

INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP PRACTICES AND MANAGEMENT STYLES OF SCHOOL HEADS IN THE SCHOOLS DIVISION OF COTABATO

Ibrahim Ambag

Cotabato Foundation College of Science and Technology

ABSTRACT

This study investigated the relationship between innovative leadership practices, management styles, and the work efficiency and effectiveness of elementary school heads in the Schools Division of Cotabato. Using a sequential explanatory mixed-methods design, the study surveyed 234 school heads and conducted interviews with 25 informants. Quantitative results revealed very high levels of innovative leadership and management practices. However, only innovative thinking significantly influenced work effectiveness, while management styles showed no direct impact on efficiency or effectiveness. Qualitative findings highlighted that innovation fosters instructional improvement and teacher empowerment, though it is often constrained by resistance to change and resource limitations. The study concludes that leadership performance is driven more by adaptive thinking than by traditional management routines.

Keyword: *Innovative leadership, management styles, Division of Cotabato*

1. INTRODUCTION

In an era of rapid educational evolution, school heads are tasked with leading institutions toward innovation and excellence. Innovative leadership involves strategies that promote creativity and adaptability, while management styles dictate how resources are coordinated and staff are motivated. Existing research often explores leadership in business or healthcare, leaving a notable gap regarding the specific innovative practices of school heads in Philippine public education. This study sought to address this gap by examining the Schools Division of Cotabato during the 2024-2025 school year.

The research was grounded in the Path-Goal Theory, which suggests that a leader's style must fit the employee and work environment to achieve specific goals. The study aimed to determine the levels of strategic thinking, innovative thinking, action patterns, and interpersonal skills among school heads, as well as their management styles in terms of instructional leadership, stakeholder engagement, and fiscal management. It further tested the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between these leadership dimensions and work performance.

2. METHODS

This study employed a sequential explanatory research design, a mixed-methods approach where quantitative data is collected first, followed by qualitative data to explain the initial results. The integration of data occurred during the interpretation phase to provide a holistic understanding of the phenomenon.

The study was conducted in the Schools Division of Cotabato, focusing on elementary school heads across three congressional districts. A total of 234 respondents participated in the quantitative phase via simple random sampling, while 25 informants were selected for the qualitative phase through purposive, criterion-based sampling.

Data collection utilized two primary instruments: a questionnaire adapted from Akyürek and Karabay (2022) and Inandi et al. (2013) for the quantitative phase, and an interview guide for the qualitative phase. Statistical analysis included Weighted Mean to determine practice levels, Spearman Rho for relationships, and Multiple Regression to determine influence. Qualitative data were processed through Thematic Analysis. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, ensuring informed consent, privacy, and

confidentiality in accordance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012.

3. RESULTS

3.1. Quantitative Phase Findings

The quantitative analysis revealed that school heads in Cotabato operate at a very high level of innovative leadership, with grand means for strategic thinking (4.74), innovative thinking (4.74), and action patterns (4.71) all falling into the highest descriptive category. In strategic thinking, school heads excelled at setting long-term goals and seeking partnerships. In innovative thinking, they demonstrated high adaptability and a reliance on data-driven decisions.

Management practices were also highly rated, particularly stakeholder engagement, which earned the highest grand mean of 4.87. Fiscal management (4.77) and instructional leadership (4.69) were consistently practiced. However, work efficiency (3.94) and work effectiveness (4.02) were rated lower—categorized as "High" rather than "Very High"—indicating that while leadership practices are exemplary, they do not always translate perfectly into operational output.

Regression analysis provided the most critical insights. Innovative thinking was found to be the only dimension with a significant positive relationship with work effectiveness ($\rho = 0.129$, $p = 0.049$). Conversely, strategic thinking showed a negative influence on effectiveness ($t = -1.903$, $p = 0.050$), suggesting that an overemphasis on abstract planning can delay practical responses. Furthermore, action patterns had a negative influence on work efficiency ($t = -1.739$, $p = 0.046$), implying that excessive leader intervention may disrupt routine processes. Most notably, management styles (instructional, fiscal, and stakeholder) showed no significant relationship or influence on either work efficiency or effectiveness.

3.2. Qualitative Phase Findings

The thematic analysis identified four major global themes regarding innovative leadership. First, Innovation for Instructional and Organizational Improvement showed that school heads view innovation as a tool to align teaching with learner needs. Second, Teacher Empowerment emerged as a result of leadership that fosters motivation and professional growth. Third, leaders

emphasized Visionary and Collaborative Roles, where ownership is shared with staff. Finally, the need for Balancing Innovation with Stability was highlighted to prevent instructional disruption.

Challenges to innovation included resistance to change from teachers attached to traditional methods, fear of failure, and limited time and resources. Institutional pressures, such as rigid policy alignment and leadership turnover, also hindered the sustainability of innovative initiatives.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest a disconnect between theoretical leadership practices and practical performance metrics. While school heads are "highly innovative," their effectiveness is specifically tied to their cognitive flexibility (innovative thinking) rather than their administrative routines. The negative impact of excessive strategic thinking and action-oriented behaviors suggests that leaders may become "bottlenecks" if they over-plan or over-intervene.

The lack of influence from traditional management styles on efficiency indicates that these practices are "foundational" but not "drivers" of performance. They keep the school stable but do not necessarily move it forward in a complex, changing environment.

Based on these results, the study proposes the Innovative Thinking-Driven Leadership Enhancement Program (IT-DLEP). This intervention focuses on capacity-building for adaptive thinking, strategy-to-action planning, and effective delegation. It is recommended that education authorities prioritize "inner dimension" training, such as work gratitude and ethical reflection, and redesign administrative workflows to reduce leader overload. Future leadership development should shift from teaching "what to do" (management) to "how to think" (innovation) to better meet the evolving needs of the Philippine educational landscape.

Innovative Leadership Practices and Management Styles of School Heads in the Schools Division of Cotabato

5. CONCLUSIONS

High Proficiency: School heads demonstrate a consistently high level of innovative leadership

and consistently practice instructional leadership, stakeholder engagement, and fiscal management.

Cognitive Drivers: Innovative thinking is significantly related to work effectiveness, indicating that leaders who embrace adaptability and creative problem-solving perform their roles more effectively.

Leadership Balance: While innovative thinking is a driver, overemphasis on abstract strategic planning can limit immediate effectiveness, and excessive action patterns can decrease work efficiency.

Management Limitations: Management practices alone do not determine performance outcomes; they provide stability but must be supported by innovative thinking to drive effectiveness.

Barriers: Implementation of innovation is primarily constrained by resistance to change, uneven teacher readiness, and fear of failure among staff.

References