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Research Article

Trials and Triumphs of School Leaders with Diverse Sogie in Managing Workplace Conflicts

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of school leaders in Masbate Province who identify with diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE). It examines their trials, triumphs, and how they manage conflicts within workplace learning environments. Using purposive sampling and a qualitative, phenomenological methodology, the study emphasizes real-life challenges caused by institutional discrimination, bias, and communication breakdowns. Despite these challenges, these leaders consistently employ inclusive leadership approaches to foster equal and supportive school environments, demonstrating emotional intelligence and resilience. Findings reveal that SOGIE-diverse leaders face challenges rooted from both organizational structures and interpersonal relations, often worsened by exclusion. They do, however, address issues using tactics such as private talks, professional development, emotional de-escalation, and strict protocol adherence. Their leadership includes empathy, adaptability, and a strong commitment to diversity.

Creating inclusive school cultures and engaging the broader community is also crucial for effective conflict resolution. While institutional initiatives, such as Project PATAS and Gender and Development (GAD) programs, aim to support inclusivity, their effectiveness is limited by inconsistent implementation and weak accountability.

The study emphasizes the importance of policy adjustments and continued leadership training for persons from SOGIE-diverse backgrounds. These leaders play a vital role in encouraging respect, diversity, and inclusivity, which benefits both educators and learners.

Keywords: *conflict resolution, diversity in leadership, inclusive education, SOGIE, school leadership, trials and triumphs, workplace conflict*

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Introduction

Conflict is an inseparable aspect of any work environment, more so in schools where individuals possess varied beliefs, personalities as well as views (Zartman, 2007). Conflicts in educational institutions can be caused by the lack of understanding, communication difficulties, workload, and value differences. In the case of school leaders who have diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE), conflicts in the workplace may become more difficult because they also have to face discrimination, stereotyping, and bias (Cerezo et al., 2020). Research has demonstrated that inclusive leadership assists in establishing positive relationships in the workplace and fosters fairness in school (Seijts & Milani, 2022). Empathy, emotional intelligence, and open communication are used by school leaders who have different SOGIE to manage conflicts and create an inclusive school environment (Shore and Chung, 2022). Collaboration, innovation, and respect among teachers and learners also are a result of their leadership (Inegbedion et al., 2020). Nevertheless, even with the promotion of inclusivity, a large number of leaders with different SOGIE still encounter prejudice and professional scrutiny that impact their leadership experiences (Dykes and Delpert, 2018). Despite the numerous studies that have been done on the topic of leadership and diversity, not much research has been conducted on the lived experiences of school leaders with diverse SOGIE in managing workplace conflicts. One still needs to have a more in-depth look into how they approach challenges, conflicts, and inclusivity in educational institutions.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the trials and triumphs of school leaders with different sexual orientations in managing workplace conflicts and to identify the strategies and institutional support systems that foster inclusivity and reduce discrimination in the Division of Masbate Province. Listed below are

the primary questions that this study aims to investigate:

1. What are the experiences of school leaders with diverse SOGIE in managing workplace conflicts?
 - a. trials
 - b. triumphs
2. What conflict resolution strategies do school leaders with diverse SOGIE use to effectively address conflict and promote a positive workplace environment?
3. What institutional policies and support systems exist to assist school leaders with diverse SOGIE in handling workplace challenges, and how can they be improved?

Significance of the Study

The study is important because it sheds light on how school leaders who have different Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) experiences are utilizing their skills and abilities to resolve conflicts in schools. The results can assist school leaders to reinforce conflict resolution practices that are rooted in empathy, inclusiveness, emotional intelligence, and policy-driven leadership. The study could also help support educational institutions and the Department of Education in enhancing institutional policies, gender programs, and support, which encourage respect, equity and inclusive school environments. In addition, the research results will contribute to raising awareness of teachers and school staff about diversity and school work environment inclusivity and may become a reference for future research on the theme of leadership, workplace conflict management, and SOGIE in educational contexts.

Conceptual Framework

This paper has explored how school leaders with different Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) dealt with workplace conflicts. The framework emphasizes the impact of personal identity, leadership practices, institutional support, and workplace biases on conflict experiences and

conflict resolution. The framework demonstrates that different SOGIE identities influence the way school leaders feel and react to conflicts in the workplace. Discrimination and prejudice are among the challenges that are likely to increase conflict, as well as influence leadership experiences. School leaders in response tend to employ inclusive, transformational and flexible leadership practices like empathy, collaboration and open communication to resolve conflicts and foster harmony in the workplace. Other policies and

support systems within the institution also play a role in conflict resolution either by reinforcing or restraining inclusive leadership practices. Stretchy support systems will make bias effects smaller, increase resilience, and lead to a more respectful and inclusive school atmosphere. Comprehensively, the framework illustrates how the identity, leadership, conflict management, and institutional support contribute to the trials and triumph of school leaders with diverse SOGIE.

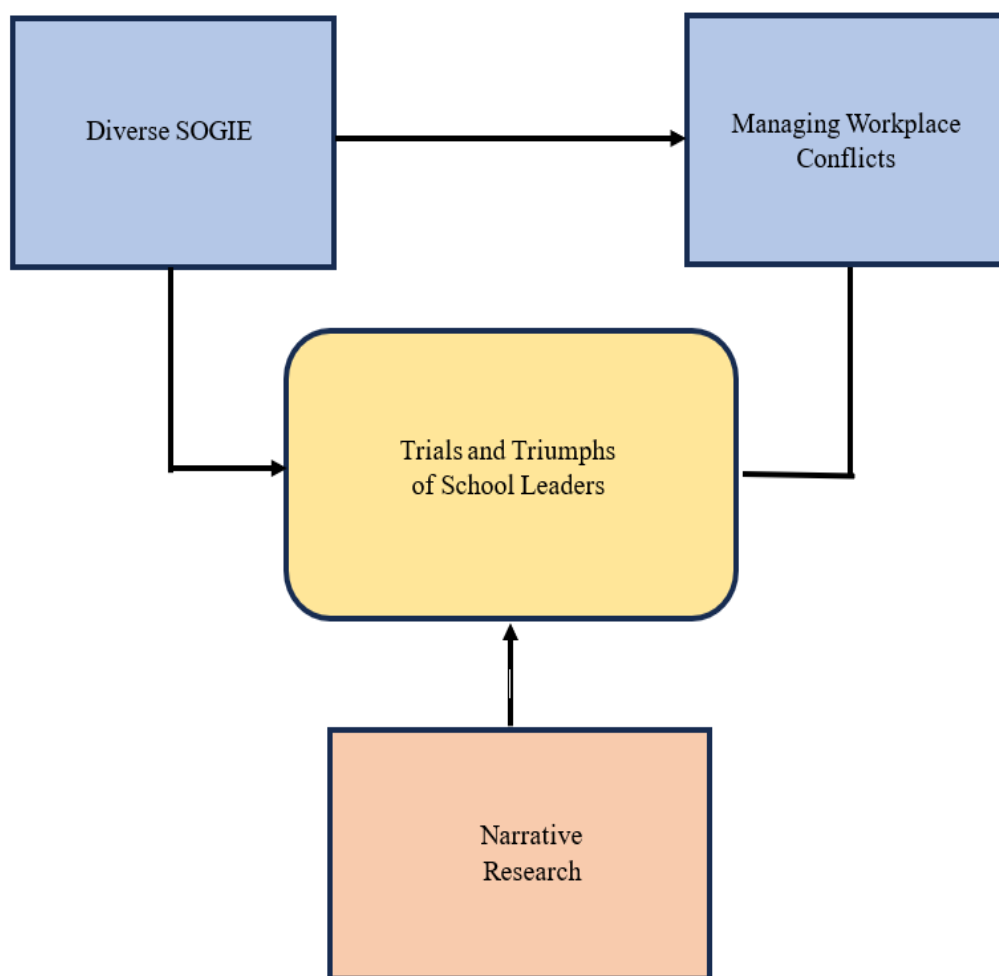


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The lived experiences of school leaders with varying sexual orientations in handling conflicts at work were investigated in this study using a qualitative research design and a phenomenological approach. A

phenomenological approach is suitable since it allows for a more thorough comprehension of these leaders' triumphs, tactics, and personal and professional struggles from their points of view. Phenomenological study emphasizes the meanings people ascribe to their lived experiences by recording and characterizing

how they perceive and assign meaning to them (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By using this approach, the researcher was able to learn more about the intricate realities that school administrators must deal with while resolving conflicts and valuing their individuality.

The Respondents

The respondents of this research were school leaders with divergent Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression (SOGIE) in the Division of Masbate, comprising principals, assistant principals, department heads and other school administrators who were involved in leadership and conflict management. Purposive sampling was used to select the participants of different schools in the province to be able to have a variety of leadership experiences and workplace situations. The participants were selected on the basis of their leadership position, work experiences in handling conflicts in workplace and the identification with the diverse SOGIE. The sample size was not stated, but five participants were used to ensure a detailed exploration and saturation of data. Anonymity and confidentiality were greatly maintained so as to foster honesty and frankness in sharing experiences.

Instrument

This study utilized semi-structured interviews as the primary research instrument to gather in-depth insights from school leaders with different sexual orientations regarding their experiences in managing workplace conflicts. The interview guide included open-ended questions aimed at investigating the challenges, strategies, and successes of these leaders in conflict resolution while ensuring flexibility for participants to share their unique perspectives.

Data Analysis

For this study, narrative analysis was used as the primary approach to examine the lived experiences of school leaders with diverse SOGIE in managing workplace conflicts. Data were collected through in-depth, semi-

structured interviews that encouraged participants, school leaders with diverse SOGIE, to share personal stories about their leadership journeys, mainly focusing on moments of conflict and how their SOGIE identities influenced these experiences. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and the narratives were carefully read and reviewed to provide a deep understanding of each participant's story. The analysis involved identifying the structure of each narrative—examining elements such as the conflict in the workplace, strategies implemented by leaders with diverse SOGIE in handling conflicts, and conflict resolution.

Results and Discussion

Trials experienced by school leaders with diverse SOGIE in managing workplace conflicts.

The section highlights the experiences of school leaders with various Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) in handling conflicts at the workplace. The results indicated that workload, interpersonal tension, discrimination, communication problem, and a problem in leadership authority in the school setting are the common causes of conflicts. The structural and operational issues that include unequal distribution of workload, lack of teaching staff and coordinatorship issues were cited by the participants as the key causes of stress and tension at the workplace. They shared:

"One would complain about the unparalleled distribution of teaching loads." – P1

"A shortage of teaching staff... increases the workload..." – P1

"Distribution of coordinatorship... some teachers were not doing their job." – P2

Organizational relationships and leadership performance were also influenced by interpersonal conflicts, professional jealousy, workplace rumors and resistance by colleagues. Participants stated: P3 states that there are groups that exist... deep rooted. *"Challenge is professional jealousy... my*

instructions are still being questioned.” – P3 P2:
“There are many rumors about it...”

Discrimination based on identity also turned out to be a major issue that influenced the confidence and emotional state of participants as school leaders with varying SOGIE.

“Due to my sexual orientation, people believe that I am weak. “People may laugh at me... even joke about my name...” – P2

Issues of communication further exacerbated misunderstandings and conflicts at the workplace. *“Misunderstanding in terms of... dissemination of information.” – P4 P5*, in their group chat, mentioned that conflict arose in the chat... In spite of these obstacles, leadership resilience demonstrated by the participants in solving workplace conflict is in terms of empathy, communication and adherence to policies. *“How to make it clear... this is DepEd Order No. 5...” – P1*

Despite achieving professional milestones, some participants encountered systemic resistance to their authority. As one leader noted, “I passed the NQESH, but my orders are still being called into question”. The results indicate that school leaders who possess different SOGIE still have to deal with both operations and identity-based conflict as they strive to promote inclusive, respectful, and supportive school cultures.

Triumphs by School Leaders with Diverse SOGIE in Managing Workplace Conflicts

This section will give the success stories of school leaders with varied Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) in addressing workplace conflicts. The results showed that the participants fostered workplace harmony by applying personalized conflict resolution, empathic leadership, inclusivity, equal opportunities, and policy-based governance. These practices assisted in enhancing communication, collaboration, and good relationships in the school. The

participants developed individualized and empathic processes of solving workplace conflicts through the application of calm communication, emotional sensitivity and situational leadership styles. They stressed on knowing the feelings and characters of the people involved and then resolving conflicts. The participants shared:

“I just left them first to cool down... then, like a friend first, so I could really get to the root causes.” – P5

“Usually, I don’t shout... I make them feel that there is something wrong. Silence is a powerful tool.” – P2

The results imply that emotional intelligent leadership fosters trust, openness and peaceful resolution of conflicts in schools. Experiences in this regard reinforce the Emotional Intelligence Theory, which focuses on empathy, self-control, and emotional awareness as key competencies of leadership and conflict management (Garwe, 2017). Another issue that came out as crucial leadership practices among the participants were inclusiveness and equality. School leaders encouraged diversity respect with inclusive programs, equal professional opportunities and supportive school environments to both teachers and learners irrespective of SOGIE. One participant stated:

“We belong to learn, regardless of their status, family background, or sexual orientation.” – P5

The results suggest that inclusive leadership enhances relationships at the workplace, fosters fairness, and provides a more supportive school environment. These are practices that are in line with the Inclusive Leadership Theory, which focuses on respect, transparency, and equal opportunities in organizations (Shore et al., 2018). There were also indications of the significance of policy-led leadership and governance in ensuring professionalism and accountability in schools. In solving workplace problems, the emphasis was on compliance with policies,

documentation as well as objective decision-making. As one of the participants told us:

"Stick to the policy... all decisions were documented in black and white, like a memorandum." – P3

The results indicate that transparency, accountability, and the need to always implement policies will help to reduce workplace conflicts and enhance organizational trust. In general, the experiences of school leaders with diverse SOGIE are indicative that empathy, inclusivity, emotional intelligence, and fair leadership practices help to create a more peaceful, respectful, and collaborative educational environment.

Conflict Resolution Strategies Used by School Leaders with Diverse SOGIE to Promote a Positive Workplace Environment

In this section, we are going to share the conflict resolution approaches that school leaders with diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression (SOGIE) have adopted in resolving workplace conflicts and enhancing positive organizational relationships. The results indicated that subjects used communication-based approaches, inclusive relationships-building, adaptive leadership and policy-driven governance in solving conflicts in the learning institutions. The participants stressed the necessity of honest, confidential, and understanding communication in overcoming misunderstandings at work place. Leaders would have favored quiet and dignified discussions to avoid the escalation of conflict and establishment of trust among the stakeholders. The participants shared:

"Closed-door meeting actually. Having closed-door meeting separately. In my experience, it actually works." – P1

"Talking to them on a personal level... from the heart." – P2

These results are in full agreement with Emotional Intelligence Theory formulated by Goleman (1995) that highlights empathy, emotional regulation, and social awareness as crucial leadership skills. Heartfelt communication and emotional sensitivity helped school leaders to effectively cope with tensions and retain good working relationships. The results also showed that inclusiveness and relationship building were significant approaches in resolving conflicts. The participants advocated transparency, respect and community participation in the establishment of harmonious school environments. One participant explained:

"I stick to what is objective... The memorandum is factual." – P3

The findings are consistent with the Procedural Justice Theory (Thibaut and Walker, 1975) which highlights the fact that fair and transparent processes enhance trust, legitimacy and stability of the organization. The experiences of the participants suggest that balance of empathy, inclusivity, adaptability, and policy-directed leadership practices is the key to effective conflict management among school leaders with diverse SOGIE. On the whole, the results indicate that school leaders with varying SOGIE apply emotionally intelligent, inclusive, and transparent leadership styles in conflict management and positive working conditions. Not only do these strategies help to resolve interpersonal conflicts but also enhance the relationship in an organization, inclusiveness, and harmony at work within the educational institutions.

Institutional Policies and Support Systems to Assist School Leaders with Diverse SOGIE in Addressing Workplace Challenges

This section outlines the various institutional policies and support systems that will help school leaders address issues in the workplace with those who have diverse Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Expression

(SOGIE). The findings indicated that resources within the school, school culture, inclusive support program, and school policies play an important role in shaping leadership responses to school conflicts and the creation of inclusive school environments. The participants emphasized the need for the role and utilization of institutional-based support systems, including Project PATAS, Gender and Development (GAD) programs, and community partnerships in the creation of inclusive and equal opportunities in school. One participant shared:

"PATAS... gives them equal opportunity to attend appropriate trainings and seminars..." – P1

The results indicated that a range of support systems and equal access programs enhance professional development, inclusivity and organizational support for school leaders of different SOGIE. This is consistent with Tyler's (1989) theory of institutional conflict resolution, which suggests that proactive institutional structures lead to equity, empowerment and organizational stability. It is also noted, however, that inclusivity policies are sometimes seen as being in place for compliance reasons, and so their impact is not that strong in schools in the long-term. One participant stated:

"Because it's mandated... It's just repeated. Different speakers now." – P2

This conclusion aligns with Yang (2024) who holds that policy implementation does not necessarily lead to meaningful cultural change. In order to be a good community of learners, real leadership and real programs in context and engaged learning are still required. The participants also highlighted that inclusive school culture is fostered when leaders demonstrate respect, acceptance and inclusivity in all aspects of their interactions and school routine. One participant explained:

"We belong to learn... I've included it in the lessons. Even in our discussions about work ethics..." – P5

The results support the Transformational Leadership Theory which emphasizes the importance of value-driven leadership, role modeling and inclusivity in creating organizational culture. Incorporating inclusive practices into lessons, policies and professional learning opportunities establishes a more positive and comprehensive culture of inclusivity in schools. In brief, the results suggest that the use of authentic leadership and inclusive practices in combination with effective policy implementation are more effective in the development of institutional policies and support systems. School leaders who come from a variety of SOGIE are important to creating a respectful, equitable, and supportive school climate both through policy implementation and their personal model.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was to examine the lived experiences of school leaders of more than one gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation, in handling conflict in their schools. The results indicated that these leaders face problems facing operational, interpersonal conflicts, discrimination and communication breakdowns. In spite of these challenges, they showed resilience in their emotionally intelligent, inclusive and adaptive leadership. The study also revealed that school leaders who have diverse SOGIE foster harmony in the workplace by being empathetic, transparent, policy abiding and inclusive communicators. In the face of existing biases and institutional constraints, their leadership styles have helped create positive school relationships, professional development, and more inclusive learning spaces.

The findings also revealed the crucial importance of institutional policies and

support mechanisms in promoting inclusive leadership. There are initiatives for inclusivity and equality of opportunity in place (e.g. GAD initiatives, Project PATAS) but there are gaps in both implementation and accountability. So, it is essential for educational institutions to reinforce inclusive policies, ensure a consistent implementation of these policies, and foster school cultures based on respect, acceptance and equity.

The experiences of school leaders across the diverse SOGIE highlight the need for greater inclusion and more effective institutional support systems, and for sustainable leadership development programs that foster diversity, workplace harmony, and equitable educational settings.

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