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Faculty in Transition: Lived Experiences, Stressors, and Coping Mechanisms of Faculty Who Unexpectedly Transitioned into Leadership Roles

Gerald D. Venta, Ed.D., LPT
College of Education, PHINMA Cagayan de Oro College – Butuan Campus, Philippines
geraldventa@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

A 2020 study by Ayers and Gonzales showed that teachers who step into leadership without prior notice tend to experience deeper stress. Beyond broad investigations into leadership growth, few qualitative efforts explore how individuals thrust into authority handle pressure while adjusting - a gap noted by Basile in 2019. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences, stressors, and coping mechanisms of faculty who transitioned unexpectedly into leadership roles. By employing thematic analysis on the responses from the interview with the participants, the approach captures how these six educators, who once filled a teaching staff position and are now serving as program head or dean, feel about unanticipated responsibilities. Consequently, the themes show that leadership transitions in higher education are best understood as identity work that requires strong organizational support, not just individual adaptation. Findings may inform institutional leadership preparation programs and structured support system for transitioning faculty.

Keywords: *Faculty in Transition, Leadership, Stress, Coping Mechanism*

INTRODUCTION

Stress shows up among faculty when juggling teaching, research, and service duties. Rapid shifts in academia, along with rising pressures, complicate leadership positions - according to Black (2015). Though specialized training is usually needed for such posts, Bbaale (2022) points out it's common for professors to step into roles like department head or dean unprepared, as Duncan (2020) also observes. Appointments may follow urgent staffing gaps, internal demand, or recommendations from colleagues, unfolding without long-term planning. Taking charge brings new strains: Terblanche et al. (2018) highlight how even seasoned faculty face personal disruption, tension, and a reshaped sense of self once they lead.

A study by Ayers and Gonzales in 2020 showed that teachers stepping into leadership without prior notice tend to experience deeper stress across personal, cognitive, and social areas. The same applies within the biggest private higher education system in Southeast Asia as described by Loyola in 2025, targeting overlooked populations – this higher education organization moves fast when selecting leaders, especially during mid-academic year vacancies. According to Sanchez in 2025, its mission centers on accessible, high-standard learning opportunities. When changes happen quickly, though, routines falter; instruction may weaken. One of its many schools saw around seven different leaders over two years; meanwhile, a second managed with just one during that span. Leadership shifts happen fast - usually without adequate preparation - driven largely by intense pressure and exhaustion setting in quickly.

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Beyond broad investigations into leadership growth, few qualitative efforts explore how individuals appointed to authority handle pressure while adjusting - a gap noted by Basile in 2019. Although attention has been paid to deliberate paths into management, accidental ascents remain less examined; Fang and Thanh highlight this imbalance in 2024. Instead of focusing on emotional resilience amid change, past work often tracks professional movement and structural obstacles faced by these unplanned leaders - evidence gathered by Smiley, Zakrajsek, and Fletcher shows such patterns clearly by 2021.

Higher education now moves fast, reshaping institutions and rules in ways that strain staff more than before. Faculty stepping into leadership often do so abruptly, without proper guidance or backing. These individuals face sudden demands from administration tasks, even as teaching and research continue unchanged. Such pressure builds up, raising chances of exhaustion and withdrawal from work (Khater, 2022). Unlike leaders who ease into their roles over time, many now confront complex issues overnight. Support systems, when present, make a difference-clear guideline on skill development and emotional resilience softens the impact. When colleges define pathways for growth and coping, adjustments become less overwhelming. Policies matter most when they respond to real conditions, not just ideal timelines. Leadership does not always grow slowly; sometimes it arrives unannounced. When digital shifts, new policies, or emergencies unfold, familiar work patterns and roles often break down. Faculty members, amid widespread moves to remote or mixed teaching formats, frequently described feeling disconnected from their professional selves. Sudden transitions- especially those without proper backing-tended to deepen stress. These moments reshaped how educators saw their place in academia.

Unexpectedly, those who become leaders by chance in schools carry burdens beyond extra duties - emotional strain often follows close behind (Khater, 2022). Taking on unfamiliar paperwork, regaining self-assurance, navigating shifts in peer dynamics: these weigh heavily. When roles shift without warning, feeling mentally anchored helps - not everyone experiences this balance equally. Support systems matter too; guidance that is emotional, cognitive, or social softens the impact of abrupt career turns, especially seen across trade programs and high school settings (Hanssen & Utvr, 2022).

Even with growing understanding, current studies rarely explore the distinct pressures, ways of managing them, or adaptation patterns among accidental leaders in academia. While much attention goes to intentional leadership training or structured role changes, those stepping into positions without preparation tend to be ignored. What it actually feels like - the real moments, day-to-day decisions, emotional toll - during sudden shifts into leadership remains largely unexamined.

One major challenge stands out within expansive educational systems focused on social impact, particularly those reaching marginalized groups - like this biggest higher education organization across Southeast Asia. When leadership roles must be filled quickly, constant changes in personnel tend to weaken teaching standards and undermine steady operations. Studies show poor succession planning and weak institutional adaptability increase chances of exhaustion, high exit rates, and lower classroom effectiveness (Khater, 2022). During shifts in staffing, educators benefit when institutions offer tailored guidance, skill- development programs, and practical stress-management (Hanssen & Utvr, 2022). Despite this, there remains a noticeable absence of rich, localized case studies exploring how unplanned leadership paths affect individuals thrust into academic management roles.

Because of these patterns and missing pieces, looking closely at how accidental leaders in higher education handle pressure makes sense. What we find could refine ideas about leadership while informing better backing systems for institutions dealing with constant shifts in charge. When teachers step into leadership roles unexpectedly, they often carry heavy loads, juggling duties outside their original expertise. According to Kruse (2020), balancing daily teaching with managerial work increases strain noticeably. Learning key abilities - like supervising others, handling funds, setting goals, or influencing workplace norms - often happens on the fly. Support tends to be limited, leaving many to adapt without clear direction. New leaders often feel pressure when roles are unclear, tasks pile up, demands clash - on top of

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managing people they once worked alongside. Support networks, shared decision-making practices, and tools to manage tension ease the shift into leadership, according to recent findings (Stress Management Strategies for Educators and Administrators, 2025). Research confirms these approaches matter.

Synthesis of Literature Review

Leadership in academia often feels heavy, especially when scholars move into roles they did not train for directly. Unlike the familiar routines of classroom instruction or independent study, stepping up means dealing with budget choices, team conflicts, and unseen power dynamics across departments (Ross et al., 2023; Kruse, 2020; Lattimer, 2024). Suddenly, former peers become subordinates, schedules stretch thin, expectations blur, and isolation grows despite being surrounded by people. Pressure builds further due to rapid changes in digital tools and university policies that reshape duties almost yearly (Ho, Shaari, & Kang, 2021; Mabasa & Maluka, 2024). Facing this, some adapt through inner skills like staying calm under strain, noticing their own reactions, or organizing thoughts clearly - others lean on guidance from experienced mentors, shared decision-making, or training programs designed specifically for academic managers (Arambala & Avelino, 2024; Stress Management Strategies for Educators and Administrators, 2025). What stands out from these results is how resilience shapes stress responses, when supported by healthy workplace environments or broader social ecosystems - pointing directly to its influence on leadership growth and personal conduct in academic roles (Simmons, 2016; Yost, Patton, & Ward, 2018). Research compiled here emphasizes examining faculty experiences with adversity and adaptation during entry into leadership positions because those moments deeply affect their effectiveness as leaders and long-term career paths.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Starting from a place of real-world pressure, the research draws on Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping as its core guide. Because sudden leadership often comes unannounced, this perspective shows how people judge new demands landing in their lap. Rather than seeing stress as fixed, the approach treats it as something shaped through ongoing exchanges between person and situation. How someone sees a challenge - either as danger or opportunity - depends heavily on thought processes kicking in under pressure. When roles shift out of nowhere, especially for those never trained to lead, interpretation matters just as much as action. One path involves tackling the source head-on; another works by managing inner reactions when control feels thin. Though different in method, both ways help people stay steady when expectations reshape overnight. What counts most is not avoiding strain but responding in step with personal resources. When facing job instability, temporary teachers often rely on personal beliefs, social connections, or shifts in thinking to handle unclear responsibilities. Though dealing with change can weigh heavily on mental well-being, turning attention toward emotions offers a way through such strain. Focusing directly on challenges, however, tends to lower stress more consistently within school settings. This pattern appears clearly in recent observations of educators managing demanding roles.

When people unexpectedly move into leadership roles, their sense of professional self begins to shift. What makes this change difficult is the speed - there's little time to adjust before new demands take hold. Instead of a slow introduction, these individuals face immediate pressure to act like leaders while still seeing themselves as teachers. Over time, they work to balance old values with new duties, often reshaping how they view their place at work. Without prior training, the mismatch between expectation and experience can create inner conflict. Research links smoother shifts in identity to better job performance and emotional health. How well someone adapts depends largely on support received during early months in the role. Findings suggest that rushed entries into administration leave lasting marks on both confidence and daily functioning. This lens helps explain not just actions but underlying personal redefinition amid disruption.

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From an expanded perspective, Social Cognitive Career Theory shows how surroundings, individual traits, and past learning combine through dynamic connections to influence who grows into leadership roles. What stands out is the weight given to belief in one's abilities, anticipated results, and defined aims when people face unplanned shifts in their professional paths (Iheduru-Anderson, 2025). When leaders emerge without intent, inner strengths like hopefulness, confidence, endurance, and positive outlook become key tools for handling pressure (Singh, 2023). Because of its attention to shifting mindsets under unpredictable conditions, this model fits well with understanding improvised leadership behavior. When work demands are high, having proper backing from the institution can make a difference in how well nursing educators build mental resilience (Singh, 2023). Support structures within hospitals or schools tend to strengthen confidence and motivation during shifts into management positions.

Initial Conceptual Framework

A fresh look at how unplanned school leaders handle pressure blends ideas from several established theories about stress, career development, identity, and workplace demands. What shapes their early journey begins with traits like past exposure to leadership roles (Fosco, 2023), along with how each person naturally deals with difficulty. Also playing a part are surrounding conditions - such as whether the organization supports growth, offers guidance, or makes job duties clear. These elements meet head-on when someone steps into authority without warning, creating immediate strain. Because of this abrupt shift, those affected must adapt fast while facing hurdles unlike those encountered by trained peers. Shortened time to learn the ropes, confusion about what is expected, and doubts about skill level pile on mental load (Brion & Kiral, 2021). How well they manage depends not only on inner strengths but also on hidden pressures lurking within the system around them.

Coping begins not with habits but how individuals interpret change - some see duty, others pressure. When stepping into leadership unplanned, people first decide if the shift feels dangerous, doable, or promising. Their next step depends less on circumstances than on what tools they believe they possess. Responses differ widely: tackling issues head-on stands alongside reaching out for advice or comfort. Some reframe thoughts to stay steady; others practice methods that reduce tension. Under strain, a few pull back quietly or bury themselves deeper in work. Not every reaction helps. Resources shape choices, yet judgment shapes which ones get used. When challenges arise, educators often find relief through practical solutions rather than emotional responses - this shift matters most during periods of change (Kilag et al., 2023). What stands out is how personal views on leadership adapt alongside shifting workplace conditions, shaping the way individuals respond over time.

In the model, mediating and moderating factors link stressors to results. Though leadership backing matters, it is psychological resilience that carries its influence forward - turning guidance into stronger involvement at work and less exhaustion for unplanned leaders (Winarno et. al., 2025). When pressure hits, how much an organization backs its people changes what happens next; things like mentoring, access to tools, and feeling seen shape whether coping works or fails. Where workers feel backed by their institution, they tend to build inner strength over time - yet when support falls short, strain grows worse and responses stiffen (Singh, 2023). Notably, gender plays a shaping role: women in charge often carry emotional load tied to team welfare and daily exchanges, yet they are also quicker to protect their own balance through personal habits and reaching out (Fosco, 2023). What shows up in results covers job-related aspects like how well someone leads and their loyalty to the organization, while also touching private areas such as mental health and managing time between duties and life outside work. Growth over time becomes visible through a stronger sense of who one is as a leader and the ability to keep moving forward in a career.

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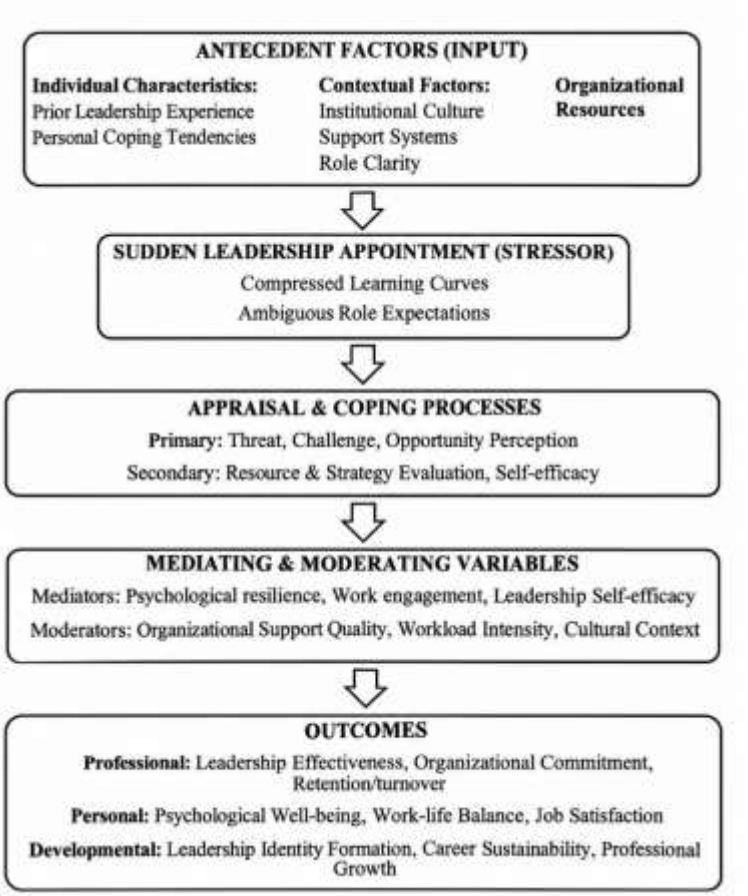


Figure 1. *Conceptual Framework*

Statement of the Problem

Many teachers take on big jobs at schools without getting any real preparation. However, hardly anyone has looked closely at how they actually deal with the pressure that comes with it. Instead of focusing on those thrown into leadership unexpectedly, past studies tend to follow people who had training first. Even inside fast-moving school groups like the biggest private higher education organization in Southeast Asia, little attention goes to what helps - or hurts - these sudden leaders emotionally. Without knowing more, schools struggle to build proper help systems for them. When support falls short, quitting becomes more likely, teaching slips, and exhaustion grows. Hence, this study turns toward understanding exactly how such leaders manage stress within the said private higher education organization. Additionally, this study digs into lived experience instead of assumptions, aiming to ground future guidance in actual stories rather than guesswork. Each question asked here ties back to solid ideas already recognized in research:

- Questions 1-3 align with the appraisal processes described in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping.
- Questions 4-6 mirror the coping strategies aspects of the same model.

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This framework ensures that the questions probe into relevant theoretical domains, facilitating a comprehensive exploration of the stress and coping experiences of accidental leaders.

1. What are the lived experiences of faculty members during their transition into leadership roles?
2. What stressors do these transitioning leaders encounter as they adapt to their new responsibilities?
3. How do these leaders describe the coping mechanisms they use to manage stress?
4. What personal, institutional, or social factors support or hinder their stress management efforts?
5. In what ways do these experiences of stress and coping influence their leadership identity and practices?
6. Based on these results, what stress and coping strategies framework can be formulated?

METHODS

This study adopts a phenomenological, qualitative design to explore how faculty members who unexpectedly assumed leadership roles experience and make meaning of that transition. Rather than generalizing findings, the research aims to capture the lived essence of this shift—the struggles, adaptations, and personal insights—through in-depth interviews. Participants will be selected via purposive sampling, targeting individuals who were teaching staff before 2020 and have since become department heads, deans, or program leads without having initially planned for such roles. A sample of six to ten participants is considered appropriate for this design, balancing depth of inquiry with manageability of analysis.

Data will be collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted via Zoom, lasting thirty to ninety minutes each and recorded with participant consent. The interview guide, grounded in Lazarus and Folkman's stress-appraisal framework and informed by recent work from Padmanabhanunni et al. (2023), Ramiso (2025), and Venäläinen (2024), consists of fifteen open-ended questions organized into five sections: background and context, experiences during the transition, stress management and coping strategies, personal insights and meaning-making, and closing reflections. This structure is designed to elicit rich narrative detail on how participants interpreted pressure, coped with new demands, and developed their leadership identity, while still allowing flexibility for unanticipated themes to emerge.

Collected data will be analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of thematic analysis, which involves horizontalizing the data, reducing and eliminating redundant information, clustering statements into themes, and developing textural and structural descriptions before synthesizing these into a composite account of the core experience. To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, the study will incorporate member-checking, allowing participants to validate emerging interpretations, alongside peer debriefing to provide external oversight of the analytical process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This research looked at how six instructors navigated stepping into official leadership positions, focusing on what stressed them out, how they responded, while also tracing changes in how they saw themselves leading. Data came from open-ended conversations analyzed thematically linked to each study question, uncovering key ideas that surfaced repeatedly. Quotes pulled from interviews highlight recurring behaviors, painting a clearer picture of what unfolded behind the scenes.

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Table 1. *Thematic Table/Theme Development*

Statements from the Respondents	Themes
"attention must stretch across teachers, learners, and office demands – simultaneously"	Abrupt Shift from Classroom Freedom to School Oversight
"I needed to take responsibility for choices impacting the entire team, guide staff members while handling daily operations, also ensure coworkers received proper support."	
"I felt nervous and uncertain… At the same time, I recognized it as an opportunity for growth, a chance to challenge myself, and a way to make a meaningful contribution to both students and colleagues."	*Emotional Ambivalence in the Initial Stages of Leadership*
"I had a lot of projects to execute… but I was particularly stressed when in about a year into my new role, I was given another equally tasking role."	Role Overload and Competing Demands
"I am no longer just focused on teaching, but now must think and act as a leader for the department and the students, especially those at risk academically or personally."	
"One particularly stressful situation was preparing for the presentation of the bridging program and figuring out how to provide instructions to my colleagues, many of whom had longer service and more experience than I did."	*Interpersonal and Relational Stress*
"Staying tidy keeps me grounded; reaching out when it gets heavy helps too, along with focusing just on what's next."	Problem-Focused Coping Through Organization and Planning
"take mental health leaves whenever I need to"	
"do the things I want to feel better, taking a break/leave."	*Emotion-Focused Coping Through Reflection and Self-Regulation*
"take mental health leaves"	
"I resort to seeking a breather from my work friends over food and coffee."	Social Support as a Protective Factor
"Yes, credible mentors and my family were strong sources of support, offering guidance, encouragement, and reassurance during stressful moments and helping me stay grounded."	

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"unclear rules or rigid procedures sometimes made things harder."	*Institutional Gaps and Structural Stressors*
"Orient people well. Assign a mentor who will support the transitioning leader for a period of time."	
"I realized that I have a capacity for leadership grounded in service, patience, and collaboration."	Emergence of Reflective and Empathetic Leadership
"It is important to listen to my team as well, a leader who listens, can help a lot with team camaraderie and work ethics, which in turn, would lessen workplace stress."	
"This leadership experience has taught me that I am more resilient, adaptable, and capable of growth than I initially believed."	*Leadership as a Continuous Learning Process*
"stepping out of my comfort zone can lead to personal and professional growth."	

Theme 1: Abrupt Shift from Classroom Freedom to School Oversight

Faculty leaders reported that prior to leadership, their work was focused on:

- direct student interaction,
- lesson planning,
- and academic delivery.

Upon transition, they experienced:

- expanded accountability,
- administrative oversight,
- Choices shaping staff, learners, and how organizations performed. A shift unfolded quietly through daily judgments.

Shifting from teaching to administration reshapes how individuals view their work. Uncertainty surfaced when participants stepped away from the autonomy of lesson planning into broader duties tied to school operations. One described it: *"attention must stretch across teachers, learners, and office demands - simultaneously"*.

One individual remarked, *"I needed to take responsibility for choices impacting the entire team, guide staff members while handling daily operations, also ensure coworkers received proper support."* That experience reflects a pattern identified by Kezar in 2018 - the struggle many face when pulled between roles. Research into shifts within universities reveals how those in middle positions feel pressure from two directions. On one hand, there is commitment to independent scholarship; on the other, demands for measurable results grow stronger. Because of this, uncertainty about personal role definition persists over time.

All six participants said they felt underprepared - a result that matches what Bolden and colleagues found in 2015 when studying how leaders grow within British universities. While observing training efforts, these participants saw an emphasis on practical abilities instead of shifts in sense of self necessary

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during major role changes. Because of this, many schools appear to treat leadership as a set of techniques, not as something rooted in inner transformation. Much like Floyd and Dimmock pointed out five years later, development initiatives in academia keep prioritizing administrative competence while skipping over emotional and interpersonal hurdles tied to guiding others in intricate university environments.

Unexpected shifts unsettle routines most academics know well. Research by Sutherland (2018) shows abrupt changes raise stress levels far above those seen during smooth progressions, slowing personal adaptation. When guidance falls short, individuals face compressed career development, a state described by Coryell et al. (2020), where new roles demand quick self-redefinition despite limited reflection time.

Sub-theme 1.1: Emotional Ambivalence in the Initial Stages of Leadership

Some participants claimed they felt excitement when stepping into leadership positions while others experienced doubt. Common emotions included:

- A sense of energy fills the moment, appreciation follows close behind because of what has opened up
- worry that comes from being caught off guard,
- fear of making mistakes,
- self-doubt about competence.

Surprisingly, stepping into leadership stirred conflicting feelings among participants, revealing how layered such shifts can be. Excitement showed up alongside anxiety; gratitude appeared hand in hand with fear; confidence mingled with doubt - emotions far deeper than mere hesitation. One person reflected: *"I felt nervous and uncertain… At the same time, I recognized it as an opportunity for growth, a chance to challenge myself, and a way to make a meaningful contribution to both students and colleagues."*

A different person mentioned having mixed emotions - some anxiety early on, yet still feeling thankful and driven to perform well in the position. Uncertainty about personal capability came up frequently among interviewees. That hesitation mirrors findings by Caza et al., who in 2018 described such moments as threats to how someone sees themselves during professional turning points. When individuals step into leadership positions that stretch their known abilities, how they respond - whether protectively or with flexibility - hinges largely on the backing they receive. Without sufficient help, some react by doubting themselves or pulling back.

Theme 2: Role Overload and Competing Demands

A dominant stressor across participants was role overload.
Leaders struggled with:

- balancing teaching loads and administrative duties,
- handling urgent institutional concerns,
- managing faculty performance,
- meeting deadlines and compliance requirements.
- The accumulation of tasks led to feelings of:
- exhaustion,
- constant pressure,
- inability to “switch off” from work.

Role overload was the primary factor shaping participants' experiences of leadership transitions. Taking on teaching, administrative work, urgent issues, managing faculty, and meeting compliance requirements led to what participants called constant pressure and an inability to switch off from work. One participant shared, *"I had a lot of projects to execute… but I was particularly stressed when in about*

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a year into my new role, I was given another equally tasking role." Kenny and Fluck (2017) found that role overload is common in higher education, linking it to productivity demands with fewer resources. For new leaders, this is made worse by what Turnbull et al. (2022) call "leadership load," meaning the extra mental and emotional work of managing others while keeping up with teaching and research.

This overload affects how participants experience time. One participant said, *"I am no longer just focused on teaching, but now must think and act as a leader for the department and the students, especially those at risk academically or personally."* Carvalho and Diogo (2018) found that role overload in academic leadership is both about the amount and the type of work. Dividing attention across many areas makes it hard to practice what they call "slow scholarship." Like in this study, their participants said work took over their personal time, made it hard to *"switch off,"* and left them feeling constantly tired. Moreover, Jääskelä et al. (2020) also found that this overload led to worse physical and mental health for academic leaders, especially those early in their careers. Additionally, Watermeyer and Tomlinson (2021) argue that the COVID-19 pandemic made these problems worse, normalizing overwork and blurring the line between work and personal life in ways that persist. Even though this study took place after the pandemic, participants still faced these ongoing issues. The inability to switch off aligns with what these scholars call "academic presence," in which staff are expected to remain always available and responsive due to digital technology and management practices.

Sub-theme 2.1: Interpersonal and Relational Stress

Participants reported stress related to:

- managing former peers,
- handling faculty resistance,
- mediating conflicts,
- Setting rules can feel awkward when working alongside people you used to work beside as peers.

Stress in personal interactions came up often, especially during shifts into leadership roles - moments when friendships shift and power needs renegotiation among those once on equal footing. A sense of unease surfaced around leading team presentations, one participant said, recalling difficulty giving direction to coworkers with deeper institutional history and broader expertise. Made evident by the statement, *"One particularly stressful situation was preparing for the presentation of the bridging program and figuring out how to provide instructions to my colleagues, many of whom had longer service and more experience than I did."*. In addition, statements from the participants such as, *"I also had faculty members who are as old as my mother"* and *"I was only 22 years old at the time."* highlighted added layers. Research by Urick et al. (2017) supports this, showing youth can hinder perceived authority, especially in settings where rank follows age. Older workers sometimes challenge young managers because age brings unspoken influence, which can clash with official job titles.

Stress often surfaced among coworkers when one received a promotion, according to Seibert and colleagues in 2016. Feelings like envy or unease about shifting dynamics were common. As roles changed, so did personal and professional boundaries - what some researchers call relational reorganization. Adjustments had to happen on both sides: from the promoted individual and from those remaining in prior peer roles. Emotional strain was frequently mentioned by participants trying to balance their new responsibilities. Keeping work connections intact while stepping into authority proved difficult for many. One participant put it clearly: handling power without damaging trust took constant care.

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Theme 3: Problem-Focused Coping Through Organization and Planning

Participants employed problem-focused coping strategies, such as:

- time management,
- prioritization of tasks,
- planning and scheduling,
- delegating responsibilities.

When swamped, people turned to methods like organizing their time, ranking duties, making plans, arranging schedules, or handing off work - each helping them feel steady again. A participant noted, *"Staying tidy keeps me grounded; reaching out when it gets heavy helps too, along with focusing just on what's next."* Someone else said they handle pressure tied to leading others by keeping systems in place and deciding what matters most each day. Large jobs get split into tiny chunks, deadlines marked clearly so gaps do not slip through. Moreover, Kok and McDonald (2017) states that structured approaches like planning tend to appear when academic leaders confront uncertain challenges. Faced with unfamiliar demands, many shape clarity by breaking down ambiguous issues into defined actions. Furthermore, handling stress well often depends on switching strategies based on control. When people face situations they can change, like too many responsibilities, how they manage time matters. Some handled it by structuring tasks differently. Their method showed a shift toward practical steps when outcomes were adjustable.

Sub-theme 3.1: Emotion-Focused Coping Through Reflection and Self-Regulation

Some turned to ways of handling feelings, such as distraction or talking things through:

- self-reflection,
- acceptance of limitations,
- seeing difficulties as chances to grow,
- mindfulness and emotional regulation.

When encountering difficulty, some participants turned inward - examining thoughts, acknowledging boundaries, reframing setbacks as growth moments, staying present through mindful awareness. By seeing hardship as a chance to learn, individuals engaged in cognitive reappraisal: adjusting their understanding of events to soften emotional weight such as seeing challenge as *"opportunities for growth"* according to one of the participants. Research by Gross and Jazaieri (2023) highlights this approach as especially effective for reducing strain over time. Lasting mental strength often grew where emotions were reshaped, not resisted. Research showed individuals viewing stressors as challenges instead of dangers tend to experience milder bodily reactions. These people also perform more effectively across tasks. One group viewed leadership obstacles not as risks but chances to develop, reflecting a flexible mindset. Such thinking links closely to improved outcomes under pressure. Moreover, a few individuals highlighted how becoming aware of themselves mattered, also pointing out that handling emotions during tough moments grew more natural. It connects with the work of Boyatzis and others from 2015, suggesting deep personal shifts depend on seeing oneself clearly - something sparked by looking at aspirations alongside present realities.

Some participants pointed out ways they care for themselves, such as *"take mental health leaves whenever I need to"* and *"do the things I want to feel better, taking a break/leave."* According to Kinman and Johnson (2019), drawing clear lines between job duties and private life plays a central role in reducing exhaustion for those leading academic teams. Taking pauses during work allows individuals to gain what researchers describe as recovery moments - periods that renew mental strength.

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Theme 4: Social Support as a Protective Factor

Participants handled stress better when they had solid help around them. Key sources of support included:

- friends within the team, those guiding alongside,
- mentors and supervisors,
- family members who offer steady comfort during tough moments.

One way people handle pressure is through help from others, revealing how personal strength grows within connections. Support often came from coworkers, senior figures, guides at work, managers, or relatives - each lessening loneliness, making hardships feel ordinary. One participant shared, *"I resort to seeking a breather from my work friends over food and coffee."* Another said, *"Yes, credible mentors and my family were strong sources of support, offering guidance, encouragement, and reassurance during stressful moments and helping me stay grounded."* Findings here fit patterns seen before in studies about leading in schools. For instance, Jones and team discovered in 2017 that backing from peers mattered most for heads of departments, outweighing structured learning or years spent working. One finding stood out: shared experiences among peers eased emotional strain while simplifying complex organizational demands.

Feelings of reduced isolation among participants echo results from Berkman and Glass (2020), who linked social integration directly to better well-being. Evidence suggests weak ties offer little protection when it comes to physical health; depth often outweighs number. New leaders may experience a gap, as noted by Floyd and Dimmock (2021) - detached from teaching staff yet excluded from top-level circles - which heightens emotional strain. Brief moments of genuine contact, labeled high-quality connections by Dutton and Heaphy (2018), can fuel resilience and personal development through small wins. In addition, people often feel less isolated when they see others dealing with the same difficulties. What Haslam and colleagues discovered in 2019 becomes clear here - shared group membership can improve well-being. Instead of feeling at fault, individuals begin to trust their ability to act together. A common sense of being new leaders during change offers emotional strength along with real-world help.

Sub-theme 4.1: Institutional Gaps and Structural Stressors

While some institutional policies were helpful, many participants identified the following as additional stressors:

- lack of formal leadership training,
- unclear role expectations,
- limited onboarding processes.

While social support helped protect participants, they also noticed major gaps in their institutions that made transitions more stressful and difficult. One participant said, *"unclear rules or rigid procedures sometimes made things harder."* Another recommended, *"Orient people well. Assign a mentor who will support the transitioning leader for a period of time."* These issues show that participants saw their institutions as not investing enough in leadership development. This finding is consistent with research by Gmelch and Buller (2015) on academic leadership preparation, which demonstrated that most institutions offer minimal onboarding for new department chairs and program directors, despite the complexity of these roles. Moreover, this lack of preparation results in what they term leadership gaps: disconnects between role demands and leader capabilities that generate preventable stress and reduced effectiveness.

The *"unclear rules or rigid procedures"* mentioned by participants are examples of what Floyd (2016) calls the paradox of academic bureaucracy: systems meant to create clarity and consistency, but that actually cause confusion and limit flexibility. Floyd found that academic leaders spend a lot of time

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dealing with rules that are often unclear, conflicting, or not connected to teaching values. This is especially hard for new leaders who do not yet have the relationships or insider knowledge to handle these systems.

The gaps that participants noticed in their institutions also reflect wider trends in higher education. Padilla and Ghosh (2020) argue that changes in university management have increased demands on academics but reduced professional development. They call this management intensification without support, meaning there are higher expectations for leadership and accountability, but not enough resources to help people build these skills. These conditions help explain why participants found transitions overwhelming, even though they were capable and committed.

Theme 5: Emergence of Reflective and Empathetic Leadership

Leadership identity shifted, as individuals spoke about their experiences with pressure and how they managed it. They became leaders who are:

- showing greater understanding of staff challenges,
- thinking more carefully before choosing what to do and,
- showing greater patience often provide stronger support.

Empathy grew among participants, along with deeper self-reflection and greater patience. Not merely occupying a position, leadership began feeling like a personal journey influenced by hardship and thoughtfulness. A quiet strength emerged when one participant shared: *"I realized that I have a capacity for leadership grounded in service, patience, and collaboration."* Another participant noted that *"It is important to listen to my team as well, a leader who listens, can help a lot with team camaraderie and work ethics, which in turn, would lessen workplace stress."* Growth like this echoes findings in studies about realness in leading roles. According to Iszatt-White and Kempster (2019), admitting uncertainty leads to more honest, resilient forms of influence compared to hiding weakness behind false confidence. What people go through - tension, doubt - can unexpectedly clarify who they truly are, instead of clouding it.

Listening stood out among participants, tying into newer studies about modest leadership styles. Openness to critique, respect for teammates' skills, along with owning one's limits - Owens and colleagues noticed these traits in 2023 as key markers of humble leaders. Teams led by such individuals tend to perform better; workers also report feeling more supported. Hardships, it turns out, may nurture this kind of humility - one that sharpens a leader's impact over time. Confidence and tight control once defined strong leadership, yet today's evidence questions that idea. When compassion enters leadership, empathy grows, matching what observers saw in the participants. A sense of shared hardship during periods of change appeared to spark real concern for others among those involved, according to Dutton et al. (2022). Leaders who notice distress, feel alongside people, then step in to support tend to foster teams that are more adaptable, creative, and motivated. Because individuals faced uncertainty and pressure while shifting roles, they developed what the researchers label empathic concern - a deep awareness of another's difficulty born from personal exposure.

Patience shown by participants connects to Petrie's 2020 idea of vertical development - shifting how leaders perceive complex situations, rather than simply gaining abilities. Her studies into mature leadership reveal individuals who handle ambiguity better, plan with longer horizons, while holding space for conflicting perspectives simultaneously. This shift appeared in participants through growing tolerance for delay or difficulty, sparked initially by pressure they could barely manage. Viewing such strain as helpful echoes findings where hardship leads to personal expansion. Those viewing pressure as an opening to evolve appeared to engage in what researchers label deliberate rumination - thinking deeply to uncover insight and lessons from hard moments.

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Sub-theme 5.1: Leadership as a Continuous Learning Process

Participants viewed leadership not as mastery but as:

- ongoing adaptation,
- continuous learning,
- personal and professional growth.

Change defines what it means to lead, according to several participants, instead of seeing mastery as a fixed goal. One participant stated, *"This leadership experience has taught me that I am more resilient, adaptable, and capable of growth than I initially believed."* Another noted, *"stepping out of my comfort zone can lead to personal and professional growth."* Believing abilities grow with time shows up often in how people describe their progress - this idea appears across studies on leadership learning. A shift inward happens when challenges arise; one person reflected that leading revealed strengths they did not know existed - resilience, flexibility, ability to evolve. Moving into unfamiliar roles brought insight for another: discomfort creates room for advancement, both personally and at work. Such views echo earlier conclusions by Heslin and Keating (2017), whose data suggests effort shapes leader effectiveness far more than natural gift ever could. Change often comes when people treat leadership as something always growing. One study shows flexibility matters just as much as skill in fast-moving workplaces. Instead of sticking rigidly to rules, leaders succeed by adjusting quickly - this idea appears clear in recent findings. A framework built around testing new methods, thinking deeply, then refining them echoes what real leaders describe experiencing. Learning does not stop after training ends; it shapes how challenges get handled day by day. Seen differently, progress happens less through mastery of tools and more through constant questioning and response. Additionally, willingness to step outside familiar boundaries reflects a form of lasting growth in leadership training, according to Petriglieri and Petriglieri (2020). As individuals show greater willingness to adjust mid-course during surprises, signs suggest they are moving closer to that deeper form of mastery. Ultimately, it is less about having answers and more about navigating the unknown with awareness.

Problem 6: Based on these results, what stress and coping strategies framework can be formulated?

Based on the themes, below is the stress and coping strategies framework that is formulated. This comprehensive framework integrates contemporary stress and coping theory with the unique context of academic leadership transitions. It synthesizes elements from transactional stress theory, identity development, and organizational support systems.

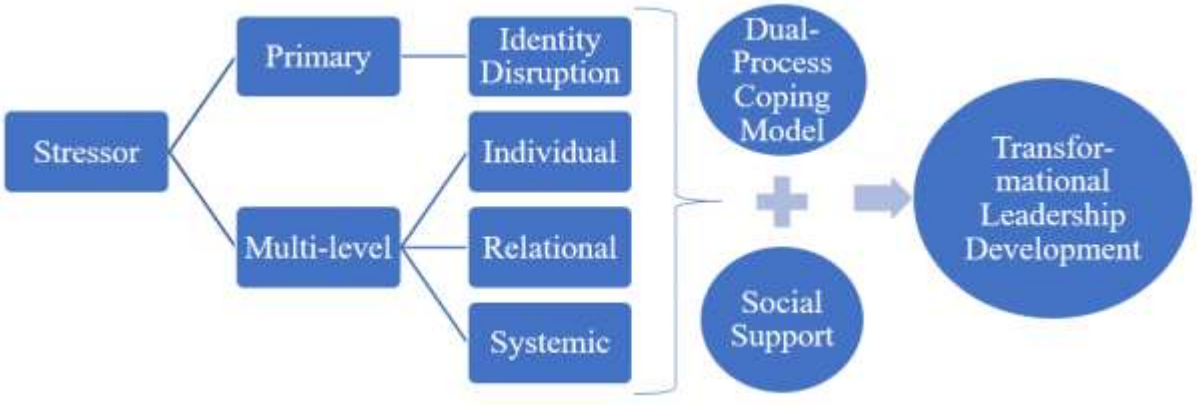


Figure 2. *Dynamic Identity-Based Stress and Coping in Academic Leadership Transitions Framework*

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Moving into management pulls faculty into a process called leader emergence - redefining who they are professionally, not just adding duties, disrupting their identity. As people interact, watch, try actions, then adjust them around peers, their work selves slowly change shape. When authority meets scholarly independence, friction builds. That clash often triggers mixed emotions: eagerness tangled with worry, assurance shadowed by hesitation.

Above all stands the idea that additional stress shows up in three forms: personal or individual, social or relational, and structural or systemic. On a personal or individual level, emotional uncertainty sits alongside doubts about one's own worth - alongside something scholars call identity threat, where expectations feel too heavy for current skills. When people start seeing themselves as leaders before others see them that way - or accept it internally - the strain grows strongest. Additionally, on a social or relational level, gaining trust becomes harder when stepping into a role among coworkers once treated as equals, unlike those joining from outside who face fewer such hurdles. Adjustment takes shape through what Seibert and colleagues call relational reorganization - shifting dynamics when new leaders navigate changed roles among previous equals. Authority becomes a tightrope walk, as Braun's team observes: leading with honesty often strains camaraderie. Furthermore, on a structural or systemic level, pressure mounts alongside teaching loads documented by Kenny and Fluck, worsened as support shrinks. Managing people piles unseen effort atop existing duties, according to Turnbull's idea of leadership load. Time falls short even as expectations rise, part of Rosa's concept where speed overtakes depth.

Using Folkman's revised approach from 2022, the structure highlights ways people handle pressure - either by tackling emotions or solving problems, depending on how much influence they feel they have. When challenges seem controllable, actions like sorting duties, setting priorities, assigning work, and breaking big jobs into steps become useful. On one hand, all these falls under the Problem-focused strategies of the Dual-process coping model. Research by Hafenbrack and Vohs in 2018 shows these tactics lower worry because they build confidence in managing situations. Progress, especially in work that matters, lifts mood and energy; Amabile and Kramer found this clearly in their 2019 study. However, when emotions take center stage, changing how one thinks about a situation matters most. According to Gross and Jazaieri (2023), seeing difficult moments as chances instead of dangers helps reduce strain over time. Kindness toward oneself - what Reitz and colleagues call self-compassion (2022) - shows up clearly in those who handle pressure well while staying effective at leading others. Clear lines between job duties and private hours matter too; Kinman and Johnson (2019) point out that stepping away regularly supports long-term energy. These, on the other hand falls under the Emotion-focused strategies of the Dual-process coping model.

In addition, Social support as an added coping strategy emphasis what helps people handle pressure often comes down to who stands beside them. Research by Jones and colleagues in 2017 showed that getting help from peers matters more for leadership success than official preparation or past roles. Instead of relying on hierarchy, some turn to connections shaped through shared experience. These links fall into three types: informal circles, guidance from experienced individuals, and backing from loved ones. In their work, Gagné and Collinson noted that when emerging leaders join group-based learning, they feel less strain and grow more certain of themselves - especially next to those going it alone.

Outcomes shift simply by changing how someone is supported. Shared identity among emerging leaders brings emotional backing along with sharper thinking under pressure, according to Haslam and colleagues in 2019. While discussing mentorship, Ragins and Kram two years later draw a line - between practical help like advice on advancement and learning, versus personal encouragement that validates who someone is. Moving forward, Murphy and Kram in 2022 suggest trustworthiness matters; so does mixing high expectations with steady reassurance. When demands peak, having family nearby eases job strain, Ruppanner's team discovered in 2021 - a kind of grounding Smith's group called identity anchoring back in 2018. That anchor holds firm against loneliness at work, especially for managers caught in the middle, as Floyd and Dimmock observed just recently.

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Stress, if met with thoughtful guidance and time to reflect, can shape transformative leadership. Research by Tedeschi and colleagues in 2018 shows difficult experiences only lead to personal advancement when paired with care and encouragement. Facing hardship alone might result in lasting harm; however, when challenge meets reflection along with backing from others, progress emerges through focused thinking - where individuals actively seek understanding and insight. Another study, conducted by Iszatt-White and Kempster in 2019, revealed leaders who accept their weaknesses and work through them tend to build stronger, truer versions of themselves compared to those insisting on appearing flawless. Pressure felt by those involved helped shape ways of leading that included understanding, modesty, one alongside another. In recent work, Petrie notes growth in depth means leaders handle complicated situations better, not just learn more tools. Becoming skilled at facing unclear outcomes, seeing broad patterns, holding different views together marks strong guidance. Such progress moves faster when change happens gently, help shows up clearly.

SUMMARY

The Problem

This study aims to investigate the stress management experiences of accidental leaders in PHINMA Education, addressing the pressing need for context-specific knowledge and evidence-based support frameworks for these educational leaders.

Methods

Using the phenomenological method and a qualitative research design, this study investigates the lived experiences of six faculty members who have unexpectedly moved into leadership positions in higher education of the different PHINMA Education schools in the Philippines. After gathering the responses through a semi-structured interview, thematic analysis was done following the steps outlined in Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method. Member-checking by seeking feedback from participants on the emerging findings and interpretations was incorporated to strengthen the trustworthiness of the analysis.

Findings

Based on the data gathered, the following were the findings of this study:

Finding 1: Disruption of Professional Identity as the Primary Stressor in Leadership Transitions

The primary challenge for new academic leaders is not the workload, but rather a significant disruption to their professional identity. Gigliotti and Ruben (2017) refer to this process as identity reconstruction, emphasizing that it involves more than simply assuming a new role. All six participants reported feeling unprepared for this transition, experiencing what Kezar (2018) describes as the "hybrid professional" identity crisis, which involves balancing academic freedom with institutional accountability. Participants also reported experiencing a range of mixed emotions, including excitement and anxiety, gratitude and fear, as well as confidence and doubt. This finding aligns with Clapp-Smith et al. (2019), who argue that leaders who acknowledge their mixed emotions develop stronger leadership identities. Additionally, participants identified discrepancies between claiming leadership, being granted leadership, and fully internalizing the leadership role (Miscenko & Day, 2016). For example, one participant, who was "only 22 years old" and leading faculty "as old as my mother," illustrated how age and cultural expectations regarding seniority can intensify identity struggles. This challenge is particularly pronounced in collectivist cultures, where respect for elders is a core value (Hofstede et al., 2015).

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Finding 2: Leadership Transitions Produce Compounding Stressors Across Multiple Levels

The study identified stressors that operate concurrently at individual, relational, and systemic levels, resulting in pressures that cannot be addressed by interventions targeting only a single dimension. At the individual level, participants experienced what Caza et al. (2018) describe as "identity threat," which manifested as self-doubt and imposter feelings exacerbated by insufficient preparation. Notably, fewer than 30% of new academic leaders received formal preparation prior to assuming their roles (Gmelch & Buller, 2015). At the relational level, managing former peers emerged as a significant stressor, as participants struggled to establish authority among colleagues who previously regarded them as equals. This challenge aligns with Floyd and Fung's (2017) identification of unique legitimacy deficits faced by internal appointees, which are not typically encountered by external hires. Participants also reported tension between hierarchical authenticity and relational authenticity (Braun et al., 2017), with one participant noting the stress of "providing instructions to my colleagues, many of whom had longer service and more experience than I did." At the systemic level, participants reported severe role overload and persistent pressure, reflecting what Rosa (2019) terms "social acceleration," where institutional demands exceed the available time for meaningful engagement. Importantly, this overload was both quantitative and qualitative, diminishing participants' capacity for what Carvalho and Diogo (2018) refer to as "slow scholarship," or deep, thoughtful engagement with academic work. This encroachment on personal time is consistent with Watermeyer and Tomlinson's (2021) observations regarding the normalization of overwork in contemporary academia.

Finding 3: New Leaders Utilize Flexible, Dual-Process Coping Strategies

Participants used both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies, choosing their approach based on whether they could control the stressor. This matches Folkman's (2022) updated transactional model, which highlights the importance of flexible strategies. For stressors they could control, participants relied on problem-focused methods such as time management, task prioritization, and delegation. Breaking big projects into smaller steps also supports Hafenbrack and Vohs's (2018) finding that setting small, achievable goals can lower anxiety. At the same time, participants used emotion-focused strategies such as rethinking situations, reflecting on their experiences, accepting their limits, and viewing challenges as chances to learn. Those who accepted their limits showed self-compassion, which Reitz et al. (2022) describe as being kind to oneself during tough times or setbacks. Participants also mentioned self-care, including taking mental health leave and doing activities that help them recover, which supports Kinman and Johnson's (2019) point that managing boundaries is key to avoiding burnout. However, the study also found evidence for Gill and Donaghue's (2016) view that focusing too much on individual resilience can wrongly shift blame from organizational problems to personal shortcomings. The fact that some participants needed to "take mental health leaves" may point to a failure by institutions to provide healthy working conditions. Finally, participants' use of mindfulness and self-care should be considered in light of Rupprecht et al.'s (2019) warning about "McMindfulness," which refers to shallow practices that help organizations secure compliance from stressed workers rather than truly supporting their well-being.

Finding 4: Social Support as a Central Mediator Between Stress and Outcomes

Support from colleagues, mentors, and family was the most important factor in managing stress and building strong leadership identities. This means social support is at the heart of successful leadership transitions, not just an added benefit. Peer support stood out as especially helpful. When leaders connected with each other, they felt less isolated and found it easier to handle challenges. This aligns with Jones et al.'s (2017) finding that peer support is the best predictor of leadership satisfaction and effectiveness among department chairs. Those with trusted mentors managed transition challenges more effectively. Mentors offered both practical help, like career advice and skill-building, and emotional support, such as

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encouragement and affirmation, as described by Ragins and Kram (2020). Family members also played a key role by providing emotional stability, which fits with Smith et al.'s (2018) idea of "identity anchoring"—relationships that support a sense of self beyond work. The way social support reduces isolation aligns with Berkman and Glass's (2020) research, which shows that isolation is associated with worse health, while strong relationships improve well-being. For new leaders facing what Floyd and Dimmock (2021) call "professional loneliness," social support helps them form what Dutton and Heaphy (2018) describe as "high-quality connections," or brief, positive interactions that boost energy and growth.

Finding 5: Deficiencies in Institutional Support Lead to Avoidable Stress and Hinder Leadership Development

The analysis shows that when institutions do not provide enough preparation, onboarding, or ongoing support, new leaders experience stress that could be avoided. This highlights the organization's responsibility during leadership transitions. Most participants said they had little formal preparation before taking on leadership roles, which aligns with Gmelch and Buller's (2015) survey, which found that fewer than 30% of academic leaders received formal training. Participants also noted that unclear rules or strict procedures made their jobs more difficult. This aligns with Floyd's (2016) idea of the "paradox of academic bureaucracy," in which systems meant to help actually cause confusion and limit flexibility. The findings also support Morris and Laipple's (2015) research, which found that higher education often lacks clear processes for finding, preparing, and supporting new leaders, with roles usually filled only when someone leaves. Padilla and Ghosh (2020) describe this as "management intensification without support," in which leaders face greater demands but receive insufficient professional development. The evidence suggests that participants struggled not because they were unprepared personally, but because their institutions did not invest in leadership development. This supports Bryman's (2021) view that the lack of systematic leadership development comes from seeing leadership as an individual effort rather than a shared practice.

Finding 6: The Combination of Stress, Challenge, and Support Facilitates Transformational Leadership Development

The main finding is that participants who received sufficient support during transitions experienced significant positive changes in their leadership identities and skills. This result challenges the idea that stress is only harmful, while still recognizing the role of institutions. Participants became more empathetic, reflective, patient, and supportive as leaders. One participant described developing “a capacity for leadership grounded in service, patience, and collaboration,” which matches Owens et al.'s (2023) research on leader humility. This change also fits with Tedeschi et al.'s (2018) updated model of post-traumatic growth, which explains how positive change can come from difficult situations. However, their model points out that both challenge and support are needed for growth, since struggle alone often leads to trauma. Participants’ greater patience and comfort with uncertainty also suggest what Petrie (2020) calls "vertical development," a shift in how leaders understand complexity rather than just learning new skills. The study found that participants began to see leadership as an ongoing process of adaptation and learning, which aligns with Heslin and Keating’s (2017) notion of a growth mindset in leadership. Still, the findings echo Boud and Hager’s (2015) warning that constant learning can become overwhelming when used to make up for poor initial preparation. This raises the question of whether participants’ focus on learning shows real growth, an adjustment to lack of support, or both.

Finding 7: The Framework Identifies Leadership Transition as Identity Work Necessitating Organizational Support

The study’s themes show that leadership transitions in higher education are best understood as identity work that requires strong organizational support, not just individual adaptation. This view affects both theory and practice. The framework points to identity disruption, rather than task overload, as the

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main source of stress. Multiple stressors add up in ways that individual coping alone cannot solve. While participants used both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping, social support was the key factor in whether stress led to growth or burnout. The findings show that personal resilience and coping skills matter, but they cannot make up for gaps in preparation, mentoring, peer support, or working conditions. This challenges the idea that leadership transition outcomes depend mostly on individual abilities. When institutions offer sufficient support, leadership transitions can lead to positive changes, such as more empathetic and authentic leadership, greater cognitive complexity, and a stronger commitment to learning. Without enough support, stress and burnout are more likely, and growth opportunities are lost. The study's main contribution is showing that growth happens when challenge is matched with support, but harm results when support is lacking. Institutions should move away from viewing leadership development solely as an individual task and instead build strong support systems, such as structured onboarding, mentoring, peer learning, reflective practice, and reasonable workloads.

CONCLUSION

One way to look at it: shifting into academic leadership reshapes how faculty see themselves professionally. Often, those shifts come with pressure - balancing different priorities forces people to rethink what they do and who they relate to in their work environment. What stands out is that moving into such positions isn't just about tasks - it involves emotional labor, dealing with uncertainty, finding ways to manage strain, drawing strength from others, while also being shaped by university structures (Ross et al., 2023). Another layer comes through when examining why friction occurs - not always clear where one responsibility ends and another begins, time grows tighter, duties clash between management and scholarship, adapting institutions adds more weight (Ho, Shaari, & Kang, 2021; Mabasa & Maluka, 2024). It is common for universities to overlook proper backing of emerging academic heads. When professors rise into leadership lacking training, guidance, or balanced responsibilities, pressure builds - performance dips, exhaustion sets in fast (Lattimer, 2024; Kruse, 2020).

Still, findings show benefits when schools offer real help. Evidence shows clear guidance at entry points, coaching from colleagues, shared experiences among peers, together with tools to handle pressure, helps incoming leaders turn tough moments into chances to advance (Simmons, 2016; Stress Management Strategies for Educators and Administrators, 2025). Systems built around resilience make transitions smoother, especially where long-term health and balance matter most (Ross et al., 2023). Teachers in nurturing settings that encouraged thinking back and skill building grew more understanding, genuine in approach, stronger in leading - proof progress can happen if aid matches demand (Tedeschi et al., 2018). Data highlights how teamwork-based styles ease strain (Arambala & Avelino, 2024), while strong mentorship boosts performance and lowers staff changeover (Gigliotti et al., 2023).

What stands out most is how academic leadership cannot simply rest on one person's efforts with little backing from the organization. Instead, it unfolds through ongoing support and long-term commitment from institutions. It matters less if organizations have enough funds to foster leadership skills - more pressing is what happens without such programs, especially considering rising levels of strain, exhaustion, staff departures, and weak management where preparation falls short (Lindstrom, 2019; Ross et al., 2023; Heffernan & Bosetti, 2020). Helping individuals move into leadership roles is not something extra or easily dropped. Without these supports, stability and progress within universities may falter. Longevity in academia hinges upon recognizing this duty, guiding growth in leaders who act with honesty, skill, and care.

Recommendation

Based on the results and conclusions, the following recommendations are hereby presented:

1. Faculty considering leadership roles may engage in structured self-reflection, seek mentorship, and segment work relationship prior to assuming administrative position.

2. Higher education institutions are encouraged to implement structured onboarding programs such as formal mentoring systems, peer mentoring or learning community, and providing adjustment in their workloads.
3. Future researchers may test the propose stress and coping framework through mixed-method design to further examine how institutional support moderates leadership outcome.

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