

# Growth through Adversity: The Five Stages of the Epic Academic Leaders' Journey in the New Normal

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*Abstract—The pandemic, if has not paralyzed some organizations, has resulted in so many drastic changes. It tests an individual's commitment to the organization, mental health, and even his or her job satisfaction. In educational institutions, sudden organizational changes have made evident impacts on academic leaders in various ways. Specifically, this study's objectives were to: (1) see through the experiences of the academic heads their expanding capacity to perform leadership roles in the organization amidst the adversity, which is the challenge in the new normal; and (2) identify the essence of their experiences in performing leadership roles in the organization amidst the adversity. The results revealed the themes which appear to be the combination of negative and positive impacts of the new normal on themselves and their leadership skills. Those are: (1) Tests and Enemies, (2) Ordeal, (3) Allies, (4) Merit and Power, and (5) Return with Elixir. The chain of five themes is anchored on the 12 Stages of a Hero's Journey in literature, specifically the journey of an epic hero. The academic heads are viewed to be epic heroes who are called for an adventure. Their lives are associated with a journey, making the new normal the call for an adventure, where they will have to encounter conflicts, support, and personal trials that will forge both their character and skills before they finally accomplish their mission. Therefore, each theme is viewed to be a stage in their journey as leaders. With these identified themes, it was concluded that: (1) different organizational conflicts are factors in their commitment development and job satisfaction, (2) pressure and fatigue cause the deterioration of their energy and that the perceived support of the organization and peer and family support including the trust given to them played an important role in preserving their drive and commitment as leaders, (3) they have*

*evidently shown effective conflict management skills and organizational sensitivity, and (4) the new normal is the opportunity for them to expand their leadership skills despite the limitations, develop their flexibility and adaptability to organizational changes, and develop organizational sensitivity towards their subordinates.*

*Culled from the thematic analysis and conclusions of this study, the following may be recommended: (1) the HR and management may continue providing mental wellness program for the employees; frequent conduct of this program is highly recommended; (2) prioritizing the mental health may benefit not only the academic heads but also the entire organization; (3) it is recommended that the management strengthen the organizational support and interdependency within the school as this highly combats the adverse effects of the new normal; and (4) the academic heads are recommended to attend training and workshops that focus on developing leadership skills in the new normal.*

*Index Terms— New Normal, Growth through Adversity, Leadership, Support System, Challenges, Adversities, and Organizational Change*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Any organizational change involves and entails types of adjustment for both the organization, its management, and its people.

One of the phenomena that resulted in so many adjustments is the pandemic. The pandemic which is COVID has been around for almost two years, if has not paralyzed some organizations, has brought in so many changes in organizations as they stay afloat or remain operational. It tests an individual's

commitment to the organization, mental health, and even his or her job satisfaction.

Francisco and Nuqui (2020) said that New Normal is a reality and certainty that everyone seeking to improve education must accept. Moreover, they have concluded that the emergence of situational leadership in the New Normal Leadership has really been displayed by the school administrators even in a single minute, day-by-day, and wherever they are, to promote quality education in the country. Therefore, a big responsibility is placed upon the academic heads to help the school administrators.

An organizational change, especially in the learning modality, has taken place and is now globally implemented. This change has made evident impacts on the academic heads in various ways.

The primary aim of this study was to see through the experiences of the academic heads their expanding capacity to perform leadership roles in the organization amidst the adversity, which is the challenge in the new normal, and to identify the essence of their experiences in performing leadership roles in the organization amidst the adversity.

II. METHODOLOGY

The phenomenological method was used in this study wherein qualitative data were utilized in a form of narrations. It was used since this study aimed to describe their perceptions and lived experiences. According to the Center for Innovation in Research and Teaching of Grand Canyon University, its purpose is to describe human experiences, reactions, feelings, perspectives, ideas, thoughts, and responses to a particular stimulus, called “bracketing”.

After the receipt of approval from the school head and consent from the informants, one-on-one interviews, ranging from one to three in frequency, were conducted with the four informants (Special Subject, Artificial Intelligence, Social Studies, and Science Subject Area Heads) to explore their insights and lived experiences as they lead their teachers or subordinates in the new normal. The interviews had a duration ranging from 10-30 minutes.

III. RESULTS

A chain of five themes emanated from the thematic analysis of the series of interviews with the informants. These are (1) *Tests and Enemies*, (2) *Ordeal*, (3) *Allies*, (4) *Merit and Power*, and (5) *Return with Elixir*.

The chain of five themes is anchored on the 12 Stages of a Hero’s Journey in literature, specifically the journey of an epic hero. The academic heads are viewed to be epic heroes who are called for an adventure. Their lives are associated with a journey, making the new normal as the call for an adventure, where they will have to encounter conflicts, support, and personal trials that will forge both their character and skills before they finally accomplish their mission.

Therefore, each theme is viewed to be a stage in their journey as leaders.

Figure 1: The Five Stages of the Epic Academic Leaders’ Journey in the New Normal

Stage 1	Stage 2	Stage 3	Stage 4	Stage 5
TESTS and ENEMIES	ORDEAL	ALLIES	MERIT and POWER	RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR
Challenges	Tribulations	Support	Leadership Strengths	Growth through Adversity

The five themes culled from the interviews presented both the negative and positive impacts of the new setup or new normal on themselves specifically and the way they lead their subordinates.

THEME 1: Tests and Enemies (Challenges). *In literature, tests and enemies fall under the conflict stage in the plot of the story which centers on the struggles faced by the epic hero.* In the workplace, the academic heads experienced different conflicts that tested their capacity to withstand. Those conflicts constantly affected their performance and ability to manage departmental issues.

Table 1: The Challenges Experienced by the Academic Heads

Challenges
1. <i>Pressure in the workplace</i> (Difficulty adapting to the new setup, Pressure from a leader, Difficulty in rendering multiple tasks, and Hardships if meeting expectations as a leader)
2. <i>Conflict affecting the operation</i> (Impact of technical problems, Impact of poor communication, and Impact of miscommunication)
3. <i>Conflict affecting the performance</i> (Impact of emotional fatigue and Impact of fatigue (physical, mental and emotional))
4. <i>Deterrent to effective conflict management</i> (Inability to manage emotions)

**THEME 2: Ordeals (Tribulations).** *In literature, an ordeal is a painful or horrific experience that will test one's guilt or conscience and character. It is any trial or wilderness that the epic hero must be able to survive. This is the stage when the character questions his capacity, loses his hope, and abandons responsibility.* In the workplace, in the new normal, many teachers experience emotional struggles which are influenced by their perceived lack of support from the organization, which are faced by the academic heads.

Table 2: The Ordeals Gone through by the Academic Heads

Ordeals
1. <i>Factors affecting building self-confidence as a leader</i> (Impact Self-Doubt on Performance and Self-doubt as a Leader)
2. <i>Deterrent to job satisfaction and organizational commitment</i> (Excessive training given to employees, Lack of Organizational Planning, Poor work-life balance, and Poor workload management)

But despite these tribulations and hard adjustments, they have found the bright side of this new normal.

**THEME 3: Allies (Support).** *In the context of literature, allies refer to entities or characters that come to rescue the epic hero in times of conflict. They may be people with superpowers or any character who has the capacity to help the epic hero alleviate and survive the trials.* In a work setting, they are surrounded by supportive people who give moral support, trust, and inspiration, which they find a factor in developing organizational commitment.

Table 3: The Support and Motivation Received by the Academic Heads

Support
<i>Factor in developing organizational commitment</i>
1. Impact of active communication and sense of responsibility among subordinates, Impact of peer and family support, Impact of peer support, Impact of trust, and Perceived positive treatment from peers
2. Perceived organizational support, Rest as a form of motivation, Organizational Flexibility and Adaptability in the workplace, and Impact of effective Organizational Practices
3. Impact of Inspiration

However, academic heads' craving for rest indicates that they need enough chance to recuperate from the adversity brought by the pandemic.

**THEME 4: Merit and Power (Leadership Strengths).** *Any epic hero in literature holds qualities and power that make him meritorious or worthy of the title.* Leaders in any workplace are known to be the epitome of discipline, grace, and intelligence. The qualities they embody gain them both trust and respect which are both factors in developing people and building a positive relationship with them. Despite the challenges they experienced earlier, they discovered some things in them that have developed well.

Table 4: The Academic Heads' Perceived Leadership Strengths

Leadership Strengths
1. <i>Conflict management practices</i> (Peer consultation in management practices and Time management skills)
2. <i>Characteristics of effective leadership</i> (Embracing changes, Acceptance of her weakness as a leader, Efficient decision-making, Ability to manage adversities, Peer consultation in managing conflicts, Strict adherence to conflict resolution procedures, Efficient leadership skills, Flexibility and Adaptability in the workplace, Readiness in taking leadership roles, and Self-confidence in Leadership)
3. <i>Factors in building positive relationships with subordinates</i> (Organizational sensitivity, Awareness of the situation of subordinates, Positive attitude and expectations towards subordinates' performance, Positive treatment towards people, Impact of patience on subordinates, and Impact of firmness)

**THEME 5: Return with Elixir (Growth through Adversity).** *In any epic story, this is the final stage wherein the epic hero returns to the ordinary world victoriously with his mission accomplished. Elixir refers to the substance or the essence of something or simply the essential principle. This stage simply means that the epic hero has finally accomplished his mission in his journey after all the trials he had encountered, bringing all the realizations and the best things the journey had taught him.* In the

academic year that academic heads have been sailing through, they had shared the struggles that they had experienced, and now that the academic is almost over, they shared the positive impacts that the new normal has made in their growth as leaders.

*Table 5: The Academic Heads' Perceived Positive Impact of the New Normal*

<i>Growth through Adversity</i>
1. <i>Leadership development (Improvement in performance and leadership)</i>
2. <i>Benefits of adversities to a leader (Positive effects of the new normal and Learning from adversity)</i>
3. <i>Key to effective organizational change management (Advantage of having the new setup, Awareness of the Changes, and Openness to Changes)</i>

To synthesize, the academic heads had started taking on the new normal with a difficult beginning. The adjustment has been more difficult due to the pressure and the personal struggle they experience. However, they feel the support of the people and the management which gives them the motivation. The motivation yields positive results. The new normal, on its bright side, helps them develop more leadership skills.

*The Essence of the Experiences*

The academic heads' experiences put emphasis on the importance of conflict not only in management but also in one's life, and if it is viewed positively, it opens opportunities and brings growth.

Conflict is inevitable that should not be avoided, but rather be embraced. In an organization, leaders play an important role which is to lead people. They are revered by people and seen by their subordinates as sources of inspiration and motivation thus they need to be able to live with the expectations.

Leaders have limitations and are impacted by pressing conditions and situations. With the support of all the members of the organization, the adversities may be surmounted, and the leaders will be able to gain the power to commit themselves more.

Interdependency is an important practice in an organization, especially in managing organizational change.

Moreover, the conflicts and changes will sharpen one's skills. The combination of organizational and peer support, self-confidence, awareness of one's weakness, and openness to changes develop growth through adversity.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to see through the experiences of the academic heads their expanding capacity to perform leadership roles in the organization amidst the adversity, which is the challenge in the new normal, and to identify the essence of their experiences in performing leadership roles in the organization amidst the adversity.

*The thematic analysis provided bases for the following conclusions:*

The experiences of the informants highlighted their leadership development. The thematic analysis revealed that different organizational conflicts are factors in their commitment development and job satisfaction.

Due to the pressure and fatigue, they felt the deterioration of their energy. In the midst of these challenges, the perceived support of the organization and peer and family support including the trust given to them played an important role in preserving their drive and commitment as leaders.

They have managed to render their responsibility and have shown the qualities of a leader. They have evidently shown effective conflict management skills and organizational sensitivity.

The new normal is the opportunity for them to expand their leadership skills despite the limitations, develop their flexibility and adaptability to organizational changes, and develop organizational sensitivity towards their subordinates.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

*Culled from the thematic analysis and conclusions of this study, the following may be recommended:*

The HR and management may continue providing mental wellness programs for the employees; frequent conduct of this program is highly recommended.

[6] <https://research.gcu.edu/cirt~3>

Prioritizing mental health may benefit not only the academic heads but also the entire organization.

It is recommended that the management strengthen the organizational support and interdependency within the school as this highly combats the adverse effects of the new normal.

The academic heads are recommended to attend training and workshops that focus on developing leadership skills in the new normal.

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