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Navigating Leadership in Educational Administration: A Phenomenological Study of Administrative Officers in the Department of Education Regional Office

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Abstract

Leadership in educational administration extends beyond formal supervisory positions and includes the capacity to coordinate people, manage resources, interpret policies, resolve operational problems, sustain collaboration, and uphold accountability within complex public institutions. In the Philippine Department of Education Regional Office, Administrative Officers occupy positions that support personnel administration, records, property and supply management, financial transactions, correspondence, and other organizational processes essential to effective educational governance. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Administrative Officers in navigating leadership within a Department of Education Regional Office. Specifically, it examined how they understood leadership in administrative work, exercised influence despite bureaucratic and procedural constraints, managed competing responsibilities, responded to institutional challenges, collaborated with colleagues and supervisors, and developed professional confidence and leadership identity. Participants were purposively selected Administrative Officers with substantial experience in regional-office administrative functions. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and were analyzed using phenomenological procedures involving significant statements, meaning units, thematic clustering, textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis of the essence of the experience. The analysis generated six interconnected themes: leading through service, exercising leadership without relying solely on position, navigating policy and bureaucracy, leading through coordination and relationships, making decisions under pressure and accountability, and growing into an administrative leadership identity. The findings showed that administrative leadership was relational, ethical, adaptive, and service-oriented. The study provides implications for leadership development, succession planning, mentoring, competency-building, organizational support, and human-resource policies for Administrative Officers within the Department of Education.

Keywords: leadership, educational administration, leadership development, organizational support

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I. Introduction

Leadership in education is often associated with school heads, superintendents, regional directors, and other formally designated leaders. However, the daily functioning of educational organizations also depends heavily on personnel who exercise leadership through administrative coordination, resource stewardship, policy implementation, communication, problem-solving, and support services. Administrative Officers occupy an important position within this organizational system because they translate policies into operational processes, coordinate institutional requirements, facilitate communication among offices, and help ensure that educational programs and services are supported by efficient administrative systems. Their roles require not only technical knowledge of procedures but also judgment, interpersonal competence, accountability, adaptability, and the capacity to influence others. In this sense, administrative leadership may be exercised even without the highest formal authority, particularly when personnel guide colleagues, resolve procedural concerns, manage competing demands, or help the organization respond to complex situations.

Within the Philippine Department of Education, the Regional Office 2 serves as a major governance and management level between the Central Office and Schools Division Offices. The rationalized organizational structure established under DepEd Order No. 52, s. 2015 reflects the principles of decentralization, shared governance, accountability, and organizational effectiveness under Republic Act No. 9155. Regional Offices perform leadership, management, technical assistance, quality assurance, planning, administrative, financial, and human-resource functions necessary to implement the Department's mandate. Within this environment, Administrative Officers work within systems governed by formal procedures, accountability requirements, deadlines, interoffice coordination, and public-service expectations. Their leadership experiences are therefore shaped by the need to balance responsiveness with compliance, efficiency with accuracy, and initiative with institutional accountability.

Public-sector research has consistently demonstrated that leadership remains important even within highly regulated bureaucratic environments. Backhaus and Vogel (2022), in a meta-analysis of 151 public-administration studies involving 486 effect sizes and more than 2.8 million participants, found that leadership was positively associated with beneficial organizational outcomes and negatively associated with detrimental outcomes. They further emphasized that administrative context, leadership style, and institutional tradition influenced the strength of these relationships. This finding is particularly relevant to Administrative Officers because it shows that leadership can affect performance, organizational functioning, and employee outcomes even in institutions where formal rules and procedures strongly shape behavior.

More specifically, Bao et al. (2025) examined transformational leadership in public administration through a meta-analysis of 70 primary studies, 151 independent effect sizes, and 718,601 participants. Their findings showed that transformational leadership was significantly associated with individual-level outcomes such as motivation, attitudes, and behavior, as well as organizational outcomes including performance and innovation. These findings suggest that leadership within public organizations is not limited to enforcing compliance. It can also involve inspiring cooperation, strengthening motivation, encouraging constructive behavior, and supporting organizational improvement. For Administrative Officers, such leadership may be expressed through mentoring colleagues, facilitating teamwork, helping employees understand organizational changes, and promoting effective administrative practices.

Philippine research provides more direct evidence regarding the experiences of administrative personnel within the Department of Education. Mojica and Canoy (2025), in a phenomenographic study involving 18 DepEd administrative staff, found that participants understood government service delivery through five progressively broader conceptions: rule compliance, efficiency and timeliness, facilitation of educational access, collaborative governance, and public empowerment and ethical stewardship. Their findings demonstrate that administrative work may evolve from routine compliance toward a deeper understanding of public service, collaboration, and ethical responsibility. This perspective is closely related to leadership because Administrative Officers are frequently required to move beyond merely following rules and instead interpret how administrative procedures can effectively support institutional goals and stakeholders.

Similarly, Hernandez and Canoy (2025) examined how DepEd administrative personnel conceptualized efficiency in public education support systems. Their study, which also involved 18 administrative staff, identified five conceptions of efficiency: fast output delivery, task accuracy and compliance, responsible resource management, coordinated team functioning, and ethical and purposeful public service. These findings are particularly relevant to administrative leadership because they show that effectiveness cannot be reduced to completing tasks quickly. Leadership also involves protecting resources, ensuring accuracy, coordinating others, and maintaining ethical responsibility. Administrative Officers who manage personnel, records, property, financial processes, and organizational requirements therefore exercise leadership whenever they balance speed, quality, accountability, and service.

At a broader Philippine public-sector level, Bayona et al. (2026) examined leadership competencies and managerial role effectiveness among selected public-sector managers in Quezon City. Their study highlighted the importance of leadership

competencies in public organizations facing bureaucratic structures, resource limitations, and increasing demands for responsive governance. The researchers reported generally high levels of leadership competency and managerial role effectiveness among their participants and found a strong positive relationship between the two. This suggests that leadership competence is closely connected with effective performance in government settings and further supports the need to examine how Administrative Officers develop and exercise leadership within complex bureaucratic environments. Taken together, these studies show that leadership in public administration involves far more than formal authority. It includes service orientation, competence, ethical judgment, collaboration, adaptability, resource stewardship, motivation, and the ability to navigate institutional constraints. Nevertheless, much of the existing literature either examines public-sector leadership broadly, focuses on managerial-level personnel, or investigates administrative employees in terms of efficiency and service delivery. Comparatively less attention has been given to how Administrative Officers themselves experience leadership as part of their everyday roles within a Department of Education Regional Office 2. Their experiences are particularly important because they operate at the intersection of policy, bureaucracy, administrative expertise, organizational relationships, and service delivery.

This gap provided the basis for the present study. Rather than measuring leadership competencies or determining which leadership style Administrative Officers demonstrated, the study explored how they personally experienced and interpreted leadership within their administrative roles. It examined how they exercised influence without always holding the highest formal authority, navigated policies and procedural constraints, coordinated with colleagues and other organizational units, made decisions under pressure, responded to workplace challenges, and gradually developed confidence and leadership identity. Through a phenomenological approach, the study sought to reveal the meanings Administrative Officers attached to leadership and to illuminate how administrative leadership was actually lived within the organizational realities of a Department of Education Regional Office 2.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

This study **aimed** to explore the lived experiences of Administrative Officers in navigating leadership within a Department of Education Regional Office 2.

Specifically, it **sought** to answer the following questions:

1. How did Administrative Officers describe leadership within their administrative roles?
2. How did they exercise leadership in situations where they did not possess the highest formal authority?
3. What leadership challenges did they encounter within bureaucratic and policy-driven environments?
4. How did they make decisions and manage accountability under administrative pressure?
5. How did relationships with colleagues, supervisors, and other offices shape their leadership practices?
6. What strategies did they use to respond to conflict, workload, ambiguity, and organizational change?
7. How did their experiences shape their identity and development as administrative leaders?

4. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Administrative Officers who navigated leadership within a Department of Education Regional Office 2. Phenomenology was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand the meanings participants attached to their leadership experiences rather than quantitatively measure leadership styles or competencies. Following Moustakas (1994), the inquiry focused on significant statements, formulated meanings, thematic clusters, textural and structural descriptions, and synthesis of the essence of the phenomenon. Participants were selected through purposive criterion sampling and consisted of Administrative Officers who had substantial experience in administrative coordination, decision-making, policy implementation, personnel interaction, and organizational processes. They held Administrative Officer positions in the Regional Office 2, had experienced situations requiring leadership and decision-making, had sufficient years of service to provide meaningful reflections, and voluntarily agreed to participate. Variation in position level, section assignment, years of service, and leadership exposure was considered to obtain diverse perspectives. Data were gathered through individual semi-structured interviews that explored participants' experiences of exercising leadership, influencing colleagues without direct authority, making difficult decisions, interpreting policies, responding to conflict, managing organizational

challenges, and developing leadership competence. Probing questions were used to elicit detailed descriptions and concrete examples, and with participants' consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

The data were analyzed using phenomenological procedures. Interview transcripts were read repeatedly to develop a holistic understanding of participants' experiences, after which significant leadership-related statements were identified and transformed into meaning units and initial codes. Related codes were grouped into thematic clusters, patterns across participants were compared, and textural descriptions were developed to explain what participants experienced, while structural descriptions were constructed to identify the conditions and contexts that shaped those experiences. These descriptions were subsequently synthesized to determine the shared essence of navigating leadership as an Administrative Officer. Trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility was strengthened through sustained engagement with the interview data, participant clarification, and peer debriefing; dependability was supported through an audit trail of methodological and analytical decisions; confirmability was addressed through reflexive documentation and clear links between interpretations and participant accounts; and transferability was enhanced through detailed descriptions of the participants and organizational context. Ethical clearance was obtained from the appropriate institutional research ethics committee, and permission was secured from the Department of Education Regional Office before data collection. Participants provided written informed consent and were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality measures, and right to withdraw without professional consequences. Participant identities were protected using codes such as P1, P2, and P3, while interview recordings, transcripts, and related research materials were securely stored and accessed only by the researchers.

5. Findings

Phenomenological analysis generated six interconnected themes describing how Administrative Officers experienced and navigated leadership within the Department of Education Regional Office: (1) Leading Through Service: Leadership Began With Helping the Organization Function; (2) Leading Without the Title: Influence Developed Through Competence and Credibility; (3) Leading Within the Rules: Navigating Policy, Bureaucracy, and Discretion; (4) Leadership Through Relationships: Coordination, Communication, and Shared Work; (5) Deciding Under Pressure: Balancing Timeliness, Accuracy, and Accountability; and (6) Becoming an Administrative Leader: Growth Through Experience, Reflection, and Responsibility. Together, these themes revealed that leadership among Administrative Officers was not limited to formal authority but emerged through service, expertise, policy interpretation, interpersonal influence, accountable decision-making, and continuous professional development.

Theme 1. Leading Through Service: Leadership Began With Helping the Organization Function

The first theme revealed that participants understood leadership primarily as service to people and the organization rather than the exercise of positional power. Administrative Officers described leadership as helping colleagues accomplish responsibilities, clarifying administrative procedures, ensuring that requirements were processed correctly, and providing guidance whenever organizational problems emerged. Participants emphasized that their leadership was often demonstrated through responsiveness, availability, reliability, and their willingness to assist others even when the concern did not directly fall within their immediate assignment.

Their experiences further indicated that Administrative Officers viewed effective leadership as creating conditions that enabled other personnel to perform their duties successfully. Rather than emphasizing authority or control, participants associated leadership with responsibility, accessibility, and commitment to organizational goals.

Participant Responses

P1: "For me, leadership is not always about giving instructions. Sometimes you lead by helping people understand what they need to do and making sure that the process becomes easier for them."

P4: "Most of the time, people come to us when they are confused about a procedure. I feel that leadership is being able to guide them correctly because the information we give can affect the decision they will make."

P7: "I learned that before people follow you, they have to feel that you are willing to help them. Leadership for me starts with service because we are here to support the organization."

The participants' experiences indicated that administrative leadership was grounded in service-oriented influence. Their understanding of leadership extended beyond hierarchy and reflected an orientation toward helping colleagues, facilitating organizational processes, and contributing to public service. Mojica and Canoy (2025), in their study of DepEd administrative personnel, similarly found that government service was understood through progressively broader

conceptions that included rule compliance, efficiency, facilitation of educational access, collaborative governance, and ethical stewardship. These findings support the view that administrative leadership becomes more meaningful when personnel see their work as contributing to the wider educational mission rather than merely completing transactions.
Similarly, Hernandez and Canoy (2025) found that DepEd administrative employees associated efficiency not only with fast completion of tasks but also with coordinated teamwork, responsible resource management, and ethical and purposeful public service. This reinforces the present finding that leadership credibility was developed through dependable service. The participants appeared to exercise a form of leadership consistent with servant-oriented perspectives, where influence was built by supporting others and placing organizational needs alongside personal responsibility. Thus, service became both a leadership practice and a source of professional legitimacy.

Theme 2. Leading Without the Title: Influence Developed Through Competence and Credibility
The second theme showed that Administrative Officers exercised leadership even when they did not occupy the highest position in the organizational hierarchy. Participants reported that colleagues frequently sought their advice because of their technical expertise, institutional knowledge, familiarity with policies, and experience in handling administrative processes. In many instances, influence arose not from formal authority but from the confidence others placed in their judgment.
Participants explained that credibility had to be earned through consistent performance, accuracy, reliability, and willingness to accept responsibility. They also recognized that a position title alone did not automatically make an individual influential. Rather, colleagues were more likely to follow guidance when they perceived that the Administrative Officer understood the process and could provide dependable solutions.

Participant Responses
P2: "There are times when I am not the highest-ranking person in the discussion, but they still ask me what process should be followed because they know that it is my area and I have handled it many times."
P5: "I realized that people do not follow you just because of your position. They listen when they know that you are consistent, that you know your work, and that what you are telling them is reliable."
P8: "Credibility is very important. If you keep giving correct information and you are accountable for your decisions, people eventually trust you even if you are not their immediate supervisor."

The finding demonstrated that leadership within administrative settings could be expertise-based rather than purely position-based. Administrative Officers developed influence because their technical competence and organizational knowledge made them credible sources of guidance. Backhaus and Vogel's (2022) meta-analysis of 151 public-administration studies found that leadership was positively and consistently associated with beneficial outcomes across different public-sector contexts, while also emphasizing that contextual conditions shape how leadership functions. The implication for Administrative Officers is that leadership need not always emerge through hierarchical command; it may develop through competent performance and professional credibility.
Bao et al. (2025) likewise found, across 70 primary studies involving more than 718,000 participants, that transformational leadership in public administration was associated with positive individual and organizational outcomes, including motivation, behavior, performance, and innovation. Although the present participants did not necessarily describe themselves as transformational leaders, their experiences illustrated one important aspect of effective public leadership: the ability to influence organizational behavior through competence and trust. Thus, the findings suggest that technical expertise can become a form of informal leadership capital, allowing Administrative Officers to guide decisions even when formal authority rests elsewhere.

Theme 3. Leading Within the Rules: Navigating Policy, Bureaucracy, and Discretion
The third theme captured the participants' experiences of balancing organizational responsiveness with compliance with government policies and procedures. Administrative Officers reported that they regularly handled concerns involving memoranda, policies, documentary requirements, government rules, and established administrative procedures. They described situations in which stakeholders requested immediate action but procedural requirements prevented shortcuts. Participants therefore had to explain policies, identify permissible options, consult appropriate authorities, and exercise careful judgment when policies did not provide direct answers. They acknowledged that leadership within government required them to remain responsive without compromising accountability or legal and institutional requirements.

Participant Responses

P3: "Sometimes the client wants the transaction completed immediately, but there are requirements that we cannot remove. Our responsibility is to explain why those documents are needed and help them find the proper way to comply."
P6: "You want to help, but in government you cannot just decide based on what is convenient. You have to check the policy first because whatever decision you make should be defensible."
P9: "There are situations where the memorandum does not answer everything. That is when experience becomes important, but we also consult because we do not want to make a decision that will create a bigger problem later."
The participants' accounts revealed the distinctive tension between bureaucratic compliance and administrative discretion. Administrative Officers were expected to respond to organizational needs while remaining within the boundaries established by policy. Mojica and Canoy (2025) similarly identified rule compliance as a foundational conception of DepEd administrative service but also found that employees developed broader understandings involving collaborative governance and ethical stewardship. This progression helps explain why participants did not describe compliance as simple obedience; rather, they attempted to interpret rules responsibly in order to provide workable solutions.
Backhaus and Vogel (2022) emphasized that leadership outcomes in the public sector vary according to administrative context and tradition, illustrating that leadership cannot be separated from institutional arrangements. Public leaders exercise discretion within structures that demand transparency and accountability. The present findings therefore suggest that effective Administrative Officers practiced **bounded discretion**: they exercised initiative and judgment while recognizing that leadership decisions had to remain consistent with policy and institutional responsibility. This ability to navigate between rigidity and flexibility constituted an important dimension of administrative leadership.

Theme 4. Leadership Through Relationships: Coordination, Communication, and Shared Work
The fourth theme revealed that participants experienced administrative leadership as fundamentally relational. They described frequent interaction with supervisors, colleagues, other divisions, Schools Division Offices, and external stakeholders. Because many administrative processes required information, approval, documentation, or action from several offices, participants emphasized that leadership depended heavily on communication and coordination.
Strong professional relationships enabled Administrative Officers to resolve misunderstandings, obtain information more efficiently, clarify responsibilities, and manage complex processes. Participants also noted that respectful communication was especially important when dealing with disagreement or delayed compliance. They learned that technical knowledge alone was insufficient if they could not communicate their expectations clearly or maintain constructive working relationships.

Participant Responses
P1: "You can know the policy and the process, but if you cannot communicate properly, you will still have problems. People need to understand not only what you need from them but why it is needed."
P5: "Our work is really interconnected. There are documents that start from one office, pass through another, and require approval somewhere else. You cannot accomplish everything alone."
P10: "I learned to be careful with how I communicate. Even if you are correct, the way you say something can affect whether the other person will cooperate with you."

The finding emphasized relational leadership and collaborative governance. Participants did not experience administrative leadership as isolated individual performance but as the ability to coordinate interdependent people and processes. Hernandez and Canoy (2025) identified coordinated team functioning as one of the major ways DepEd administrative employees conceptualized efficiency, suggesting that collaboration is an integral component of administrative effectiveness. Mojica and Canoy (2025) similarly identified collaborative governance as a more developed conception of public-service delivery among DepEd administrative personnel.
These findings are also consistent with broader public-leadership research. Bao et al. (2025) found that transformational leadership was positively associated with leader-member exchange and beneficial employee outcomes, highlighting the importance of relational processes in public administration. For Administrative Officers, leadership was therefore enacted through communication, trust, coordination, and the ability to maintain productive relationships across formal organizational boundaries. The participants' experiences indicate that administrative competence becomes more effective when combined with interpersonal competence.
Theme 5. Deciding Under Pressure: Balancing Timeliness, Accuracy, and Accountability
The fifth theme described the participants' experiences of making administrative decisions amid deadlines, competing responsibilities, incomplete information, and urgent organizational demands. Administrative Officers reported that they

frequently had to determine which concerns required immediate action while ensuring that decisions remained accurate and consistent with policy.

Participants recognized that errors could have consequences for personnel, financial transactions, government resources, official records, and the credibility of the Regional Office. As a result, they described decision-making as a process of checking available information, consulting policies, verifying documents, considering possible consequences, and seeking guidance when appropriate.

Participant Responses

P2: "There are situations where everyone wants an answer immediately, but I learned that I should not decide just because people are waiting. I have to make sure that the information is correct."

P6: "Speed is important, especially when there is a deadline, but accuracy is more important because one mistake can affect another office or another employee."

P8: "When I make a decision, I always ask myself if I can explain and defend it later. That makes me check the policy and documents carefully before I act."

The theme demonstrated that Administrative Officers understood leadership as accountable decision-making rather than rapid decision-making alone. Hernandez and Canoy (2025) found that DepEd administrative personnel conceptualized efficiency through multiple dimensions, including fast delivery, task accuracy, compliance, responsible resource management, teamwork, and ethical service. This closely mirrors participants' efforts to balance timeliness with accuracy and accountability.

Backhaus and Vogel (2022) further demonstrated that public-sector leadership is generally associated with positive performance and organizational outcomes, but that leadership effectiveness depends on context. In a public institution, decision quality must therefore be considered alongside decision speed. Bao et al. (2025) similarly reported positive associations between transformational leadership and organizational performance and innovation in public administration. The present study extends these findings by showing that, at the operational level, leadership involved the willingness to slow down when necessary, verify facts, and accept responsibility for the consequences of administrative decisions.

Theme 6. Becoming an Administrative Leader: Growth Through Experience, Reflection, and Responsibility

The final theme revealed that participants' leadership identities developed gradually rather than emerging automatically with appointment to an Administrative Officer position. Several participants initially perceived their role primarily in technical or support terms. Over time, repeated exposure to administrative challenges, difficult decisions, policy implementation, coordination, mentoring, and problem-solving changed how they understood themselves.

Participants reported increasing confidence in giving advice, resolving issues, communicating with different personnel, and assuming accountability. They also recognized that leadership development remained unfinished because policies, technologies, organizational expectations, and workplace relationships continued to change.

Participant Responses

P3: "When I first became an Administrative Officer, I focused mainly on completing my assigned work. Later, I realized that people were already asking for my advice, and that made me understand that my role also involved leadership."

P7: "Every difficult situation taught me something. There were decisions I was afraid to make before, but experience helped me become more confident and careful."

P10: "I do not think you ever finish learning how to lead. Policies change, people are different, and new problems come, so you also need to keep learning and adjusting."

This theme illustrated the development of leadership identity through experience and reflection. Participants did not regard leadership as a fixed personal characteristic; they described it as something strengthened through responsibility, experience, feedback, and continuous learning. Public-sector leadership research provides support for this developmental interpretation. Backhaus and Vogel (2022) found that various leadership approaches can contribute to positive outcomes in public organizations, suggesting that effective public leadership is not restricted to a single style or predetermined set of traits.

Bao et al. (2025) likewise demonstrated that leadership within public administration is associated with employee motivation, behavior, organizational performance, and innovation, reinforcing the importance of deliberately developing leadership capability among administrative personnel. In the Philippine DepEd context, Mojica and Canoy (2025) showed

that administrative personnel's understandings of public service ranged from procedural compliance to more reflective and ethically grounded conceptions of stewardship. This suggests that professional growth may also involve a shift in how Administrative Officers understand their organizational purpose.

The present findings therefore indicate that becoming an administrative leader was an evolving professional process. Experience created opportunities for participants to test their judgment, reflect on outcomes, learn from colleagues, and gradually develop confidence. Leadership identity emerged when participants began to recognize that their decisions, guidance, and behavior influenced not only administrative outputs but also the functioning of the wider organization.

Participants initially exercised leadership through service and technical responsibility. As their competence and credibility increased, colleagues increasingly sought their advice. Greater responsibility exposed them to policy ambiguity, interpersonal challenges, and decisions carrying organizational consequences. Through these experiences, they learned that leadership required both confidence and restraint, initiative and consultation, and efficiency and accountability.

The essence of the phenomenon therefore rested in the ability to lead within and beyond the formal administrative role. Although Administrative Officers worked within hierarchical and bureaucratic structures, their influence extended beyond their formal job descriptions. They guided processes, shaped decisions, supported colleagues, interpreted policies, and maintained the relationships necessary for organizational functioning.

The findings are consistent with broader public-sector evidence showing that leadership is positively associated with beneficial organizational outcomes and that leadership effectiveness depends significantly on administrative context (Backhaus & Vogel, 2022). They also correspond with Bao et al. (2025), whose meta-analysis showed that transformational leadership in public administration was related to motivation, behavior, organizational performance, and innovation. In the Philippine DepEd setting, the findings resonate with recent studies showing that administrative personnel understand their work through efficiency, coordinated teamwork, ethical service, collaborative governance, and stewardship (Hernandez & Canoy, 2025; Mojica & Canoy, 2025).

Thus, navigating leadership as an Administrative Officer was not simply a matter of occupying a position. It was a continuing process of earning trust, exercising judgment, coordinating people, interpreting rules responsibly, and accepting accountability for decisions that affected the organization.

6. Discussion

The findings revealed that leadership among Administrative Officers was not confined to formal authority. Participants exercised leadership through service, competence, credibility, collaboration, policy interpretation, and accountable decision-making.

The theme Leading Through Service showed that participants understood leadership as helping colleagues and supporting organizational processes. This finding was consistent with Mojica and Canoy (2025), who found that DepEd administrative personnel viewed government service through collaboration, efficiency, public empowerment, and ethical stewardship.

Leading Without the Title demonstrated that technical competence and credibility allowed participants to exercise influence despite differences in formal rank. Their experiences showed that expertise functioned as an important source of leadership legitimacy.

The theme Leading Within the Rules illustrated how participants navigated bureaucracy while remaining responsive to organizational needs. They balanced procedural compliance with practical problem-solving, indicating that administrative leadership involved responsible interpretation rather than mechanical application of rules.

Leadership Through Relationships highlighted the importance of communication and coordination. Participants depended on professional relationships to secure information, coordinate responsibilities, and solve problems across organizational units.

The theme Deciding Under Pressure demonstrated that administrative leadership required careful judgment. Participants balanced timeliness with accuracy and accountability, reinforcing the view that efficiency in public administration is multidimensional.

Finally, Becoming an Administrative Leader showed that leadership identity developed through experience. Participants became more confident as they encountered increasingly complex responsibilities, reflected on previous decisions, and learned from colleagues and supervisors.

Overall, the study demonstrated that administrative leadership within the Department of Education Regional Office was relational, adaptive, ethical, and service-oriented.

7. Implications for the Department of Education Regional Office

The findings suggest that leadership-development programs for Administrative Officers should recognize leadership as an

integral component of administrative work. Training may focus on adaptive leadership, ethical decision-making, policy interpretation, conflict management, communication, collaboration, and strategic problem-solving.
Mentoring programs may also be strengthened so that experienced Administrative Officers can guide personnel who are developing administrative and leadership competence.
The findings further suggest that succession planning should consider employees who demonstrate not only technical competence but also credibility, service orientation, sound judgment, and collaborative ability.
Administrative Officers should also be provided with opportunities to participate in organizational planning, process improvement, and policy consultation, since their operational knowledge may contribute significantly to institutional effectiveness.

8. Conclusion

The study found that leadership among Administrative Officers in the Department of Education Regional Office developed through a combination of service, technical competence, relational influence, policy navigation, accountability, and continuous professional growth. Participants did not experience leadership solely as formal authority; instead, they exercised leadership by supporting colleagues, guiding administrative processes, interpreting rules, coordinating organizational relationships, and making responsible decisions under pressure.
The themes Leading Through Service; Leading Without the Title; Leading Within the Rules; Leadership Through Relationships; Deciding Under Pressure; and Becoming an Administrative Leader revealed that administrative leadership extended beyond routine task completion.
The findings showed that Administrative Officers gradually developed leadership confidence and identity as they encountered more complex responsibilities and learned to balance organizational expectations with public-service accountability.
The essence of their experience was found in their ability to lead within and beyond the administrative role. Their leadership was often less visible than traditional executive leadership, yet it played an important role in sustaining organizational processes and translating policies into effective administrative practice.
Strengthening the leadership capacity of Administrative Officers therefore remains important because their competence and judgment continue to influence the efficiency, accountability, responsiveness, and effectiveness of educational administration.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the Department of Education Regional Office may strengthen leadership-development programs specifically for Administrative Officers. Training may focus on adaptive leadership, policy interpretation, ethical decision-making, communication, conflict resolution, team coordination, and strategic problem-solving.
Structured mentoring and coaching programs may also be established to support Administrative Officers who are preparing for higher leadership responsibilities.
Administrative Officers may be given greater opportunities to participate in process-improvement initiatives and organizational planning.
Future studies may examine leadership experiences across different Regional Offices, Schools Division Offices, Administrative Officer levels, and career stages.

10. Limitations

The study was limited to the experiences of Administrative Officers within a particular Department of Education Regional Office. The findings therefore reflected the specific organizational context, culture, staffing structure, and administrative environment in which the participants worked.
The study relied primarily on participants' self-reported experiences, which may have been influenced by memory, interpretation, and willingness to discuss workplace concerns.
Differences in Administrative Officer level, years of service, section assignment, and supervisory responsibilities may also have influenced individual experiences.

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