

Empowerment Management in Higher Education: A Case Study from the Philippines

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Abstract

Reorganization in higher education institutions in the Philippines became inevitable when the whole Philippine education system shifted from having 10 years to 12 years of basic education starting in year 2015, henceforth pushing higher education to do a comprehensive evaluation of its programs or curricular offerings to match with the competencies called for by higher education in the country.. These changes led academic units to review their respective mission, vision, and goals so as to empower departmental heads (or chairpersons) to in turn strengthen their respective unit. The Empowerment –Management-Equalizer Workshop in one private university in the Philippines assessed departmental chairpersons' understanding of their functions and responsibilities as academic and administrative leaders and managers. After participating in this workshop, the departmental chairpersons answered the researcher-designed empowerment-management-equalizer (EME) assessment tool enabling the participants to gauge their capability to distinguish between tasks and responsibilities through matching job description with their coordinative, executive, and recommendatory functions. This workshop has four parts, mainly university governance, leadership, communication, and conflict management. The EME Assessment Tool answered in the last phase of the workshop, on the other hand was an adaptation of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Style Instrument (2015). This study outlines the workshop phases which effected a cohesive understanding of the role of people in higher education and higher education's aim towards empowerment management and leadership.

1 Introduction

Academic departments in higher educational institutions (HEIs) in the Philippines are multifaceted and adopt an inter/multi-disciplinary systems approach to instruction, research, and social involvement. Academic and operational unit heads at all levels of the HEIs need to understand and know the balance between their two jobs: as a manager and as a teacher.

With the bold changes in higher education, as a result, operational unit managers are not confined to doing just specific tasks; they need to be empowered to respond to interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary concerns, and to do so not only by

looking at the local scenario but also by keeping global perspectives in view. In 2015, the Philippines started the implementation of the K to 12 System (Republic Act 10533, The Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013) wherein, instead of finishing basic education in 10 years (six years of primary education [Grade 1 to Grade 6] and four years of secondary or high school education [Grade 7 to Grade 10]), the mandatory kindergarten (K) level and two years in secondary education (Grade 10 to Grade 12), termed as Senior High School (SHS) were added to the basic education curriculum, resulting to a dearth in enrolment in higher education in 2015. As managers, the department chairpersons had to take a closer look on how their course offerings would meet the demands of incoming college students by 2017 and also ensure the faculty's readiness in handling the new and revised courses. College curricular programs were revisited, revised and revitalized to be at pace with the K to 12 System. All the revised curricular programs had to be reviewed and approved by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) of the Philippines.

The unique features of the additional two-year levels in secondary education in the K to 12 System posted a real challenge in designing tertiary curricular programs in the country. At the start of SHS (Grade 11), the student had to choose from the three SHS tracks, namely: 1. Academic Track; 2. Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL) Track; and 3. Sports and Arts Track. The academic track is chosen by students who would pursue college education; the TVL track is chosen by students who are interested in job-ready skills and issuance of certificates of competency and national certifications on specific skill-sets; the Sports and Arts Track are for students who would venture in athletics, fitness and recreational industries, and in visual design and performing arts, respectively. Higher education institutions focused on strategically designing academic programs that would have to be offered by 2017. These programs should be aligned with the strands under the academic track, namely: 1. Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM); 2. Humanities and Social Sciences (HUMSS); 3. General Academics (GA); and 4. Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM). For HEIs and department heads, choosing and enrolling in these strands in SHS became determinants of the courses the SHS graduate would take in college and the number of students who would be attracted to take the new/revised course programs which has to be aligned/matched with the SHS academic strand. Faculty loading that is also managed by the department head is very much dependent on the college courses chosen by the SHS graduate.

This legislation of RA 10 533 compelled higher education institutions (HEIs) to do a comprehensive evaluation of their programs to match with the 21st century competencies and skills (P21 Framework, 2007) required in the Philippine higher education curriculum. In the case of the Ateneo de Naga University (ADNU), Philippines, the presence of SHS academic strands effected to a reorganization in the colleges to realign course offerings in higher education with the K to 12 System's academic strands. ADNU reorganized two out of its six colleges, mainly the College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) to the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) and the College of Engineering (CE) to the College of Science and Engineering (CSE).

The CAS housed eight departments and one center, namely, the Departments of Literature and Language Studies, Mathematics, Media Studies, Natural Sciences, Philosophy, Psychology, Social Sciences, Theology, and the College Reading Center (CRC). In 2015, two of its departments (Mathematics and Natural Sciences) were transferred to the CE to group all the humanities and social science-related curricula and science and engineering related courses under the CHSS and CSE, respectively. The university's expectation on the department heads being pro-active in revising the curricular offerings simultaneous with manning their respective departments was high; the reorganization and process of transferring the two departments, however, happened too fast and spawned confusion among the unit heads and faculty alike.

Faced with the challenge of shaping a new, albeit re-organized college, the CHSS dean spearheaded the review of the college's mission, vision, and goals with the six department chairpersons giving inputs enabling harmony within and between the departments and henceforth strengthening its multi-faceted set-up.

2 The IDC-PAP: Empowerment-Management-Equalizer of Department Chairpersons

A brief look at the Project Action Plan (PAP). The concept of the project action plan [PAP] was introduced during Phase I of the International Deans' Course South-East Asia 2016/17. The thematic areas in the IDC where the PAP would be linked are the following: financial management, strategic management, research management, curriculum design, quality assurance. This three-phase course is designed for its participants to "work on an individual reform project which will be implemented in between the contact phases at the participants' home universities." Upon return to the home university, the PAP would be fully designed and implemented with the guidance of an IDC-DAAD mentor/trainer. In the interim workshop (Part II) held in the Philippines last October 23–27, 2016, the PAP was presented and the learning progress of each course participant was shared and feedback were given by peers and trainers. In the final conference (Part III) held in Yogyakarta, Indonesia on February 5–10, 2017.

Shaping the Empowerment-Management-Equalizer (EME). This IDC-PAP zeroed-in on strategic management and planning and quality assurance of jobs specifically of the mid-level administrators, in this case faculty members who become department chairpersons and center directors. . The proponent realized that introducing strategic management and planning in higher education to newly appointed mid-level administrators may be seen as an encumbrance, as such there would be hesitation in understanding the roles and functions which the new job requires, albeit, accepting the responsibilities and the new job. They have been and are still more adept and focused on teaching, doing research, and extension (social involvement) work.

In school-year 2015–2016, the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (CHSS) has a dean and seven departments/center under it – Literature and Language Studies, Media Studies, Philosophy, Psychology, Social Sciences, Theology, and the College Reading Center. With this, The CHSS which shows a multifaceted set-up and inter/multi-disciplinary systems approach in understanding approaches to instruction, research, and social involvement.

As Dean of the CHSS, the proponent is expected to:

- a) “lead in the program design and implementation of projects that will embolden instruction, research, and social involvement bearing in mind the support to the University Mission, Vision, and Goals;
- b) “encourage the faculty and have faculty development programs to guide them in their career paths;
- c) “to support student programs for the development and growth of the students and hone them to become men and women for others and prepare them to succeed in their chosen career and field of specialization; and
- d) “to have means and ways for the faculty and the College to be able to conduct and publish researches in both local, national, and international arenas” (Job Description of the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, n. d.)

Over and above all these is the need to understand the interdisciplinary and multi-disciplinary approaches and systems where all areas and disciplines under the Humanities and Social Sciences may be glued and work together as a system. Taking into consideration too the university’s CorPlan2020, mid-level administrators need to understand and know the balance between being managers and faculty/professors themselves. Corporate Planning 2020 (CorPlan2020) “is a product of a long process of reflective interaction and collaboration among the different offices and units of seeking the best way to realize the University Mission and Vision” (Fabay, 2013). As such, CorPlan2020 is the blueprint which presents how the university can reach its objective through consolidated and synthesized goals and strategic tasks, guided by its six key result areas encompassing the university’s four-fold functions: instruction, research, social involvement, and formation (as stipulated in the University Mission (2013), forming students to become ‘men and women for others’ through a balanced academic, research, and community service, “responding to Christ’s call to serve first God’s Kingdom – *Primum Regnum Dei.*”)

This blueprint serves as the template for all the colleges and units to follow to reach success and achieve its milestones. However, with the changes in the country’s educational system - the additional two years in basic education (Philippine K to 12 System) and revisions in the higher education curriculum (CHED Memorandum Order No.20 series of 2013: The New General Education Curriculum), the University had to adapt to these changes; academic departments especially, need to recalibrate and/or re-assess identified plans and programs already included in the corporate plan. The department chairpersons and center directors need not be confined to doing just specific tasks as well; they need to be empowered and trained in handling

interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary activities or concerns, by not just considering or looking at the local scenario but looking at it holistically, with international and global perspectives.

The proponent realized that through the designed IDC-PAP: Workshop on Empowerment-Management Equalizer (EME) of Department Chairpersons, the latter would learn and apply strategic management and planning in recalibrating, re-assessing identified programs and projects they have indicated in CorPlan2020, have balance and be empowered in performing their duties and have quality assurance of jobs and deliverables. The Workshop on EME was held on September 1–2, 2016 at the Ateneo de Naga University.

It is hoped that this module may be incorporated in the university's Leadership Development and Succession Program as it intends to educate and empower its current and future administrators on managing change and strategic management.

Incorporated in the workshop was evaluating and matching the unit heads' job descriptions with their actual tasks and responsibilities, and how they balance their over-all work load. The College's main concern was strengthening its foundation and support system provided to its departments/units, and empowering the department chairpersons in becoming managers and at the same time teachers in the university where they also have to fulfil the four-fold function of instruction, research, social involvement, and Ignatian formation. A first step to this was the design of a two-day Workshop on Empowerment-Management Equalizer of Department Chairpersons. Second was adapting the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (2002, 2010) to come up with the researcher-designed Empowerment-Management Equalizer (EME) Assessment Tool.

Workshop Outputs

The two-day Workshop on Empowerment-Management Equalizer of Department Chairpersons was designed to share with the workshop participants selected inputs from the International Deans' Course South-East Asia 2016–2017. The workshop has two interfaces; it started off with the background of the DIES-IDC Southeast Asia 2016/2017 Phase 1 with the following topics: University Governance, Leadership and Communication, Soft-Skills or the Skill-Will Matrix, and Conflict Management. The second part of the workshop was answering two assessment tools/checklists – the Thomas – Kilman Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) and the proponent-designed Empowerment-Management Equalizer (EME) Assessment Checklist for the Department Chairpersons with the items lifted from the mid-level administrator's job description as it adapted the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (2002, 2010). These helped both the dean of the College of Humanities and Social Sciences (the proponent) and the mid-level administrators (six department chairpersons and one center director) appreciate the leadership role given them – a role that may have been hesitantly or willingly accepted or not.

Conflict Management. "The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (TKI) assesses an individual's behavior in conflict situations—that is, situations in which

the concerns of two people appear to be incompatible. In conflict situations, we can describe a person's behavior along two basic dimensions: (1) **assertiveness**, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy his or her own concerns, and (2) **cooperativeness**, the extent to which the individual attempts to satisfy the other person's concerns. These two dimensions of behavior can be used to define five methods of dealing with conflict." According to Thomas (1994), the five methods are Competing, Collaborating, Compromising, Avoiding, and Accommodating. The instrument was answered after the workshop sessions on soft-skills and conflict management.

The mid-level administrators found it interesting that their style in handling conflicts fall under the given methods. According to TKI Interpretation (J. Trainer, 2010), "In the case of conflict-handling behavior, there are no right or wrong answers. All five modes are useful in some situations: each represents a set of useful social skills. Our conventional wisdom recognizes, for example, that often "Two heads are better than one" (collaborating). But it also says, "Kill your enemies with kindness" (accommodating), "Split the difference" (compromising). "Leave well enough alone" (avoiding), and "Might makes right" (competing). The effectiveness of a given conflict-handling mode depends on the requirements of the specific situation and the skill with which you use that mode."

High among the conflict mode is **compromising** and **accommodating**, low in **competing**, and average on **collaborating** and **avoiding** (Table 1). Four of the administrators are high in compromising and accommodating. Chairmanship is not a full-time position and only has an equivalent number of credit units. As such, the department chairpersons are faced with dealing and balancing administrative functions and handling college classes. There are instances when faculty members who are much older, in age and/or years of service in the university, would insist on doing what have been long practiced and not welcoming changes or adjustments (i. e., teaching methodologies, doing research, designing and implementing syllabi, attendance checking, etc.). The implied seniority of the faculty members, more often than not, presents a hindrance in decision-making, resulting in a compromise or accommodation. More often than not the chairpersons do not enter into discussions or disagreements with faculty members; seldom do they compete (Low) with their faculty showing that the mid-level administrators do not compete with, but rather prioritize the need and welfare of the faculty and their department (collaborating, compromising, and accommodating).

Table 1: Mid-Level Administrators' Response to the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument

Usage	Competing	Collaborating	Compromising	Avoiding	Accommodating
HIGH		2	4	2	4
AVERAGE	2	3	2	4	3
LOW	5	2	1	1	

Empowerment Management Equalizer. Incorporated in the workshop was evaluating and matching the unit heads’ job descriptions with their actual tasks and responsibilities, and how they balance their over-all work load. The College’s main concern was strengthening its foundation and support system provided to its departments/units, and empowering the department chairpersons in becoming managers and at the same time teachers in the university where they also have to fulfil the four-fold function of instruction, research, social involvement, and Ignatian formation.

Every position in an organization has a job description (JD). In the University, when a faculty gets the position as unit head (department chairperson), she is expected to be oriented of his job by the former unit head; understanding and “getting-in-on-the-job” becomes experiential (learning-by-doing). The new department chairperson does not immediately go through the job description (tasks and responsibilities) provided by the human resource office. These 47 tasks and responsibilities were laid in the Empowerment-Management Equalizer Checklist where the department chairpersons would be able to name which among the varied functions they acknowledge, identify, and perform. Following the format of the Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument (2002, 2010), the proponent re-arranged the order of the job descriptions from the original personnel file; a sample of these re-arranged job descriptions are hereby presented, along with the functions they need to identify (Table 2). The seven mid-level administrators (6 department chairpersons and one center director) would have to discern under which of the four general functions it falls – Coordinating Function (CF), Executive Functions (EF), Recommendatory Functions (RF), and Other/Additional functions (OF).

Table 2: Sample Items and Identified Functions in the Empowerment Management Equalizer Checklist

No.	Specific Job Description (Tasks and Responsibilities)	Function*			
		CF	EF	RF	OF
1	Actively participate in the recruitment, screening, selection and recommendation to the Dean, of new faculty members.	CF	EF	RF	OF
2	Acts as mediator in any conflict between students and teachers, and between teachers in the department	CF	EF	RF	OF
4	Coordinates with the Center for Community Development and Office of Mission and Identity regarding formation and outreach activities of teachers and students; and	CF	EF	RF	OF
13	Establishes takes direct responsibility for the maintenance, upkeep, and or upgrading of facilities and equipment in his/her office.	CF	EF	RF	OF

Function: CF – coordinating function RF – recommendatory function EF – executive function
 OF – other/additional function

Presented in the JD are the 47 tasks and responsibilities specified under four main functions – coordinating (CF, 16 items), executive (EF, 16 items), recommendatory (RF, 10 items), and additional functions (OF, 5 items) – those deliverables needed from time to time. In the process of reading and revisiting the JD, the department chairpersons would shade the column provided for the CF, EF, RF, OF (Table 2).

The proponent also prepared a frequency table to determine the mid-level administrators' awareness and understanding of said general functions (Table 3). The last phase of the Workshop on Empowerment Management Equalizer of Department Chairpersons was the classification of these tasks and responsibilities according to the four main functions which the department chairpersons are bound to perform. The levels of **high**, **average**, and **low** were determined based on the frequency of matching the individual task and responsibility with the four main functions – **CF**, **EF**, **RF**, **OF**. The proponent did the counting, together with the workshop-participants (department chairpersons center director). The higher (or lower) the frequency of correct matches between tasks and responsibilities with functions, the more balanced (imbalanced) and empowered (weak) the department chairpersons are in meeting expectations and performing their tasks and responsibilities, both as mid-level administrators and faculty. Simultaneous with it, everyone identified and shared experiences and aired clarifications about the said functions, then realized that there were some overlaps between executive and recommendatory functions.

Table 3: Frequency Table of the Distribution of the General Functions based on the Department Chairpersons' Awareness and Understanding of the Job Description (Tasks and Responsibilities)

Level	CF	EF	RF	OF
High	11 to 16	11 to 16	6 to 10	4 to 5
Average	6 to 10	6 to 10	4 to 6	2 to 3
Low	1 to 5	1 to 5	1 to 3	1 to 2

In summary (Table 4), only one was high in the **coordinating functions** and two in the **executive functions**. These chairpersons have had more experience in being mid-level administrators as compared to the others due to the fact that they have had more years of being chairpersons. Low in the **recommendatory functions** are the "most recent" in the job and the functions are quite overwhelmingly "just sinking in," resulting to mixed emotions and thinking of how to juggle their time from one function to another (imbalance). Majority of the chairpersons are on the average in the **coordinating**, **executive**, and **recommendatory** functions.

Table 4: Summary of the Department Chairpersons' Response to the Empowerment Management Equalizer Checklist

	CF	EF	RF	OF
High	1	2		
Average	5	5	5	1
Low	1		2	4

Some of these tasks and responsibilities that are faced by the department chairpersons frequently are the following:

1. Acting as mediator in conflict situations between students, parents, faculty, and departments.
2. Establishing linkages/tie-ups with the industries.
3. Designing and proposing new and revised course offerings to be served by the department; preparing faculty loading, scheduling of classes, and use of facilities/laboratories
4. Through channels, reorganizing / restructuring of the departments in response to the needs of the time and for the departments' more efficient functioning.
5. Supervising the faculty resulting to effective classroom instruction and management, efficient performance in teaching and teaching-related functions (i. e., student consultation, classroom and peer observations; preparing term examinations, doing research and community service, etc).

The above items, along with the 42 other tasks and responsibilities eat much of the time of the mid-level administrators. They need to be able to balance delivering these with their teaching load assignments. Over and above all these, the department chairpersons thrived to understand the interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approaches and systems woven in their positions where all areas and disciplines under the Humanities and Social Sciences are glued to work together as a system.

After knowing the result of their responses, of where their strong and weak points are, the proponent asked for feedback on the 2-half day workshop. The department chairpersons appreciated the design of the workshop and the importance given to sharing the inputs from the DIES-DAAD International Deans' Course Southeast Asia 2016–2017.

For a successful and fulfilling strategic management and planning, the department chairpersons and their successors always “just learn by doing” (learning through experience). There is also the realization that academic leaders, when it is time to relinquish their jobs, have to responsibility to properly turn-over the tasks to their successors. To be empowered, higher education institutions not only in the region or province, but in the country should be able to provide more enhancements or skills development for faculty members who are faced with the challenge of being middle administrators, balancing office work and teaching. Academic heads would have to be well equipped with conflict management and soft-skills to be able to handle a wide array of clientele – colleagues, co-faculty, non-academic staff, students, and parents. Philippine HEIs should have strong support coming from its human resource offices.

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