

Character Traits and Governance Practices of Local Chief Executives as Predictors of Performance of Local Government Units in Northern Samar

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Abstract: *This study determined the character traits and governance practices of local government officials in the LGUs of Northern Samar. As guided by the current study's objective, it determined the effect of the demographic profile and character traits on governance practices of local executives. This study included the profile of the respondents, particularly the age, sex, civil status, highest educational attainment, years in public service, and relevant training and seminars attended. Additionally, the Big Five character trait dimensions also known as Five Factor Model consists of the five traits; openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism were also determined. The governance practices (transparency, participation, accountability, leadership, general organization and governance, inter-governmental relations, rule of law continuity in the implementation of programs, predictability and sustainability, preference for the poor, and effective, responsive, provision of basic services were correlated with demographic profile and character traits of the local executives. The study covered 12 municipalities randomly selected from the twenty-four (24) municipalities. Educational attainment significantly correlated with participation, general organization, governance and inter-governmental relations. These findings show that education is important in the functions of the LCE such as conducting public consultations, creating local development council and monitoring of institutionalized technical NGO members. Length of public service significantly correlated with participation. This finding shows that experience in public service is crucial when an LCE conducts consultations with stakeholders. Finally, relevant trainings participated by LCEs significantly correlated with transparency and general organization and governance.*

Keywords: Character Traits, governance practices, local chief executives, five factor models

1. Introduction

In a fast changing leadership in Local Government Units (LGUs), adopting governance into daily concerns can often lead to misunderstanding. Local chief executives are always in a quandary trying to fit their style of governance, not to mention differences in political affiliations among the employees. The continuing demand for transparency and accountability also raises issues of good governance and stakeholders are asking questions when there is lack of clarity. Furthermore, the national government's emphasis on outcomes and impacts drive the Local chief executives towards maintaining good governance, accountability and performance. As the local government sector plays an increasing role in delivering public services, the issue of governance practices has been brought into sharp focus over recent years.

LGUs have to play a vital role if poverty is to be alleviated in the Philippines. The sheer magnitude of governance and the fundamental problem of poverty should be seriously given attention. Especially in the Philippines where national leadership is dominated by a few groups, decision-making and thus government programs are seen to benefit everyone. Considering also that the country is an archipelago, limited representation prohibits people from the countryside from feeling the significant presence of government.

Good governance is important for the LGU and its employees. The local government can acquire great returns, better utilization of resources, better outcomes, improved work environment and above all better future for the constituents.

On the other hand, employees could also reap more advantages if dealt with proper governance practice by the local chief executives. Local chief executives use various governance practices in handling issues surrounding LGUs. These practices however vary from individual to individual depending on one's character trait (Costa & McCrae, 1999).

Character traits are among the most important factors that determine the success of governance practices (Moberg, 2001). The Big Five Factor Model is one of the most widely studied and discussed model by researchers. The character traits consist of extroversion, agreeableness, openness to experience, emotional stability, and conscientiousness (Robbins, Judge, & Sanghi, 2008). Big five factor model of character traits has direct impact on the preferences of governance practices, consciously or unconsciously (Moberg, 2001).

2. Objectives of the Study

Generally, this study determined the character traits and local governance practices of chief executives in Local Government Units in the province of Northern Samar. Specifically, it sought to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) Determine the demographic profile of the local chief executives;
- 2) Determine the character traits of chief executives of LGUs in Northern Samar using the Five Factor Model;
- 3) Find out the extent of governance practices of local chief executives as applied or operationalized in terms of the following:
 - a) Transparency

- b) Participation
 - c) Accountability
 - d) Leadership
 - e) General organization and governance
 - f) Inter-governmental relations
 - g) Rule of Law
 - h) Continuity in the implementation of programs, predictability and sustainability
 - i) Preference for the Poor; and,
 - j) Effective, responsive, provision of basic services.
- 4) Determine the performance of the Local Government Units (LGUs).

3. Methodology

The study used descriptive -correlational design because it is also concerned on collecting data to determine whether, and to what extent, a relationship exists between demographic profile variables and governance practices. The descriptive research attempts to describe, explain and interpret conditions of the present demographic profile of the LGU officials. This research uses numerical data to explore relationships between character traits and governance practices. The degree of relationship is expressed in terms of a coefficient of correlation. If the relationship exists between variables, it implies that scores on one variable are associated with or vary with the scores on another variable. The exploration of relationship of the relationship between character traits and governance practices will provide insights into the nature of the character traits as well as an understanding of its consequence on governance.

Fifty percent or 12 local chief executives participated in the study. However, a random sample was used to determine the employees of the municipalities identified. In addition, two stakeholders in each municipality were identified to assess the local chief executive's governance practices. Accidental sampling was used.

4. Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Local Chief Executives

It shows that most of the respondents (11 or 91.67 percent) are male. In terms of civil status, nine (9) or 75 percent were already married. Most of them had two to three children. The educational attainment of the LCE shows that 11 or 91.67 percent were college graduates. Two of the LCE college graduates were lawyers while others graduated from different degree programs. The two lawyer-LCEs have the advantage in terms of management as they have the knowledge of the law in as far as local governance is concerned. As to length of service, most of them (7 or 58.33 percent) have been in public service for less than five years. These LCEs were only elected in the latest national election. In terms of relevant trainings attended, 50 percent of the respondents have not attended any training related to their position. Only six (6) LCEs attended training such as local governance and fiscal management, usually conducted by the Department of Interior and Local Government. These trainings are significant for LCEs

considering that most of the elected officials did not have formal training or education in good governance.

Character Traits of Local Chief Executives

Both the LCE and employees rated the former to manifest the character traits at "high extent". The LCE also rated their agreeableness character trait as "high extent" different from the employees' rating interpreted as "moderate extent". The high extent manifestations of the LCE's on extraversion means that the local leaders manifested traits such as being talkative, energetic, and assertive. These traits usually are characteristics of dominant personality. Local chief executives who have high manifestations on these traits are often self-confident. They seek out positions of authority, and are competitive and assertive. They like to be in charge of others or have responsibility for others. Local leaders with this type of character appear to have a high degree of both dominance and extroversion. They enjoy being "on stage" speaking before a crowd, meeting new people from different places. However, there are also leaders with manifestations that are opposite of extraversion dimension. These types of leaders have a low degree of both dominant and extroversion. They are very much reserved in many situations. In addition, these types of leaders not appear to have a great desire to influence others, preferring to focus on details and strategy rather than the brightness of interpersonal relationships.

On the other hand, the high manifestation on openness character trait of the LCE's means that the local leaders had wide interests, imaginative and insightful. This character trait is a dimension in which a leader has a broad range of interests and is imaginative, creative, and willing to consider new ideas. These leaders are intellectually curious and often seek out new experiences through travel, the arts, movies, reading widely, or other activities. Local leaders lower in this dimension tend to have narrower interests and stick to the tried-and-true ways of doing things. For example, Daft (2005) found that early travel experiences and exposure to different ideas and cultures were critical elements in developing governance skills and qualities in leaders. A local government leader who scores high on agreeableness seems warm and approachable, whereas one who is low on this dimension may seem cold, distant, and insensitive. Local chief executives who were high on agreeableness tend to make friends easily and often have a large number of friends, whereas those low on agreeableness generally established fewer close relationships.

Governance Practices of Local Chief Executive

The governance practices of the local chief executives were evaluated by themselves, the employees and stakeholders. It shows that Participation topped the list of governance practiced by the LCE in Northern Samar. Leadership governance practice comes next with a mean of 4.6 as rated by them. This means that the local leaders understood well the LGU's vision for the future. They were active in the activities of the leagues of municipalities of the Philippines and have attained planned targets in spite of challenges.

Generally, the local chief executives practiced to a very high extent the indicators of good governance. These findings are important because these indicators serve as yardstick in evaluating the performance of the LGUs in particular, as they pursue the goals of sustainable human development. They form part of the development framework for charting the progress of the local government's human development efforts at the local level, taking into consideration the limitations facing LGUs as well as the opportunities available to them. Through these indicators, LGU performance can be reviewed and compared with one another in any given time period to identify both problem areas and best practice. The governance practice measures may also be compared with performance targets or standards. At the same time, the performance of a specific LGU or group of LGUs may likewise be compared from period to period to track progress and, possibly, establish trends. Implicit in this statement is the need to have periodic measurement of progress towards the attainment of explicit objectives and goals.

Performance of the Local Government Unit

Generally, the performance of the Local Government Units derived from the Department of Interior and Local Government registered lower compared to the overall governance practices as this study found. This is shown on the general average of 2.28 among the municipalities covered in this study. Most especially, most LGUs did not meet the criteria on disaster preparedness, social protection, business-friendliness and competitiveness. Most of the LGUs did not have local disaster reduction management plan, contingency plan, and climate change action plan. There was also no presence of a mechanism on violence against women and children in most of the LGUs covered and did not comply with Accessibility Law. When it comes to business-friendliness and competitiveness, most of the LGUs did not meet the criteria on PCCI's Most Business Friendly Award and did not make it on the competitiveness index of national competitiveness council.

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the following conclusions are drawn:

Most local government leaders have wide interests and are imaginative and insightful. These leaders have broad range of interests and willing to consider new ideas. In addition, local leaders are talkative, energetic, and often self-confident. These leaders are sympathetic, kind and affectionate. It can be concluded that most local leaders are able to get along with others by being good-natured, cooperative, forgiving, compassionate, understanding, and trusting.

The government leaders are pursuing the goals of sustainable human development. They are following the development framework for charting the progress of the government's human development efforts at the local level. Most LGU's did not meet the criteria on disaster preparedness, social protection and business friendliness and competitiveness. These manifests loose implementation of the required programs set

by the government, if not, they are not prioritized. The LGU's give more priority to the establishment of anti-criminality action plan and consider peace and order as the most important function of the LGUs. There is no problem on peace and order in the covered LGUs.

The degree to which the LCEs is able to get along with others by is higher than employees and stakeholders see it. Local chief executives manifesting extraversion traits find it easier to lead meetings, confront presentations and lead change. By contrast, government leaders with low scores on the extraversion scale may take time to acquire skills on their own because they are very self-sufficient and self-absorbed.

Finally, character traits and governance practices are complementary. Character trait or governance alone does not guarantee political effectiveness. A weak character and a governance system quite beholden to local authorities only transform governance to just leadership. To gauge whether the combination of character traits and governance practices acts as efficient model, the extent of its influence over LGU affairs must be taken into consideration.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are forwarded:

- 1) Training workshops on character traits awareness/assessment for Local Chief Executives be conducted by the LGU's. This will guide them in their governance practices.
- 2) The Department of Interior and Local Government should require the Local Chief Executives to undergo trainings on governance as most of these leaders do not have formal education on good governance.
- 3) Local government units should make a concrete plan to boost local economy. They should develop and promote local products and at the same time invite outside investors to conduct business in the locality.
- 4) Competition should be encouraged to bring quality products.

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