectively in the present but also to remain relevant, resilient, and responsive over time. In the public sector, sustainability is more complex because it encompasses not only financial continuity and operational efficiency. It also involves the ability of institutions to preserve policy direction, maintain public trust, adapt to changing social demands, and continue delivering services despite leadership transitions and political changes. In local

government settings, these concerns are especially pronounced because programs and reforms are often influenced by electoral cycles, administrative priorities, and the availability of resources.

From a governance perspective, sustainable organizations are those that can translate development goals into stable systems, practices, and values that endure beyond the tenure of particular leaders. This makes leadership a crucial factor in determining whether reforms become institutionalized or remain temporary initiatives. While structures, ordinances, and policies matter, their continuity often depends on the type of leadership that initiates, communicates, and sustains them. For this reason, leadership must be viewed not simply as a managerial function but as a strategic and transformative force that shapes organizational direction and long-term viability.

Among the different leadership perspectives, transformational leadership is widely regarded as one of the most relevant in promoting sustainable organizational outcomes. Transformational leaders inspire followers through a compelling vision, encourage innovation, strengthen commitment to collective goals, and develop people in ways that support long-term organizational growth (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Northouse, 2021). Rather than focusing only on routine compliance, transformational leadership emphasizes bigger organizational change by aligning values, fostering trust, and encouraging members to work toward a shared future. These characteristics are particularly important in public organizations, where reform efforts often require both structural support and cultural acceptance.

The relevance of transformational leadership to organizational sustainability has been recognized in many studies. Existing literature shows that transformational leadership is associated with employee engagement, stronger commitment, innovation, and readiness for change, all of which contribute to organizational effectiveness (Judge & Piccolo, 2004; Yukl, 2013). However, much of this scholarship has been developed in private sector settings or in Western administrative environments. As a result, there remains limited contextual understanding of how transformational leadership operates in local government institutions in developing countries, where governance is often shaped by political turnover, bureaucratic complexity, and uneven institutional capacity.

In the Philippine context, local government units occupy a vital position in advancing development programs, social services, and community-based sustainability initiatives. They serve as the frontline institutions for translating public policy into concrete services that directly affect citizens' lives. Despite this crucial role, many local government reforms are vulnerable to disruption whenever political leadership changes. Policies may lose momentum, programs may be restructured or discontinued, and long-term governance goals may be subordinated to short-term political agendas. This pattern raises an important question about what enables some reforms to endure while others fade after a leadership transition. It also underscores the need to examine leadership behaviors that promote institutional continuity and embed sustainability into the organization itself.

Transformational leadership theory provides a strong analytical lens for this issue because its four core dimensions, namely idealized influence, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration, help explain how leaders shape organizational culture, inspire commitment, and support adaptive change (Bass, 1985). In the setting of local governance, these dimensions may reveal how leaders encourage shared ownership of reforms, promote ethical and transparent administration, and convert sustainability goals into institutional practice. More importantly, the theory allows for an examination of sustainability not merely as an outcome, but as a process that is continuously built, reinforced, and preserved through leadership action.

Although previous studies have explored leadership and sustainability, many rely heavily on quantitative approaches that capture correlations but may miss the lived experiences, contextual realities, and practical leadership processes present in actual governance environments. A qualitative approach is therefore valuable because it allows deeper exploration of how leaders understand sustainability, how they enact transformational behaviors, and how those behaviors influence the continuity of programs, policies, and institutional values within a local government unit (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This study addresses that gap by examining the role of transformational leadership in driving organizational sustainability within the City of Pasig. By focusing on the perspectives of elected officials and senior administrators who are directly involved in policy development and implementation, the research aims to uncover how leadership contributes to the long-term continuity and institutionalization of governance reforms. Specifically, it explores the leadership practices that support sustainability, the challenges encountered in maintaining reforms, and the mechanisms through which sustainability-oriented initiatives are embedded in formal systems and organizational culture.

The significance of this inquiry lies in its potential to enrich both theory and practice. Theoretically, it extends transformational leadership research into a public sector and developing-country context where empirical studies remain limited. Practically, it offers insights for local governments seeking to strengthen leadership capacity and preserve reform momentum beyond changes in political administration. More importantly, it invites readers to consider a deeper governance question: in an environment often shaped by electoral turnover and shifting priorities, what kind of leadership makes sustainability possible, and how can that leadership transform reform from a temporary agenda into a lasting institutional legacy?

Objectives of the Study

This study aims to examine the role of transformational leadership in driving organizational sustainability within a local government unit. Specifically, it seeks to:

1. Explore the transformational leadership practices exhibited by local government leaders.
2. Identify how these leadership practices contribute to organizational sustainability.
3. Examine the challenges encountered in sustaining governance reforms.
4. Determine the mechanisms by which sustainability initiatives are institutionalized within the organization.

Methodology

Research Design. The study adopted a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of transformational leadership and organizational sustainability within a real-world governance context. Case study research is appropriate when exploring complex social phenomena embedded in specific institutional settings (Yin, 2018).

Sample and Respondents. The respondents consisted of five (5) key informants composed of elected city officials and senior administrators who were directly involved in leadership, policy-making, and program implementation. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed relevant experience and insights related to sustainability-oriented governance initiatives (Patton, 2015).

Research Instruments. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed based on transformational leadership theory and organizational sustainability literature. The guide included open-ended questions that explored leadership behaviors, governance values, sustainability initiatives, and perceived challenges.

Data Collection. Key informant interviews were conducted either face-to-face or virtually, depending on participant availability. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and completeness of data.

Research Ethics. Ethical approval was secured prior to data collection. Participants were informed of the study's purpose, assured of confidentiality, and provided voluntary informed consent.

Data Analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the qualitative data. Transcripts were coded inductively, with emerging codes grouped into categories and overarching themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was guided by transformational leadership constructs while remaining open to context-specific insights.

Results and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the key informant interviews generated five major themes that explain how transformational leadership contributes to organizational sustainability within the local government unit. These themes are consistent with transformational leadership theory and sustainability-oriented governance frameworks discussed in the literature (Bass, 1985; Bass & Avolio, 1994; Elkington, 1997).

Theme 1: Visionary and Values-Oriented Leadership

The findings indicate that organizational sustainability is strongly anchored in leadership that articulates a clear, long-term vision aligned with shared organizational values. Respondents emphasized that sustainability was understood as continuity of direction and governance priorities rather than short-term program implementation. Leadership was perceived as responsible for aligning organizational goals with long-term institutional development.

This finding reflects the transformational leadership dimensions of idealized influence and inspirational motivation, where leaders communicate a compelling vision that provides meaning and direction to organizational members (Bass, 1985; Bass & Riggio, 2006). Prior studies suggest that vision-driven leadership fosters commitment and shared purpose, which are critical for sustaining reforms in public organizations, particularly in politically dynamic environments (Northouse, 2021; Yukl, 2013).

Theme 2: Ethical Governance and Trust as Foundations of Sustainability

Ethical governance emerged as a central factor in sustaining organizational initiatives. Respondents highlighted transparency, accountability, and consistency in leadership behavior as essential in building

trust within the organization and among stakeholders. Trust was viewed as a prerequisite for sustaining support for reforms and ensuring adherence to sustainability-oriented policies.

This theme aligns with the literature emphasizing the role of ethical leadership in strengthening organizational legitimacy and trust (Bass & Avolio, 1994; Yukl, 2013). Transformational leaders who model ethical conduct reinforce idealized influence, shaping organizational norms and values that support long-term sustainability. In public sector contexts, ethical governance has been identified as a key determinant of sustainable institutional performance (Brillantes & Fernandez, 2018).

Theme 3: Institutionalization of Sustainability Initiatives

The results show that sustainability was achieved not solely through leadership advocacy but through deliberate institutionalization. Respondents indicated that sustainability principles were embedded into formal structures such as policies, ordinances, administrative guidelines, and operational procedures. This institutional embedding was viewed as essential to ensuring continuity beyond leadership transitions.

This finding supports sustainability literature emphasizing that long-term organizational sustainability requires structural integration rather than reliance on individual leaders alone (Elkington, 1997; Bansal & DesJardine, 2014). Transformational leadership plays a critical role in facilitating this process by translating vision into systems and aligning organizational structures with sustainability objectives (Bass & Riggio, 2006).

Theme 4: Participatory and Collaborative Leadership Practices

Another prominent theme was the use of participatory and collaborative leadership practices. Respondents described leadership approaches that encouraged cross-departmental coordination, employee involvement, and stakeholder engagement in decision-making and implementation processes. Such practices were perceived to enhance ownership and commitment to sustainability initiatives.

These findings are consistent with the transformational leadership components of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation, which emphasize empowerment, shared learning, and collaborative problem-solving (Bass, 1985; Northouse, 2021). Prior studies indicate that participatory leadership enhances organizational adaptability and strengthens sustainability outcomes by fostering collective responsibility (Yukl, 2013).

Theme 5: Leadership in Addressing Challenges to Sustainability

Despite supportive leadership practices, respondents acknowledged challenges such as political resistance, limited resources, and bureaucratic constraints. However, the findings suggest that transformational leadership behaviors enabled leaders to manage these challenges while maintaining focus on sustainability objectives. Leaders demonstrated persistence, adaptability, and consistency in reinforcing shared goals despite institutional constraints.

This theme reflects inspirational motivation, wherein leaders sustain organizational momentum by reinforcing purpose and commitment during periods of uncertainty (Bass & Avolio, 1994). The literature supports the view that transformational leadership is particularly effective in guiding organizations through

complex change environments and sustaining reforms under challenging conditions (Yukl, 2013; Northouse, 2021).

Overall, the findings indicate that transformational leadership contributes to organizational sustainability through a combination of visionary direction, ethical governance, institutionalization, participatory practices, and adaptive leadership capacity. Sustainability within the local government unit was not treated as a discrete policy outcome but as a leadership-driven process embedded in organizational culture and formal systems.

These results extend transformational leadership theory by demonstrating its relevance in a local government context within a developing country, consistent with governance and sustainability frameworks discussed in the literature (Bass, 1985; Elkington, 1997; Brillantes & Fernandez, 2018). The study reinforces the argument that organizational sustainability in the public sector is fundamentally shaped by leadership practices that align values, structures, and stakeholder engagement over time.

Conclusion

The study demonstrates that transformational leadership plays a vital role in driving organizational sustainability within local government settings. By combining vision, ethical governance, participatory practices, and institutionalization strategies, leaders can sustain reforms beyond the tenure of a single political leader. It is recommended that local governments invest in leadership development programs that emphasize transformational competencies and embed sustainability principles into formal governance structures. Future research may extend this inquiry using comparative or mixed-methods designs across multiple local government units.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

First, local government units should strengthen leadership development programs that cultivate transformational leadership competencies among both elected officials and career administrators. Training initiatives may focus on strategic visioning, ethical governance, collaborative decision-making, innovation, and stakeholder engagement to prepare leaders for sustainability-oriented governance.

Second, sustainability-related reforms should be embedded in formal institutional mechanisms such as ordinances, administrative issuances, operational guidelines, and monitoring systems. This will help ensure that key programs and governance priorities continue even during leadership transitions.

Third, local government organizations should encourage participatory governance practices by broadening the involvement of employees, department heads, community stakeholders, and partner institutions in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Stronger participation can increase ownership and reduce resistance to reform.

Fourth, there should be deliberate efforts to promote a culture of ethical leadership, transparency, and accountability, as trust has emerged as a critical foundation for sustainability. Local governments may institutionalize ethical standards and performance review mechanisms that reinforce consistency in leadership behavior.

Fifth, future researchers may expand the study by using comparative case studies, multiple-site investigations, or mixed-methods approaches involving several local government units. Such studies may provide broader evidence on how transformational leadership influences organizational sustainability across varying political and institutional contexts.

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