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## Behind The Badge: The Lifeworld of Philippine National Police Officers in Leadership Practices

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### ABSTRACT

Leadership in policing has become a growing global concern as law enforcement agencies confront increasing security demands, rapid technological change, and heightened expectations for transparency and public accountability. This study explored the lived experiences of Philippine National Police (PNP) officers in practicing leadership, focusing on how police leaders perceive, enact, and assign meaning to leadership practices within both the organization and the communities they serve. Anchored in a transcendental phenomenological research design, the study was conducted at the Sultan Kudarat Provincial Police Office (SKPPO). Participants included five (5) Chiefs of Police under the SKPPO. Findings revealed six themes describing the lifeworld of police leadership practices: integrated moral identity, service-driven responsibility, capability formed through policing experience, guidance rooted in personal and professional life, operational command and accountability, and conflict mediation and community linkage. Seven contextual themes further illuminated leadership practice, including relational trust and community connection, continuous adaptation and personal change, emotional engagement and meaningful fulfillment, empowerment and sacrificial thinking, embodied awareness and self-regulation, quiet joy and transformative reward, and navigating complexity and cultural tension. Moreover, four themes emerged reflecting future self-perception in leadership: insightful and evolving practitioners, future-oriented service-inspired leaders, resilient individuals, and morally integrated servant leaders. This underscores that leadership in policing as a deeply moral, relational, and transformative practice shaped by lived experience and community engagement.

### INTRODUCTION

Leadership in policing has become a global concern as law enforcement agencies adapt to the complexities of modern society, including rising security demands, technological advancements, and the need for public accountability. Research shows that transformational leaders inspire subordinates, drive organizational change, and enhance community trust by modeling ethical conduct and promoting innovation (Wright *et al.*, 2019). Police organizations that practice transformational leadership are often more responsive to crime prevention, more accountable to the public, and more effective at strengthening police-community relations (Arnold *et al.*, 2020).

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has been implementing continuous reforms to promote professionalism, accountability, and integrity within the organization. Initiatives such as the PNP Transformation Roadmap and the Performance Governance System (PGS) emphasize the role of visionary leadership in ensuring effective public service and institutional modernization (De Guzman, 2020). Moreover, the three leadership pillars that the PNP must abide by, swift and responsive public service, unity and morale within the ranks, and accountability through modernization, align closely with the domains of a transformational leadership style: proactive, visionary, and innovative. The

PNP leadership framework emphasizes uniting the ranks, boosting morale, and instilling discipline, particularly as the organization faces persistent issues of political influence, resource limitations, and fluctuating public trust (Dizon, 2021).

In Mindanao and other areas with complex peace and order challenges, transformational leadership is even more critical. PNP officers stationed in these areas contend with insurgency, terrorism, and community conflicts, requiring leaders who can respond swiftly while fostering collaboration and trust among diverse communities (Sumalinog, 2022). By practicing transformational leadership, regional police leaders can unite their ranks, enhance morale, and implement innovative approaches to crime prevention and peacebuilding (Carreon & Villanueva, 2021).

However, the Philippine National Police (PNP) continues to face issues of corruption, abuse of authority, and declining public trust, despite reform efforts such as the PNP Transformation Roadmap and the Performance Governance System (PGS) (PNP, 2022; Orongan & Rabago, 2023). Many leadership practices remain rooted in transactional and command-and-control approaches, which often erode morale and cohesion within the ranks (Dizon, 2021).

Although international studies indicate that transformational leadership fosters accountability,

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innovation, and stronger police-community relations (Wright *et al.*, 2019; Sun *et al.*, 2021), research on how PNP officers themselves experience and practice this leadership style remains limited. Thus, this study aims to explore and understand the lived experiences of Philippine National Police (PNP) officers in practicing leadership. Specifically, it seeks to investigate how PNP leaders perceive, apply, and attribute significance to leadership practices that emphasize vision, accountability, innovation, and morale-building within the police organization and the communities they serve.

### Research Questions

1. What is the lifeworld of Police Officers in leadership practices?
2. How do police officers practicing leadership describe the context of their experiences?
3. How do police officers practicing leadership view themselves in the future?

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The foundational tenets of leadership theory are shared leadership, shared vision, and ongoing personal development (Northouse, 2021). It is believed that leadership is a social process that results from interactions between leaders and followers. There must be leadership in every department of an organization. In stressful, often dangerous situations, police officers must take the lead on the street. To foster community growth, members of an organization need to be aware of its vision (Bynum, n.d.). According to leadership, training is the primary factor that determines an organization's development. Training is a process that enhances the competence level of criminal justice professionals in both law enforcement and corrections agencies, resulting in a more professional organization (Deeb, 2023).

Leadership is widely recognized for promoting employee engagement, ethical behavior, and organizational adaptability, making it a more suitable approach than purely transactional or authoritarian styles in law enforcement, where public trust and organizational performance are central (Behrendt *et al.*, 2017). In the police context, it has been shown to buffer the adverse effects of stress and burnout while enhancing positive work outcomes. It was revealed that leadership reduces turnover intentions and strengthens organizational commitment by fostering supportive interactions and resource-sharing within police teams (Li *et al.*, 2020; Wang *et al.*, 2021).

The findings also indicated that police leaders who adopt practices enhance discretionary performance and overall efficiency, particularly when leadership is coupled with knowledge-sharing and elements of transactional leadership in a balanced, full-range leadership framework (Kollmann *et al.*, 2020; Arnold *et al.*, 2022). However, the strength of leadership influence is often moderated by contextual factors such as organizational culture, resource availability, and the presence of leadership development mechanisms (Haarhaus & Liening, 2020).

The national modernization agenda of the Philippine National Police (PNP), through programs such as the Performance Governance System (PGS), reflects an institutional shift toward ideals of accountability, innovation, and transparency (Campilan & Aquino, 2020). However, studies have shown that while policy frameworks encourage leadership, their implementation varies across regions, with officers' lived experiences highlighting gaps between reform intentions and leadership practices at the ground level (Cahapay, 2021). The implementation of leadership in law enforcement is not uniform but is significantly shaped by contextual factors within the organization and society. Studies have shown that organizational culture plays a pivotal role: environments that value openness, collaboration, and trust are more conducive to leadership practices than rigid, hierarchical cultures (Haarhaus & Liening, 2020). Resource availability, such as access to modern technology, training, and logistical support, also influences the extent to which police leaders can model innovation and accountability (Arnold *et al.*, 2022).

Additionally, leadership development mechanisms, such as mentorship, professional training, and succession planning, create pathways for officers to embody ideals (Sun & Henderson, 2019). Hence, local implementation often varies due to political pressures, limited resources, and entrenched organizational routines (Campilan & Aquino, 2020; Cahapay, 2021). Furthermore, external pressures, including public expectations, media scrutiny, and community trust, serve as both drivers and barriers to leadership, shaping how officers interpret their roles and responsibilities (Kearney *et al.*, 2019).

In organizational settings, these future-oriented identities are often influenced by career trajectories and professional development opportunities (Froehlich *et al.*, 2022). For law enforcement, this means that institutional pathways for promotion, role expectations, and the organizational climate shape police officers' perceptions of their leadership potential. Officers who aspire to be leaders often align their future selves with values of service, modernization, and public trust. This process is closely tied to motivation theories, such as self-determination theory, which suggest that aspirations are driven by intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Ryan & Deci, 2020).

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

#### Research Design

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological research design as advanced by Moustakas (1994). Transcendental phenomenology emphasizes the exploration and description of the essence of lived experiences by setting aside preconceptions as the process unfolds. The choice of transcendental phenomenology is especially appropriate for this study because it emphasizes not only the description of experiences but also the uncovering of the universal structures of meaning behind them. In law enforcement, where leadership is

often understood through hierarchical structures and performance metrics, the phenomenological approach shifts the lens to how officers themselves live out and make sense of leadership in practice (Neubauer *et al.*, 2019).

### Local of the Study

This study was conducted in the Sultan Kudarat Provincial Police Office (SKPPO). The SKPPO supervises and coordinates the operations of municipal and city police stations across Sultan Kudarat, ensuring the effective implementation of law enforcement, crime prevention, and community policing programs. It serves as the central hub for administrative, operational, and leadership functions that directly influence the performance and welfare of police officers within the province.

Several factors justify choosing SKPPO as a suitable study locale. First, Sultan Kudarat presents a unique policing context characterized by its geographical diversity, multi-ethnic population, and socio-political dynamics. These conditions require adaptive and visionary leadership, making it an ideal setting to examine how leadership is experienced and practiced among police officers (Campilan & Aquino, 2020). Second, SKPPO plays a significant role in advancing the PNP's reform and modernization initiatives at the provincial level, providing an opportunity to assess how national leadership frameworks such as the Performance Governance System (PGS) are translated into lived leadership practices on the ground (Cahapay, 2021). Third, the provincial office serves as a microcosm of the broader PNP organization, with leaders and officers engaging in both administrative and community-based policing roles, thereby offering rich and varied experiences of leadership dynamics.

### Participants of the Study

The participants were five (5) Chiefs of Police under the SKPPO. As frontline leaders, they are responsible for managing personnel, enforcing PNP policies, and fostering community relations, making them key figures in demonstrating leadership. Their experiences provide rich insights into how principles such as accountability, morale-building, and innovation are applied in provincial policing.

Participants were purposively selected based on the following criteria: they must be currently designated Chiefs of Police within SKPPO and have at least 1 year of leadership experience in their current post, to ensure adequate exposure to organizational dynamics. They must also be willing to provide informed consent and actively engage in the interviews. Excluded from participation are non-Chiefs of Police, those with less than a year of tenure in their current assignment, and those unwilling or unable to complete the interview process.

### Research Instrument

This study utilized a semi-structured interview guide grounded in Moustakas' (1994) phenomenological

approach to capture the lived experiences of participants in depth. The semi-structured format ensures both consistency and flexibility, covering core areas while allowing participants to share their narratives freely and openly. The instrument consisted of three main questions: leadership experiences, contextual factors that shape leadership practices, and future self-perceptions as leaders. To deepen insights, ten probing questions were used to clarify meanings and elicit richer reflections on how leadership is experienced within the police organization.

### Data Collection Method

In this study, data collection followed a systematic process to capture the essence of participants' lived experiences. Approval was first secured from Sultan Kudarat State University and relevant authorities to ensure ethical compliance (Smith & Shinebourne, 2018). Participants were purposively selected based on their direct experience with the phenomenon, enabling rich and meaningful accounts (Neubauer *et al.*, 2019).

Prior to interviews, participants were informed about the study's objectives and procedures and were provided voluntary, informed consent (Nowell *et al.*, 2017). Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to narrate their experiences while providing the researchers with flexibility to probe further (Vasileiou *et al.*, 2018). Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and thematically analyzed, with attention to bracketing biases and to participants' perspectives (Sundler *et al.*, 2019). Member checking was employed to enhance the accuracy and trustworthiness of the findings (Birt *et al.*, 2016).

### Data Analysis

The researchers used thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) explained that thematic analysis emphasizes the identification, analysis, and reporting of patterns or themes within the data. It was organized and detailed, describing all the data. The process of thematic analysis covered six steps. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the transcripts to become deeply acquainted with the content and to notice emerging patterns. Transcribing verbal accounts completes the data collection process by converting them into written form. The researchers generated initial codes by identifying where and how patterns appear. This step involves data reduction, where raw data are condensed into labels to form categories for more efficient analysis. They also identified themes by grouping related codes into overarching themes that accurately represent the data. Even when specific themes do not appear to fit neatly, they were examined for their relevance. It identified gaps or missing elements in the data.

During the review of themes, the researchers examined how each theme aligns with the data and the broader theoretical framework. The researchers defined and named each theme by clearly explaining what each represents,

which aspects of the data it captures, and what makes each theme significant.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

There are six (6) emerging themes (ET) that describe the lifeworld of police officers in leadership practices.

### ET 1. Integrated moral identity

A stable and internalized sense of self in which moral values are entirely woven into one's personal identity, professional role, and everyday behavior. Among police officers, it means that who they are as people and how they act as leaders are guided by the same moral principles, regardless of context. The participants expressed that:

"...to be a role model to my family. It is connected, intimately to be a role model as a police officer." (P1)

"...police officers in practicing leadership, a commonly widely embraced guiding principle... is service, integrity, and character." (P5)

"Practicing leadership leading by example is the best part... also my private life as a role model for being a police officer." (P2)

The findings align with Stouten and Mayer (2019), who highlighted that ethical leadership is rooted in leaders' moral identity, showing that values such as integrity and fairness guide conduct across contexts. Also, Kaptein (2020) explained that leaders embody moral identity when they consistently enact ethical principles in both private and professional life. Moreover, it aligns with Schafer (2021), who underscored that effective police leadership requires moral consistency, in which officers' personal values shape their decision-making and influence within communities.

### ET 2. Service-driven responsibility

It is a sense of duty and accountability grounded in service to others rather than in authority, rank, or personal gain. It means that police officers' leadership responsibilities are motivated by the commitment to serve the community, protect others, and uphold public trust. The participants shared that:

"I-connected in practicing police leadership as police officer of course, in my family

it teaches me about the value of responsibility and service to the community where I serve." (P3)

"police officers are engaging people from different walks of life and leading people from different upbringings. So, uh...

We must be decisive and firm so that subordinates will follow, we will be able to influence." (P1)

The findings supported Tankebe and Liebling (2020), who argued that leadership must be grounded in service to others, as legitimacy depends on fairness, accountability, and responsiveness to community needs. In contrast, Worden and McLean (2023) highlighted that integrity and accountability are sustained when officers view leadership as service to the community rather than personal gain.

### ET 3. Capability through policing experiences

The theme centers on the set of leadership competencies, skills, and personal capacities that develop over time as

a direct result of performing police duties in real-world contexts. This implies that police officers' leadership practices are not primarily learned through formal training alone, but are shaped through repeated exposure to complex situations, critical incidents, community interactions, and leadership responsibilities. These were reflected by the participants who expressed:

"...I develop a sense of decision making in a prompt way " and developed some communication skills as a police officer (P4).

"We must be decisive and firm so that subordinates will follow and the instances or situations in my life that are intimately connected with me being a police officer is to be a role model to my family".

(P1)

This aligns with Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2020), who found that officers develop leadership skills through mentoring, field exposure, and handling unpredictable situations, which cultivate resilience and adaptive decision-making. In addition, Worden and McLean (2023) emphasized that leadership capacities are shaped by repeated exposure to ethical dilemmas and operational challenges, which build accountability and integrity.

### ET 4. Guidance rooted in personal and professional life

The theme reflects a form of leadership that emerges from the police officer's lived experiences both at work and in personal roles. It means that how officers guide others professionally is shaped by the same values, lessons, and responsibilities they practice in their private lives. As the participants described:

"To give guidance to subordinates is likely connected to giving guidance to my family... to my son." (P1)

"...this will be the intimate connection of me being a police officer through my personal life practicing police leadership." (P3)

This aligns with Papagayo (2024), who emphasized that police officers' ability to guide others professionally is directly affected by how they balance personal and professional responsibilities. The study demonstrates that lessons from private life shape leadership practices in the workplace. In line with this, Detalla *et al.* (2024) found that women officers bring values and lessons from their personal roles into their professional leadership, thereby enhancing fairness, empathy, and effectiveness.

### ET 5. Operational command and accountability

This theme concentrates on the police officer's responsibility to direct actions, make decisions, and take ownership of outcomes during police operations and critical incidents. It emphasizes that leadership is exercised through hands-on command, procedural oversight, and personal accountability, especially in high-stakes situations. This means that their leadership practices lived as pressure, vigilance, and embodied authority. Officers experience leadership as being present, visible, and answerable, not distant or symbolic. The participants described that:

"As an officer in charge... I have to command and direct it... personally. From the correspond up to the filing of the case of the incident". (P4)

*“One incident that ultimately connected with me being a police officer, sir when leading my men through achieving objective, sir.” (P2)*

This supports Mendoza *et al.* (2021), who revealed that leadership effectiveness in the PNP is shaped by officers’ ability to take responsibility during operations, direct actions, and remain accountable for outcomes. Consequently, Roycroft and Brine (2021) highlighted that leadership competencies are forged through operational command, where officers must make decisions under pressure and take ownership of outcomes.

## ET 6. Conflict mediation and community linkage

This emphasizes the police officer’s leadership role in resolving conflicts while simultaneously maintaining trust, communication, and connection between the police and the community. It highlights leadership as a bridging function that addresses disputes and crises, restoring order and preserving social relationships. This means that the police officer’s leadership role is resolving conflicts while promoting trust and connection between the police organization and the community.

*“Actually, there are lots of incidents, intimately connected, being police officer.*

*But one notable incident in my career is the settling of disputes... from two erring parties.” (P3)*

*“There is one time that there is a shooting incident. As an officer in charge or a commander of the station, I have to command and direct it... personally.*

*” (P4)*

*“I know leadership as a chief is not about being in charge but about being a bridge between the community and the bad sir.” (P5)*

This is consistent with NAPOLCOM (2025), which highlighted that police leadership must rebuild public trust and strengthen relationships with communities. Leadership is framed as a bridging role that addresses disputes while ensuring communication and connection. Additionally, Tankebe and Liebling (2020) revealed that legitimacy in police leadership depends on resolving disputes fairly and maintaining trust, positioning leadership as a bridging role between law enforcement and the public.

Additionally, seven (7) emerging themes describe the contexts of the lifeworld of police officers practicing leadership.

## ET 1. Relational trust and community connection

This theme revolves around building, sustaining, and relying on relationships of trust with both the community and fellow police personnel as a foundation for leadership practice. The context of relational trust and community connection is most closely linked to the lifeworld of police officers, described as conflict mediation and community linkage, as participants’ descriptions of leadership grounded in community belief, cooperation, and relational influence support the practice of mediating conflicts and maintaining community connections. As described by the participants:

*“People in the community who always give support and believe in me are the people who stand out to me, sir.” (P1)*

*“As a police, I see the pressure of balancing order with trust and the purpose becomes clear. For myself, my leadership is not just about enforcing law but about protecting the fabric of our communities.” (P5)*

*“The personnel interrelated with me is where I influence so that we can finish the objective or we can fulfill the objective of our mission.” (P3)*

Trust in police is closely connected to perceptions of police performance, accountability, and moral alignment with community values (Rudhanto, 2025). This suggests that officers who engage proactively and ethically with community members contribute to stronger relational bonds that enhance legitimacy and support for policing initiatives. On the other hand, Community connection deepens this trust by fostering sustained interaction and collaboration between police and residents, enabling leaders to understand local needs and tailor responses accordingly. Strong police–community relations correlate positively with citizen satisfaction and trust in law enforcement services, underscoring the importance of engagement efforts such as visible presence, dialogue, and problem-solving partnerships (Ibañez *et al.*, 2025).

## ET 2. Continuous adaptation and personal change

It is the ongoing process through which police officers adjust their behaviors, thinking, and leadership approaches in response to experiences, challenges, and evolving circumstances. The context of continuous adaptation and personal change is most closely linked to the lifeworld of capability formed through policing experience, as participants’ accounts of adjusting to situations, learning from incidents, and developing leadership skills illustrate how experience shapes their capacity to lead effectively. The participants expressed that:

*“Sir, we need to be adaptable to changes and be flexible. That associates me with my practice of leadership to be flexible and adaptable to changes.” (P1)*

*“In practicing leadership, we should always learn through the result of our experience so that we can be flexible. Listen to the past experience.” (P3)*

*“I thought being a leader was about making... quick and firm decision but the context of life of the community here forced me to slow down and look beyond the badges.” (P5)*

The findings align with those of Salido *et al.* (2025), who showed that PNP leaders continuously adapt to adversity by developing emotional intelligence and resilience. Leadership strategies evolve as officers confront diverse challenges, reflecting personal change shaped by lived experiences. In line with this, Papagayo (2024) highlighted that the balancing of personal and professional roles influences police officers’ ability to adapt and change. Continuous adaptation is necessary for psychological well-being and effective leadership.

## ET 3. Emotional engagement and meaningful fulfillment

This theme pertains to the affective and motivational dimensions of leadership, in which police officers

experience a deep sense of purpose, satisfaction, and emotional connection through serving others and fulfilling their responsibilities. The context of emotional engagement and meaningful fulfillment is most closely linked to the lifeworld of service-driven responsibility, as participants' expressions of pride, satisfaction, and purpose reflect the meaning they derive from serving their community and fulfilling leadership responsibilities. As the participants described:

*"We are feeling happy and fulfilling become an effective leader."* (P3)

*"A feeling of sincerity and compassion are generated because of my desire."* (P1)

*"Sometimes I feel proud not from being in charge, but from being in a community that runs in a community, sir".* (P5)

This agrees with Alvarado (2025), who found that despite high stress levels, officers reported strong work engagement and emotional investment in their duties. Engagement was linked to meaningful fulfillment derived from community service and professional responsibility. Consequently, Cuevas *et al.* (2024) revealed that officers' emotional intelligence enables them to manage conflicts effectively, reinforcing emotional engagement with their roles and contributing to a sense of fulfillment in maintaining peace and order.

#### ET 4. Empowerment and sacrificial thinking

This theme reflects the ability to help others grow and succeed, even if it requires personal sacrifice, and to make decisions that benefit the collective rather than themselves. The context of empowerment and sacrificial thinking is most closely linked to the lifeworld of integrated moral identity, as participants' acts of prioritizing others' welfare, leading by example, and making personal sacrifices reflect the internalization of moral values that guide their leadership. This is evident in the description of the participants as follows:

*"The thought is, leadership is not about controlling but it is empowering others."* (P1)

*"We lead and sacrifice sir."* (P2)

*"One of the feelings that I generated by practice of leadership is that I am a straightforward person and they respect the kind of attitude as a leader and they always follow..."* (P4)

This aligns with Rojas and Guhao (2022), who found that transformational leadership promotes subordinates' empowerment, while sacrificial thinking is evident among leaders who prioritize collective welfare and ethical responsibility over personal interests. Additionally, Pearson-Goff and Herrington (2020) found that empowerment and sacrificial thinking develop through lived experiences, in which officers learn to prioritize collective welfare and empower subordinates during operational challenges.

#### ET 5. Embodied awareness and self-regulation

This is the ability of police officers to be consciously aware of their bodily states, emotions, and reactions, and to manage these effectively in the execution of leadership

and operational responsibilities. The context of embodied awareness and self-regulation is most closely linked to the lifeworld of operational command and accountability, as participants' focus on controlling their emotions, bodily responses, and decision-making reflects the embodied competencies necessary for effective and accountable leadership. The participants expressed that:

*"...to understand my own emotion and biases and of course, to be the decisive and apply empathy, and also to be vision-oriented and another is the resilience."* (P1)

*"As the officer in charge, it is imperative that these bodily changes, sometimes you have to... you have to make sure that you're gonna... react to the problems immediately and promptly you maintain your posture, when you are in front of your personnel".* (P4)

*"The changes or states, being aware of my practice of leadership I focus only on the firm decision and control side."* (P5)

The findings align with Virtudazo *et al.* (2025), who highlighted that officers with higher emotional intelligence regulate aggressive impulses, demonstrating embodied awareness and self-control in frontline policing. Moreover, Basinska and Dãderman (2019) found that officers' ability to regulate emotions and maintain composure reduces burnout, showing that embodied awareness and self-regulation are essential for sustainable policing.

#### ET 6. Quiet joy and transformative reward

This theme is the sense of satisfaction, fulfillment, and meaningful accomplishment that police officers experience from the positive impact of their leadership and service, often in subtle, relational, or intrinsic ways rather than in externally recognized ways. The context of quiet joy and transformative reward is most closely linked to the lifeworld of service-driven responsibility, as participants' experiences of fulfillment and satisfaction reflect the intrinsic meaning derived from serving others and fulfilling their leadership duties. The participants described that:

*"To influence people and make them believe in me. That brings joy of being a police officer".* (P1)

*"Companionship and how the committee engages issues sir."* (P2)

*"I think this, being the father or the main man of the... unit of the police station you can see this personal change from your old lifestyle. The new attitudes and behaviors changes will be your reward..."* (P4)

*"The joys are small, quiet ones...but they hit harder than any big achievement. There is a joy of walking enough through the town and hearing a group of people run up to me..."* (P5)

This aligns with Worden and McLean (2023), who argued that integrity-driven leadership provides officers with meaningful fulfillment, where the reward is not material but the transformation of self and community relationships. Additionally, Filstad *et al.* (2023) revealed that police leaders often describe joy as subtle and relational, such as community recognition or unit cohesion, while transformative rewards emerge from evolving into more reflective, service-oriented leaders.

## ET 7. Navigating complexity and cultural tension

This theme focuses on police officers' ability to manage, mediate, and make decisions in situations involving multiple, often conflicting social, cultural, or organizational demands. The context of navigating complexity and cultural tension is most closely linked to the lifeworld of conflict mediation and community linkage, as participants' experiences of resolving disputes and managing diverse expectations reflect the relational and mediatory role of leadership in complex social settings.

The participants expressed that:

*"...the new attitudes and behaviors changes will be your reward or commended as part of your leadership". (P4)*

*"The joys are small, quiet ones, but they hit harder than any big achievement. There is a joy of walking enough through the town and hearing a group of people run up to me soon." (P5)*

*"It is very challenging because you are dealing with different people". (P1)*

*"I think these challenges, problems and issues in practicing leadership are just normal and they are given to you to make you a better leader someday. That when you... assume another position someday, you become an experienced one." (P4)*

*"For me, sir, the biggest challenges with my special set and my subordinates are about bridging old habits and new ways of living." (P5)*

This agrees with Salido *et al.* (2025), who found that police leaders rely on adversity quotient and emotional intelligence to navigate complex organizational settings and cultural tensions. Officers adapt strategies to diverse backgrounds and community expectations, demonstrating resilience and cultural sensitivity. Also, Lee (2025) posited that leadership is not only about enforcing laws but also about promoting trust, engaging with communities, and making critical decisions under cultural and social pressures.

Furthermore, four (4) themes emerged as the description of the future self-perception of the police officers in practicing leadership.

## ET 1. Insightful and evolving practitioners

A leader who learns from experience, adapts to new situations, and grows through reflection and practice. They are not fixed in their approach but evolve as they gain knowledge and insight. Police officers view themselves as leaders who continuously reflect on experiences, adapt practices, and learn from outcomes to enhance their professional and personal effectiveness, demonstrating growth-oriented and reflective leadership.

The participants expressed that:

*"I can describe it insightful sir." (P1)*

*"I can describe leadership in the exploring stage sir." (P2)*

*"I think my insights are learning in life, being a police officer, because I once also, I... And I already experienced different commanders. I saw that mentoring is very important and experience." (P4)*

*"Leadership, for me, is not about having all the answers. It's about knowing how to find them with the people you serve and lead. I also think I needed to have a solution before walking into a crisis." (P5)*

The findings align with Copley (2019), who demonstrates that reflective practice enables police officers to critically analyze experiences, adapt their leadership approaches, and improve both professional and personal effectiveness. Moreover, Salido *et al.* (2025) revealed that PNP leaders rely on reflection and adaptation to overcome adversity. Continuous learning from outcomes strengthens both personal resilience and professional leadership effectiveness.

## ET 2. Future-oriented service-inspired leader

This refers to a leader who envisions long-term impact and aligns their actions with a commitment to serve others, balancing present responsibilities with strategic thinking about the future. This kind of leader is forward-thinking, community-focused, and motivated to create sustainable, positive outcomes. This implies that police officers are envisioned to become leaders who combine strategic foresight with a commitment to serving others, aligning present actions with long-term goals to produce meaningful, sustainable impact for subordinates, the community, and the organization.

As described by the participants:

*"As police officers practicing leadership, I can see myself in the future as the one that can contribute in nation building because of the experience I've gained." (P1)*

*"I believe I have gained more wisdom that could help the younger generations." (P1)*

*"I can see my future as a good public servant and a good servant of peace." (P2)*

*"For me, as a junior officer, given the time and experience, I will become a somewhat great leader someday or become a better leader." (P4)*

The findings align with Glomseth and Bentzen (2025), who presented a holistic model of police leadership that integrates public value creation, adaptive leadership, and service orientation. Leaders are expected to be forward-looking, culturally sensitive, and committed to community service. In line with this, Rojas and Guhao (2022) demonstrated that transformational leadership fosters future-oriented aspirations, in which officers see themselves as servant-leaders committed to an ethical climate, service, and long-term community trust.

## ET 3. Resilient individual

A leader who demonstrates the capacity to recover, adapt, and maintain effectiveness in the face of stress, adversity, or challenges. This type of leader is emotionally stable, flexible, and persistent, able to sustain performance and make sound decisions under pressure. This implies that police officers viewed themselves as leaders who demonstrate the capacity to recover, adapt, and maintain effectiveness in the face of stress, adversity, or challenges, drawing strength from experience and reflective practice.

As expressed by the participants:

*"Life in the uniformed service is never easy. It is a rollercoaster. I have been through ups and downs in my career. But all of this experience will make you even wiser and of course in practicing*

leadership.” (P1)

“Man in uniform is very complicated in work. Observing standards of leadership guidelines. It guides me how to survive....” (P2)

“As from experience, we learned a lot and we correct our mistakes and put it in a proper way so that we can be effective in the future.” (P3)

The findings align with Moreno *et al.* (2024), who found that police officers are routinely exposed to stressful and emotionally challenging environments, and that resilience training helps them adapt and sustain effectiveness. In contrast, Basinska and Däderman (2019) found that resilience is tied to officers’ ability to regulate emotions and maintain engagement, thereby protecting them from burnout.

#### ET 4. Morally-integrated servant leader

A leader who prioritizes serving others while consistently aligning actions with deeply held ethical and moral principles. This type of leader combines selflessness, ethical integrity, and relational responsibility, ensuring that their leadership benefits subordinates, the organization, and the community while reflecting their moral identity. This means that police officers view themselves as leaders who prioritize serving others while consistently aligning their actions with deeply held ethical and moral principles, demonstrating integrity, selflessness, and relational responsibility in their leadership practice.

As expressed by the participant:

“When I first put on this uniform, I thought it was about protecting people from danger. Now I know it’s also about protecting the dignity, the hope and the connection to one another.” (P5)

“Every time I walk through the town hall, I’m reminded that being a police officer, it’s not just a job, it’s a gift. It’s a chance to be part of something bigger than myself.” (P5)

The findings align with Bowman (2021), who argues that servant leadership is essential for repairing strained police-community relations. Officers who adopt servant leadership prioritize moral integrity and service, placing community welfare above authority. Also, the PNP Manual – Revised Primer on Personnel Decorum (2024), the official doctrine, emphasized that police officers must lead with integrity, fairness, and respect for human rights, aligning with the principles of morally integrated servant leadership.

#### CONCLUSION

Leadership practices among police officers emerge from integrating moral purpose, relational engagement, experiential learning, and emotional investment. Officers do not view leadership merely as a position of authority but as a moral and service-driven responsibility that requires balancing operational demands, community expectations, and personal integrity. Leadership development in policing is most sustainable when it promotes ethical grounding, reflective practice, adaptive capacity, and emotional fulfillment, as these dimensions reinforce both professional competence and personal growth.

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