



LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES: RISK AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT CHALLENGES TO HIGHER EDUCATION IN A VOLATILE, UNCERTAIN, COMPLEX, AND AMBIGUOUS (VUCA) ENVIRONMENT

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Article history:	Abstract:
<p>Received: 11th July 2021 Accepted: 20th August 2021 Published: 28th September 2021</p>	<p>The undulating and uncertain occurrences that challenge contemporary and future educational operations have created a surge for investigating if modern education leaders possess the required leadership competencies that may empower them to function effectively and efficiently in a world of precariousness. Subsequently, the ceaseless gravity of the challenges such as environmental volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) has reshaped where and how education activities should be done. Likewise, the challenges of leaders' risk and conflict management of internal and external threats and conflicts have adversely impacted how teachers perform their pedagogical practices.</p> <p>Besides, the recent novel COVID-19 pandemic which has dictatorially forced education practices out of its traditional context and students' learning trajectories, there is a need to explore how these precipitating environmental and social dichotomy trammled school institutional cultural values, and students' diversity challenges are perceived by educators in higher education environments.</p> <p>Accordingly, the author adopted the quantitative method, descriptive research design, and random sampling techniques as the global positioning system to route the study. The study findings showed that the leadership competency risk and conflict management got a very high overall mean score.</p> <p>The implication of the study findings is that higher education institutions leaders should recognize that having abstract knowledge of a cluster of leadership skills is insufficient in leading today and future higher education institutions in a world steamed up by VUCA challenges and pandemic crises simultaneously.</p> <p>Consequently, synergizing and rethinking the demands of teachers' professional teaching enhancement, and parental engagement may help position leaders in fighting the present challenges of volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous economic, social, cultural, and political instability impacting higher education institutions management and sustainability.</p>

Keywords: Leadership Competencies, Risk and Conflict Management, Institutional Cultural Values, Students Diversity

INTRODUCTION

The challenges zigzagging the pathway of higher education institutions nowadays due to the volatility in the global and national economy, uncertainty in what tomorrow holds, complexities associated with international and national policies. Likewise, the inconsistency in human behavior and attitudinal ambiguities seem to amputate leadership competencies to lead schools effectively and efficiently. Besides, these leadership challenges and the lack of competency in risk and conflict management fosters unsuitable working and learning conditions. For instance, Carvan (2015) submitted that leaders attest they have not either the right leadership or the capacity to develop the right leaders at multiple levels in the organization (Carvan, 2015).

Consequently, there ample need to investigate the leadership competency in terms of risk and conflict management in higher education institutions.

LEADERSHIP RISK AND CONFLICT MANAGEMENT COMPETENCY

Risk and conflict management is a phenomenon that cannot be avoided as a way of life. Much more in a VUCA world, therefore, higher education leaders should be prepared to embark on purposeful and well-calculated risk and conflict management leadership practices that may help mitigate against internal and external disruptions such as employees' grievances that may mar the achievement educational goals.

Historically, Arena et al. (2010) as cited in Yang et al. (2018) suggested that interest in enterprise risk management (ERM) has been growing since the 1990s as businesses face several shocks in competitive environments (Arena et al. 2010). However, in response to unexpected threats, one school of thought believed in the direct impact of enterprise or organizational risk management on firm performance (Callahan & Soileau 2017; Florio & Leoni 2017) while another group of researchers claimed that the relationship of ERM and firm performance could be affected by some internal factors (Khan & Ali 2017).

Furthermore, Songling, Ishtiaq, Anwar, and Ahmed's (2018) study results indicated enterprise risk management practices significantly influenced the competitive advantage and small and medium-sized emerging enterprises (SME) performance. Additionally, it was observed that financial literacy significantly moderated the relationship between enterprise risk management practices and competitive advantage (Songling et al. 2018).

However, in Bombiak's (2018) research conducted with the application of a diagnostic survey, it was concluded that although managers had significant potential for the management of human resource risk management, it was not used to a full extent in all of the analyzed organizations.

Furthermore, Bombiak (2018) submitted that a negative attitude is a barrier limiting effective human resources risk management-oriented at generating an added value in organizations. Regrettably, an example of such an attitude is perceiving human resources risk mainly as a threat and striving to avoid it (Bombiak, 2018).

Additionally, the concept of risk management has been applied to many aspects of modern life such as banking, finance, health, life, business ventures, and project management. It is attracting a lot of attention in universities in terms of academic researches, courses, and degrees offered (Sum & Saad, 2017). Accordingly, the University Transformation Program Green Book highlighted that risk and risk management is one of the duties and roles of universities' board of directors. But it was observed that risk management is missing from most aspects of the management of universities (Sum & Saad, 2017).

Telescoping from the construct of organizational conflicts, it is apparent that the wide range of behavioral, philosophical orientations and cultural differences among people breeds a fertile environment for conflicts to manifest. Although theoretical conflicts may be constructive or destructive. Aligning with constructive theory, substantive and task-relative conflicts can be constructive and promotes opportunity for meaningful dialogue in organizations. Conversely, affective conflicts are typically always destructive because it diminishes employee's satisfaction and commitment. However, the lack of conflict may signal the absence of effective interaction (Smiley, 2018).

Nevertheless, conflict should not be considered good or bad, rather it may be viewed as a necessity to help build meaningful relationships between people and groups. Apparently, this means that how the conflict is handled by leaders in higher educational settings determines whether it is productive or devastating. Although it's obvious that conflict has the potential to create positive opportunities and advancement towards a common goal (Smiley, 2018). Nonetheless, conflict can also devastate relationships and lead to negative outcomes (Kazimoto, 2013; Evans, 2013).

Conversely, Kazimoto (2013) posited that it is a high time conflict management should be a skill that leaders need to give priority to learning and mastering because of its mediating power in times of organizational dispute resolutions (Kazimoto, 2013). This is imperative because the inability of a leader to deal with conflict will not only lead to negative outcomes but may also undermine the credibility of the leader (Kazimoto, 2013). Similarly, Northouse (2016) suggested that "to be an effective leader, one needs to respond with the action that is required of a threatening functional work situation."

Consequently, this demonstrates that the job of a leader is to analyze a conflict and facilitate the situation to produce a resolution that can be positive and productive. Interestingly, Northouse reassures us that any leader can draw on his/her leadership skills to employ appropriate conflict management strategies (Northouse, 2016).

The implication is that effectively managed conflicts can lead to a resolution that results in positive outcomes and productivity for the team and/or organization (Evans, 2013). Hence, the relevance of the risk and conflict management leadership competency concept inclusion in the noble study. Still, it is apparent that leadership practices do not occur in a vacuum but their effect transcends into organizational processes, operations, and working conditions of the employees.

INSTITUTIONAL CULTURAL VALUES

Recent decades have witnessed a significant increase in scholarly interest in the role that culture plays in the economic success of nations. Especially the notion that individualistic values, in contrast to collectivistic values, are conducive to long-run development has found a positive reception in the literature. However, a collaborative and supportive culture encourage teachers to identify knowledge gaps and learn together. Sometimes this meant adopting a new perspective as they came to realize they could make a difference, and that no child should be expected to fail.

Accordingly, Solomanidina (2007) as cited in Vasyakin, Ivleva, Pozharskaya, and Shcherbakova (2016) posited that organizational culture is the company's social and spiritual field, shaped by material and non-material, visible and disguised, conscious and unconscious processes, and a phenomenon that together determines the

consonance of philosophy, ideology, values, problem-solving approaches and behavioral patterns of the company's personnel, and is capable of driving the organization towards success (Solomanidina, 2007).

Subsequently, helping employees internalize corporate values to make them feel personal and synergistically aligned with the company's values has a pronounced positive effect on the organization's performance (Posner, 2010) especially considering that gravity VUCA challenges penetrating the corridors of higher education institutions.

For instance, Pitlik and Rode's (2016) investigated the impact of individualist values on personal attitudes towards government intervention, as a potential link of culture and formal institutions. The results indicated that values related to self-direction and self-determination of individualistic values were significantly associated negatively with interventionist preferences (Pitlik et al. 2016).

Unfortunately, it was observed that the effects of self-direction values on intervention attitudes were much weaker though than the effects of a strong belief in self-determination. Moreover, Pitlik and associate (2016) disclosed that the effects of self-direction on intervention preferences were mitigated through higher trust in state actors and lower confidence in major companies (Pitlik et al. 2016), Nonetheless, it was noted that the opposite was the case for self-determination values (Pitlik et al. 2016).

However, Gorodnichenko and Roland's (2015a, 2015b) studies indicated that the key economic characteristic of individualistic cultures is to reward personal endeavor and effort, innovation, or other achievements, with higher social status (Gorodnichenko et al. 2015a). Collectivism instead fosters conformity and internalization of collective goals but discourages individuals from striving for outstanding results. This concept was buttressed by Gorodnichenko and Roland (2015b) which found that individualistic values are positively related to the development of democratic institutions.

STUDENTS' DIVERSITY

Education and how educational processes are administered have changed due to the inception of international students crossing borders to pursue tertiary education away from their respective countries. Consequently, higher education cultural and social environment in conjunction with the policies that govern the institutions has changed in order to accommodate the trends of student mobility.

Furthermore, that has created an atmosphere whereby student bodies become increasingly diverse. Therefore, in order for every student to gain the mission and goal of their learning, it is important for faculty members to understand the dynamics associated with diverse campuses and also exploit a diversity-rich social classroom environment to promote students' learning and development psychologically, emotionally, and culturally.

The implication is that the way faculty members engage with students' diversity in the classroom environment plays a critical role in student experiences, satisfaction, and learning outcomes and that consequently determines the reputation and credibility of the institution.

For instance, Possi and Milinga's (2017) research on learner diversity in inclusive classrooms focused on the language of instruction, gender, and disability issues. Accordingly, the findings indicated that challenges facing teachers in teaching mixed classes as well as students in such classes were the fast speed that teachers adopt in delivering lessons. It was equally observed that those who suffers more were those with disabilities. However, interactions between girls and boys were generally positive although the latter dominated in some classroom conversations (Possi et al. 2017).

On the other hand, Thomas (2016) examined the impact of diversity on student engagement and academic success within a university setting. The results revealed that Hispanic college students expressed more frequent experiences with diversity than black or white peers (Thomas, 2016). Likewise, the result displayed that no significant relationship between diversity experiences and grade point average of the participants regardless of gender, race, and ethnicity, and/or generational status (Thomas, 2016).

Sequel to the literature reviewed, empirical evidence shows that leaders' competencies are highly needed for effective leadership functions. The urgency of this quest on either corporate organizations or educational institutions leaders is heightened by volatility, complexity, uncertainty, and ambiguous nature of the risks and conflicts that threaten the stability of social and cultural values, and the nature of student's diversity in our schools.

Besides, the reviewed pieces of literature and studies to some extents are similar to the current study because they touched on one aspect of this study on risk and conflict management leadership competencies. However, there are differences between the past studies and the present study because the majority of the reviewed studies and journal articles were carried in the United States of America, United Kingdom, Europe, Middle East, Africa, etc. which does not portray how the 21st-century leaders' competencies identified influences higher education institutional cultural values and students' diversity in the Philippines

Lastly, a number of practitioners have contributed to this review, based upon their expertise primarily in the field of organizational and educational management and leadership styles and employees' support practices. But no known past study has explored the impact of leaders' competencies in terms of risk and conflict management on higher education institutional cultural values and students' diversity in a higher education institutions context and particularly in South Manila Education Consortium member universities, Philippines.

Hence, to close this gap in the extant literature and to contribute to the field of educational management and leadership practices of higher education institutions engineers the impetus for this present study.

As to gain a broader understanding of the constructs, the quantitative research approach, descriptive and correlational research design, and random sampling technique were used in the study. However, the study was guided by these research problems.

1. What is the perceptions of the teachers on leaders' leadership competencies in terms of risk and conflict management?
2. How does the teachers assess the following in higher education institution VUCA environment in terms of:
 - 2.1. Institutional cultural values; and
 - 2.2. Students' Diversity?
3. Is there a significant difference in the rating of the respondents on the leadership competency when grouped by school?
4. Is there a significant relationship between leadership risk and conflict management competency and identified areas in a VUCA environment indicators?

HYPOTHESIS

H1: There is no significant differences between the ratings of the respondents on the leadership competency when grouped according to school.

H2: There is no significant relationship between leadership tech-savviness, and risk and conflict management competency and institutional cultural values and students' diversity.

METHODOLOGY

The chapter included the research design, respondents of the study, sampling technique, research instruments, data gathering procedure and statistical treatment, scales validation, and reliability testing, and ethical considerations. According to Kothari (2004), as cited in Chelimo (2017), the concept of research methodology relates to a systematized, and theoretical analytic thinking of the procedures applied to a field of study.

In this study, the quantitative research method was used because it deals with numbers to explain findings (Kowalczyk, 2016). Using numbers implies that the researcher has a good knowledge of both descriptive and inferential statistical parameters, statistical calculations and interpretations of standard deviations, ANOVA, correlations, etc. (Center for Research Quality, 2015a).

Whereas both descriptive and correlational research designs were used in the interpretation and discussion of findings. Burns and Grove (2003) as cited in Chelimo (2017) define research design as a blueprint for conducting a study with maximum control over factors that may interfere with the validity of the findings. Interestingly, Kothari adds that the research design is the conceptual structure within which research is conducted and it constitutes the blueprint for the collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Kothari, 2004).

The descriptive design is preferred since it allows the use of quantitative or qualitative elements within the same study. It also often uses visual aids such as graphs and charts thus interpretation and presentation of data are simplified. Whereas correlations indicate the relationship between paired scores (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, & Walker, 2014), and in the correlational study, the goal is to explore relationships between independent and dependent research variables (Creswell, 2005).

Consequently, a correlational research design was appropriate for this study because data could be statistically analyzed to identify whether or not higher education leadership competencies influence directly or indirectly respondents' institutional teaching strategies, and the institutional challenges teachers encounter. More specifically, Pearson r (Bivariate) as a type of correlational procedure that evaluates relationships among several variables were used (Ary et al., 2014).

The respondents of the study were university teachers (instructors) from selected South Manila Education Consortium member universities operating within Taft Avenue, National Capital Region (NCR) Manila, Philippines while the researcher used the simple random sampling technique which gives equal chances to the respondents to be included in the study. Empirically and operationally, Alvi (2016) submitted that in a simple random sampling technique, it is significant that the population contains a finite number of elements that can be listed or mapped. The implication is that the population must have homogenous characteristics and each construct should meet a described criteria of the target population (university teachers within a geographical setting) as for this study (Alvi, 2016).

In this study, the total sample size was determined through the use of the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table for determining sample size. The respondents were one hundred and eighty-four ($N=184$) that took part in the study. Out of the one hundred eighty-four respondents, eighty-two (44.6%) were male while one hundred and two (55.4%) were female.

The research questionnaires were researcher-developed from the literature review and theoretical conceptualization in relation to the study indicators. The first part was on the leadership competencies on risk, and conflict management, whereas the second part centered on institutional cultural values and students' diversity.

The questionnaires were duly piloted with a total of thirty university teachers before it was administered to the target study respondents. The risk and conflict management competency was assessed with the use of the Leadership Risk and Conflict Management Competency Scale. The questionnaire assesses risk and conflict management with 17 items on a 5-point Likert scale. The questionnaire Cronbach alpha was found to be highly reliable with a Cronbach alpha of .917.

Institutional Cultural Values Scale was used to measure the higher education institutional cultural values promoted by the leaders in their institutions as perceived by the teachers. The scale reliability Cronbach alpha was .917. Whereas the Students’ Diversity Questionnaire was used to assess the perceptions of teachers on how leaders and teachers embrace and promote student diversity. The scale reliability Cronbach alpha was .913.

RESULTS

This study sought out to explore the leadership competencies on risk and conflict management challenges to higher education institutions in a VUCA environment in relation to institutional cultural values, and students’ diversity. Accordingly, this section discusses the results of the study data analysis, and tables were used for visualizations of the results. Problem one and problem two are presented in table concurrently.

Table 1.
Mean Rating Summary on Leadership Competencies (N=184)

Scale Indicators	Mean	SD	Verbal Interpretation
Risk and Conflict Management	3.93	.618	Very High
Institutional Cultural Values	3.70	.631	Very High
Students’ Diversity	4.04	.577	Very High

SD: Standard deviation

The results show that Student Diversity had the highest mean score of (m=4.04, SD. = .577), followed by risk and conflict management with a mean score of (m= 3.93, SD. = .618), correspondingly. These results could be interpreted as a very high level of competencies on the observed constructs.

Conversely, institutional cultural values had the lowest mean score of (m=3.70, SD. =.577). Nevertheless, stitching the results together, shows that the participants perceived their leaders and themselves as having a very high level of cultural values and mobilizes students’ diversity to enhance pedagogical practices.

Table 2.
Mean Significant Differences on Leadership Competencies (N=184)

Variables	Schools	Mean Scores (SD)	F-value	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Risk and conflict management	School 1	3.97 (.730)	.053	.984	Accept	Not Significant
	School 1	4.02 (.692)				
	School 3	4.09 (.512)				
	School 4	4.15 (.561)				

H1: No significant mean variances, therefore, the null hypothesis was accepted

Table 2 results on the one-way analysis of variance conducted to evaluate the null hypothesis revealed that there was not a significant difference between mean ratings of the respondents when grouped and compared according to institutional affiliations on risk and conflict management competency. Subsequently, the one-way analysis of variance conducted displayed that there was not a significant difference between the ratings of the participants on the leading risk and conflict management competency when grouped according to institutional affiliation.

The assumption of normality was evaluated using histograms and found tenable for all groups. While the assumption of homogeneity of variance was tested and found tenable using Levene’s Test, F (3) =1.382, p= .250. Levene’s test verified that if the p-value is above 0.05, the null hypothesis should be accepted and it shows there is an equality of variance (Martin and Bridgmon, 2012).

Table 3
Correlation between Independent and Dependent Variables

Variables (IV)	DV	Pearson-r	P-value	Decision	Interpretation
Risk and conflict management	ICV	312**	.000	Reject	Significant
	SD	465**	.000	Reject	Significant

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

H2: Significant relationships found, therefore, the need to reject the null hypothesis.

Table 3 findings revealed the correlation between risk and conflict management and ICV, and SD. The results were: ICV ($r=.312$, $p=.000$), and SD ($r=.465$, $p=.000$). These results disclosed that there was a strong and positive significant relationship at the 0.01 level of significant (2-tailed) between risk and conflict management and institutional cultural values and students' diversity. Hence, there was evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

The goal of this investigation was to explore and determine leadership competencies in terms of risk and conflict management challenges to higher education institutions in a VUCA environment and its significant variances when grouped according to schools and associations to institutional cultural values, and students' diversity.

Based on the descriptive data analysis, the results showed a very high mean scores on risk and conflict management. These findings denote that the participants perceived their leaders as having the competency to negotiate and find resolutions on institutional conflictual challenges. Conversely, Almeida (2017) suggested leadership problems in spatial planning tend to be even more complex and difficult to solve regarding the transition from a traditional and linear planning system to a collaborative planning system. Similarly, the findings were collaborated by the Head and Alford (2008) results those problems that have a very high degree of complexity and diversity can further the emergence of intractable conflicts. That was in congruence with the study by Almeida (2013) which showed that tourism vs. territory conflict was an intractable conflict, and therefore, difficult to resolve.

Hence, it could be inferred that there was the presence of risk and conflict management awareness in the institutions. This, in essence, negates Sum et al. (2017) who posited that risk management is missing from most aspects of the management of universities. Therefore, it could be said that the higher education institution leadership implemented risk management skills within an integrated approach to their quality assurance regime or strategic planning framework.

Besides, the results showed the respondents observed institutional culture values were embedded in group cohesion rather than individualistic culture. Based on this concept of group cohesion, it is hoped that higher education leaders and teachers would capitalize on the result to propagate an effective culture of collegiality in order to effectively and efficiently improve teachers, students, and other employees' performances.

In support of this finding, Purwani and Martin (2018) found a positive direct effect of group cohesiveness on teachers' productivity in a state senior high school in Indonesia. The findings were further affirmed by Bukhuni and Iravo's (2015) study that showed school values such as respect for others and employee collaborations enhanced the achievement of organizational goals.

Similarly, the results revealed that there was a desire for people to decrease power distance between leaders and teachers. This indirectly implies that the respondents strongly perceived and observe that powerful members of the institutions practiced or upheld a culture whereby power is distributed unequally (Hofstede, 2010). These findings implicate the notion that in a high-power distance society, inequalities among people are both expected and desired where less powerful people should be dependent on more powerful people.

In terms of the students' diversity, the findings very high mean rating scores suggests that the teachers strongly agreed that they are able to adapt instruction to the needs of linguistically diverse learners. This is interesting if the perception is actionable in the classroom of different cultural backgrounds of Asian countries, African students, and other minority students from continents like the UK and US that patronize the higher education systems of the Philippines.

Besides, the findings suggest that teachers were cognizant of the needs of linguistically diverse learners and consider racial diversity as an integral component of educational systems. However, the study findings were in contrast with Lin (2014) whose study demonstrated that teachers lacked a true understanding of diversity. Similarly, it was noted that teachers reported reliance on outside sources such as guest speakers and children around the world unit but failed to utilize their colleagues, parents, and their own experiences (Lin, 2014).

Furthermore, the analysis of variance showed there was no significant difference between risk and conflict management when grouped according higher education institutions. However, a significant correlation was found between risk and conflict management and institutional cultural values and students' diversity. These findings indicate their positive relationship and that leadership risk and conflict management competency influences institutional cultural values and students' diversity. This was in contrast to Thomas (2016) that no significant relationship.

The findings were in consonance with the study by Way, Jimmieson, and Bordia (2016) that showed a positive association between relationship conflict and anxiety/depression. However, it was observed that bullying was stronger for positive supervisor conflict management style (CMS) climates than for negative supervisor conflict management style climates (Way, et al. 2016).

CONCLUSION

Tailoring from the overall mean score on risk and conflict management competencies as perceived by the respondents. Consequently, it was concluded that the leaders keep up with a very high level of leadership competency acumen in order to soar above VUCA challenging environment.

Also, deducting from the study findings on the VUCA environment identified factors as assessed by teachers, the results revealed the respondents perceived themselves as having a very high of level institutional cultural values, and students' diversity comprehension. Therefore, it was concluded that the respondents continue to explore how to intensify their pedagogical practices to reach the diverse nature of students in their classrooms.

Likewise, the findings showed negative significant mean differences on the other indicators of the leadership competencies. Thus, it was concluded that the institution leaders particularly should try to innovate and align with the other three institutions. Moreover, the study findings showed a positive and significant correlation between leadership competencies and the VUCA environment identified institutional factors. Subsequently, it was concluded that leadership competencies explored in the study could positively impact higher education institutions leaders' responsibilities.

Theoretically, this study's findings have contributed to the higher education leadership competency theory. Through this purpose and humble leadership philosophy, they position themselves and the employees in fighting the challenges of present volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous economic, social, cultural, and political instability.

Nevertheless, the study was limited by the sample of 184 participants who were permanent teachers in the higher education systems of four universities among the SMEC member colleges and universities. Hence, future researchers can explore further this study with a greater number of universities and sample size participation. That may help in the overall generalization of the study results to other institutions of the consortium.

Another angle of limitation was on the methodology, a quantitative method was used in this study, however, future researchers may utilize qualitative and/or mixed-method which may help in shedding greater insight into the concept of leadership competencies in a VUCA environment among SMEC higher education institutions.

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