

## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Assessing innovative and responsive young leaders in public service: Lens from community clientele

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## ABSTRACT

Youth leadership brings new perspectives, innovative ideas, and a dynamic approach to addressing contemporary issues. Young leaders often possess a deep understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities faced by their generation, enabling them to develop solutions that are relevant and impactful. Their involvement in public service fosters a sense of responsibility and civic engagement, encouraging a culture of active participation and community building. This study examined the innovative and responsive characteristics of young leaders in the Philippines. This exploratory paper expected to provide understanding on how community clientele like community residents, elderly people, persons with disability, perceived innovative and responsive traits of community youth leaders. Convenience sampling (n=12) was carried out to select the participants seeking assistance from barangays leaders. Findings indicated that the community clienteles described these young leaders as possessing creative minds capable of ‘thinking outside the box’ to address evolving challenges and meet community needs. Youth leaders were noted for their commitment to effective communication, gathering feedback, and working collaboratively with the community to resolve issues. They are accessible and approachable, demonstrating empathy and attentiveness to the concerns of those they serve. The perception of community clientele emphasized how young leaders integrate creative and innovative approaches to problem-solving with proactive and empathetic engagement to the community, and their commitment to transparency and effective communication. These qualities collectively contribute to the community's positive view of youth leadership, recognizing the potential of young leaders to bring about meaningful and lasting change.

**Keywords:** innovative leadership; public service; responsive leadership; youth leadership

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## 1. Introduction

Providing public services is the primary factor in achieving effective governance<sup>[1,2]</sup>. Outstanding public

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services are essential to an efficiently operating government systems<sup>[3,4]</sup>. Exceptional service is indicative of the government's commitment to meeting the demands and desires of the community, thus ensuring community contentment and improving the overall welfare of the community to the utmost extent of its capabilities<sup>[5,6]</sup>.

Public service is a systematic approach to delivering various services to the community, while ensuring equal treatment and non-discrimination towards individuals or groups based on factors such as ethnicity, religion, or race<sup>[7]</sup>. Different forms of leadership behaviors, as well as leadership training programs, can all have an impact on public service motivation of an individual<sup>[8]</sup>. Prior studies indicate that leaders could cultivate public service motivation among their subordinates by effectively communicating their ideas, providing clear directions to accomplish desired outcomes, and emphasizing the importance of their work, consequently motivating subordinates to persevere in challenging situations<sup>[9,10]</sup>.

While in a conventional socialization process, institutions effectively convey particular values and identities to the individuals who are part of them<sup>[11]</sup>. Leaders inspire followers to transcend their immediate self-interest and strive towards broader shared objectives by expressing aspirations<sup>[8]</sup>. When leaders exhibit behavior that aligns with established norms and ethical standards, and effectively oversee ethical conduct within the organization, followers are inclined to emulate and internalize that behavior, which increases the levels of motivation among individuals to serve the public<sup>[12]</sup>. Tewari, Gujarathi and Madulety<sup>[13]</sup> argue that links between leadership and organizational productivity can be attributed to a psychological agreement between leaders and employees to achieve the intended organizational objectives.

Today, young individuals, who vary in their characteristics and backgrounds, exhibit interest in different characteristics of social and political matters<sup>[14-17]</sup>. Youth are actively searching for opportunities to meaningfully participate in various services, systems, organizations, and communities they are involved with<sup>[18]</sup>. They desire to make an active contribution to the internal development and leadership of the organization, as well as to external campaigns and activities that have a tangible and quantifiable impact on local communities<sup>[19]</sup>. For example, youth can engage in many activities to develop new skills, challenge stereotypes, and exercise responsible bystander conduct<sup>[20,21]</sup> and that, youth-led and involved models have a positive impact on students' knowledge, attitudes, and behaviors around sexual violence<sup>[22,23]</sup>.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child, established by the United Nations in 1989, asserts that children possess a right to be listened to and treated with importance in regards to issues that impact them<sup>[18]</sup>. Engaging young individuals in organizational leadership offers them the chance to participate in many roles and activities, such as governance, representation, media, and development<sup>[24]</sup>. The growing trend of incorporating youth into community development and leadership initiatives represents a constructive reaction to past practices that have overlooked the potential of youth as effective catalysts for social transformation<sup>[25]</sup>.

However, Buzinde, Foroughi and Godwill<sup>[25]</sup> argued that it is uncertain whether the program design for recruiting young leaders for social change and community development initiatives considers critical thinking and autonomy promotion as essential for enabling young leaders to succeed and become successful agents of change. Gilbert, Horsman, and Kelloway<sup>[26]</sup> believe that there is still much to learn about leadership and motivation, including critical thinking. Research on youth leadership development is limited due to the focus on adults in most leadership studies<sup>[27]</sup>.

This study looked at youth leadership within the lens of innovative and responsive contexts. Youth displayed competence in innovation as they are becoming the 'architects for social change'<sup>[28]</sup>. They were able to establish means for activism in social media<sup>[29]</sup>. This study recognized the potential of youth in integrating community development and address modern challenges that the community faces. This explored

the creative and forward-thinking strategies employed by youth leaders to address emerging challenges and improve community services.

## **2. Literature review**

### **2.1. Youth leadership in the Philippines**

There is a growing participation of youth in leadership and governance in the country. Youth participation in political, economic, and social affairs contributes to a more democratic society<sup>[30]</sup>. Youth engage in politics through voting in national and municipal elections (at age 18), supporting political parties, taking part in school-based activism, and writing on social media<sup>[31]</sup>. The ongoing trend persists, with students channeling their activism not only through physical demonstrations but also by using the power of social media platforms<sup>[32,33]</sup>.

The 1987 Philippine Constitution has duly acknowledged the significant contribution of the youth in the process of nation-building. Consequently, this recognition led to the establishment of the Sangguniang Kabataan (SK) through the enactment of Republic Act (RA) 7160, more commonly known as the Local Government Code (LGC) of 1991<sup>[34]</sup>. The SK, the Philippine counterpart of the village youth council, is a local government unit specifically designed to represent the interests and concerns of the youth in their respective communities<sup>[31]</sup>. According to De Jesus<sup>[35]</sup>, these individuals fulfill the role of youth leaders and contribute to the decision-making processes concerning youth affairs within the Local Government Unit (LGU). Their involvement in this capacity serves as a valuable training opportunity for aspiring leaders within the community<sup>[36]</sup>. The SK formulate and implement projects and programs such as organizational relationships, developing motivation, and demonstrating adaptability, resourcefulness, and commitment to work and youth empowerment<sup>[37]</sup>.

Cuya-Antonio et al.<sup>[38]</sup> conducted an exploratory descriptive-qualitative research on the role and experiences of millennial community leaders in the Philippines amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The study involved the participation of sixteen millennial community leaders and twelve citizens and subordinates in the Science City of Muñoz. Their thematic analysis revealed that youth leaders in the Philippines are characterized by their “good-natured,” “observe the law,” “principled,” “people-centered,” “wide understanding,” and “patriotic” characteristics. The findings of the study provide confirmation that the technological inclination, ideals, and aspirations of millennials are influenced by their socio-historical background. Despite their limited experience and resources, the millennial leaders demonstrate remarkable resilience and determination in guiding the community response to pandemic emergencies.

Palangdao et al.<sup>[37]</sup> identified several community development efforts in Baguio City, Philippines. For active citizenship, the SK has organized food pack relief distributions and travel pass assistance to help those in need. They have hosted various events such as esports tournaments, cooking competitions, arts and crafts sessions, and district events. They have organized blood donation drives and provided medical assistance for the youth, aged individuals, mothers, and PWD youth. Basic first aid training, seminars, hygiene kit distributions, and supplemental feeding for lactating mothers have also been part of their efforts.

### **2.2. Innovative leadership**

Innovative leadership is a leadership style that focuses on the ability to successfully guide and direct a manner of innovation inside an organization<sup>[39]</sup>. Leaders with innovative leadership style focus fostering new ideas, encouraging creativity, and motivating team members to surpass conventional boundaries to achieve organizational goals<sup>[40]</sup>. From this standpoint, individual innovation originates with the identification of problems and the creation of ideas or solutions, which can be either original or acquired<sup>[41]</sup>.

Creativity is closely linked to innovation because it has relevant influence on the process of generating original and practical ideas<sup>[42]</sup>. In fact, innovation relies on creativity as the primary driver of innovative behavior<sup>[43]</sup>. Fauzia et al.<sup>[44]</sup> described innovative behavior as (i) the ability to identify problems and subsequently generate or embrace novel solutions and ideas, (ii) engage in the formulation of alternative approaches to effectively communicate and legitimize their proposed solution or idea, while also seeking support from both internal and external stakeholders, and (iii) actual creation of a prototype or model, which serves as a tangible representation of the proposed solution or idea, and allows for its empirical testing and evaluation. These components are crucial for individuals to attain optimal results in their organizational work<sup>[45]</sup>. Essentially, an innovative individual endeavors to overcome their limitations in order to enhance fresh ideas and concepts, leading to improved products and services<sup>[46]</sup>.

The most effective way for young individuals to cultivate innovation abilities is through obtaining affirmative feedback and acknowledgment for their initial achievements, as well as being provided with opportunity to personally witness successful cases of innovation<sup>[47]</sup>. From a developmental standpoint, it is believed that a young person's ability to come up with new ideas and solutions develops as they get older and is developed during the transition to maturity. This perspective suggests that it is important to consider the influence of adults and established organizational systems in developing the necessary conditions for this ability to be achieved<sup>[47]</sup>.

### 2.3. Responsive leadership

Inadequate communication and coordination among response groups and agencies during a crisis can result in challenging and perhaps hazardous consequences<sup>[48-52]</sup>. Many studies considered responsiveness as an essential mechanism to curb the disruptive factors of disasters<sup>[53,54]</sup>. In fact, it might be a recent phenomenon where responsive leadership becomes significant for organization, governance, and community relations<sup>[55,56]</sup>. For example, context-responsive leadership involves the implementation of actions by management to effectively adjust the organization or its constituent parts to the changing circumstances of its setting<sup>[57]</sup>.

Gärtner et al.<sup>[58]</sup> believed that responsiveness “not only aims at responding to change, but at influencing change in the making.” Gaertner et al.<sup>[58]</sup> explained that responsiveness involves the act of *sensing* then followed by a specific manner of *responding*. Both behaviors exert an influence on change, thus necessitating the assumption of responsibility for them. Lastly, acquiring *credibility*, and in this instance, the course of action undertaken truly results in increased legitimacy.

In an exploratory case study of Barksdale<sup>[59]</sup>, it examined how campus leaders perceive the implementation of culturally responsive practices and discipline management strategies among instructors. It described cultural responsiveness as a leadership that involves embracing indigenized and local identities, fostering relationships to alleviate anxiety among students and teachers, exemplifying CRSL (Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Leadership) for staff in their interactions with all stakeholders, incorporating student voices, and utilizing school data to identify and monitor disparities in academic and disciplinary patterns.

Kahne et al.<sup>[60]</sup> conducted a study analyzing the concept “responsiveness” of school administrators and teachers to student voice. Their focus on responsiveness demonstrates a belief that students are important contributors to the school community and should have the ability to influence choices and actions that impact their education and the school. Empirical research indicates that when students are given the chance to engage in and develop their voice within the classroom and in the context of school governance, it promotes their democratic commitments and abilities<sup>[61,62]</sup>. Consequently, when students have poor experiences and

feel marginalized in their everyday school life, it might have a detrimental effect on their long-term political development<sup>[63]</sup>. Hence, Kahne et al.<sup>[60]</sup> believed that the adoption of responsiveness to student voice is highly regarded as it offers a crucial chance for marginalized students who are typically excluded from decision-making processes.

### **3. Research objective**

Youth leadership development is a long-term method that teaches leadership ideas while also allowing youth to implement them in their daily life. Limited studies were conducted on the concept of innovativeness and responsiveness in the context of youth leadership. It was identified that innovative leadership often involves creativity<sup>[42]</sup>, motivation<sup>[40]</sup>, problem identification<sup>[41]</sup>, feedback and acknowledgement<sup>[47]</sup>, and developmental influence<sup>[47]</sup>. For responsive leadership, communication<sup>[64]</sup>, feedback<sup>[65]</sup>, collaboration<sup>[66]</sup>, empathy<sup>[67]</sup>, commitment<sup>[68]</sup>, and proactiveness<sup>[69]</sup> emerged as its primary components.

Now, this paper analyzed the perceptions of community clientele about how they perceived the Filipino youth leaders in relation to innovative and responsive behaviors. By examining these perceptions, the study aimed to uncover how these young leaders are viewed in terms of their ability to introduce new ideas and practices (innovative behaviors) and their capacity to engage effectively with the community through active listening, empathy, and timely actions (responsive behaviors). Below are the objectives sought to be answered in this study.

- a) Identify the innovative qualities of public service leaders from the perspective of the community clientele.
- b) Identify the responsive qualities of public service leaders from the perspective of the community clientele.

## **4. Methods**

### **4.1. Research design**

This preliminary paper was a qualitative study that analyzed the experiences and perceptions of community clientele about the innovative and responsive skills of young leaders. This study gathered the narratives of community clientele to identify common themes and perspectives related to the effectiveness, creativity, and adaptability of young leaders within the community. Exploratory design expands the understanding about how community members perceived essential skills of young leaders. This study described several skills that had relevance in modern management, governance, and public service field. The primary goal of an exploratory design is to uncover underlying motives, beliefs, and attitudes that can inform further research<sup>[70-72]</sup>.

### **4.2. Sampling and participants**

The primary participants of this study were community clientele *i.e.*, residents seeking social services, elderly residents, persons with disability, local entrepreneurs, community volunteers, job seekers, among others. Community clientele is group of people who seek services, support, and assistance from local organizations, such as community centers, non-profits, and governmental units like barangays. These clients typically include residents of a particular area who rely on community resources to meet various needs, ranging from basic necessities to specialized services. Convenience sampling method was employed to select participants. Convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where participants are chosen based on their accessibility, rather than through random selection.

In sampling, the researchers strategically established a desk in front of the barangay hall, a central and accessible location frequented by community members seeking various services and assistance. This setup allowed the researchers to observe and engage with potential participants, ensuring that the sample reflected the characteristics of community clientele. Convenience sampling was chosen for its practicality, enabling the researchers to gather data from a readily available pool of participants—specifically, those who received assistance from youth leaders within just minutes. They were asked critical questions like the assistance they received, who helped them, how they feel about it, and are they positive about the outcome. This study was able to interview 12 community clientele from this sampling set up.

### 4.3. Instrument

After selecting the potential participants, they were interviewed with in-depth questions about their experiences and perceptions. **Table 1** presents the questions asked in one-on-one interview with the participants. Semi-structured questions were asked to the participants.

Qualitative research often uses semi-structured interviews, and the quality of the interview guide can significantly impact the outcomes<sup>[73,74]</sup>. Semi-structured interviews promote reciprocity between interviewer and participant, making them a valuable tool for qualitative studies<sup>[75]</sup>. This paper recognized the potential of open-ended questions to elicit narratives from community clientele who had directly received the assistances from youth leaders.

Semi-structured interviews need initial analysis of previous knowledge on the topic<sup>[76,77]</sup> and it should cover the main topic of the study<sup>[78]</sup>. Interview questions can provide a framework for guiding the conversation during interviews, although it is not necessary to adhere strictly to them<sup>[79]</sup>. Instead, the objective is to investigate the research subject by gathering data from each participant through the provision of guidance on the specific topics to be discussed<sup>[80,81]</sup>.

The interview guide of this study involved organizing the questions into a logical sequence that flows naturally during the interview. This often starts with general questions to put the participants at ease, followed by more specific questions that described the core themes of the study.

**Table 1.** Interview guide questions of the study.

Objectives	Interview Questions
Identify the innovative qualities of public service leaders from the perspective of the community clientele.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What is public service in relation to innovation to you? Explain based on your understanding.</li> <li>b. Should public service leaders in the community be innovative? Explain why they should be.</li> <li>c. What are the traits for you to be able to say that a public servant is an innovative leader? Enumerate the traits and describe each based on your observation.</li> <li>d. In what specific situation should public servants be innovative leaders? Explain by providing specific instances.</li> </ul>
Identify the responsive qualities of public service leaders from the perspective of the community clientele.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What is public service in relation to being responsive to you? Explain based on your understanding.</li> <li>b. Should public service leaders in the community be responsive? Explain why they should be.</li> <li>c. What are the traits for you to be able to say that a public servant is a responsive leader? Enumerate the traits and describe each based on your observation.</li> <li>d. In what specific situation should public servants be responsive leaders? Explain by providing specific instances.</li> </ul>

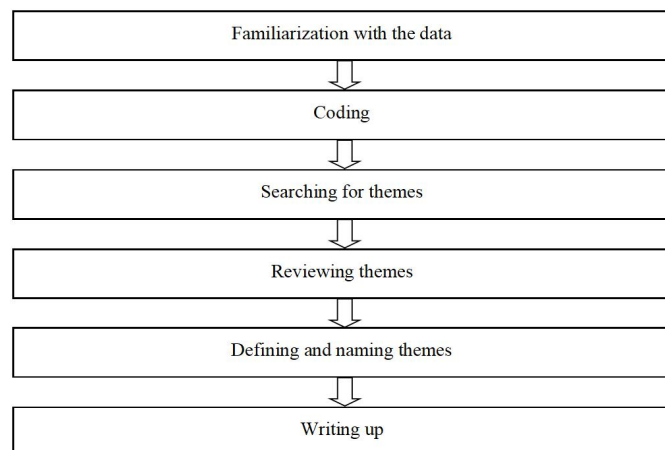
#### 4.4. Data gathering procedure

A one-on-one interview was conducted with the 12 sampled community clientele. This interaction affords individuals a special chance to document and capture every aspect of their lives<sup>[82,83]</sup>. The interviewer diligently attends to the narratives shared by the participants, meticulously documenting their comprehension thereof. The objective is to acquire a comprehensive understanding of the participants' perspectives, thoughts, and concepts<sup>[84]</sup>.

McCracken<sup>[85]</sup> proposed an interview process. Initially, "grand tour" questions are established to describe the knowledge of the participants. The questions are generic and non-directive, allowing participants to provide specific information on the interview topic or perspective. The nature of the questions posed is based on the specific content being discussed during each interaction. Typically, these questions are designed to align with the researcher's determination to investigate deeper into the topic. During the interview, researchers often employ specific or "planned prompt" (or the interview guide). These questions are strategically asked towards the end of the interview to specifically address issues that have been identified through a thorough review of the existing literature or previous investigations. The participants are encouraged to provide detailed descriptions of their interpretations of particular events or experiences they had<sup>[86]</sup>. Throughout this process, the researchers ensure that the questions promote reciprocity and encourage participants to share their experiences and insights freely.

#### 4.5. Data analysis

In exploratory design, the researcher diligently examines and reviews the data, thoughtfully searching for significant keywords, patterns, themes, or concepts that will facilitate the formulation of the analysis, prior to starting any analytical procedures. Thematic analyses, such as those employed in grounded theory and the development of cultural models, necessitate a greater degree of researcher engagement and interpretation<sup>[87]</sup>. Thematic analyses are prioritizing the identification and description of both implicit and explicit ideas present in the data, which are referred to as themes<sup>[88]</sup>. Positive psychologists are promoting an organic approach to coding and theme creation, emphasizing the active participation of research in these processes<sup>[89,90]</sup>. Braun and Clarke<sup>[91]</sup> suggested six phases of thematic analysis as shown in the **Figure 1**. In analyzing the responses from community clientele, the researchers (i) repeatedly reading the transcripts, (ii) generated initial codes by systematically identifying and highlighting significant ideas, (iii) collated codes into potential themes, (iv) reviewed the themes, (v) conducted a detailed analysis to clearly define each theme, and (vi) produced the report, weaving together the thematic analysis with vivid and compelling data extracts.



**Figure 1.** Clarke & Braun (2006) method for thematic analysis.

## 5. Results

Objective 1: Identify the innovative qualities of public service leaders from the perspective of the community clientele.

### Theme 1. Innovation as creative minds

Community clientele described young leaders as individuals with ‘creative’ thinking. They emphasized that being innovative is discovering new and creative approaches to meet the needs and concerns of the community. They are looking for creative ideas that can help address the needs of their community. They encourage young leaders to ‘think outside the box’ for addressing the evolving challenges and demands of the community, ensuring that services are continually improved and adapted to better serve the people.

“Public service in relation to innovation means finding new and creative ways to address the needs and concerns of the community.”

“It involves thinking outside the box and implementing fresh ideas to improve the quality of life for the people we serve.”

“They use critical thinking to tackle difficult problems, frequently thinking to provide practical solutions that might not be immediately apparent.”

### Theme 2. Innovation in action

Some community clientele believed that innovative young leaders should be able to adopt to new concepts and technology to enhance the service delivery. By employing critical thinking, leaders can address community problems and make practical solutions that are not immediately obvious which ensure that services are more effective and accessible to everyone. For example, using vehicles is a form of ‘innovation in action’ as it is commonly used for transportation during crisis, demonstrating how innovation can be embedded in everyday solutions.

“Leaders can enhance service delivery and make it more effective and available to all by adopting innovative concepts and technology.”

“Even the vehicles we use for public transportation are instances of innovation in action. These seemingly common vehicles are essential to our capacity to effectively address community needs.”

### Theme 3. Innovation towards change

Some community clientele believed that innovative leaders have to be working towards change. These leaders have a clear vision for the future direction of their community or society, enabling them to guide and shape its development strategically. For example, they should be able to ‘predict’ patterns and challenges within their communities. Instead of being deterred by challenges, creative leaders view them as opportunities to devise new and effective approaches. Innovation is essential for these leaders as it allows them to adapt to dynamic circumstances, overcome obstacles, and find improved solutions to community issues.

“Innovative thinking leaders has the capacity to predict emerging patterns and challenges.”

“They envision the direction they want to take their community or society.”

“Challenges don't stop creative leaders; rather, they present chances to develop new approaches.”



“Innovation is crucial because it allows leaders to adapt to changing circumstances, overcome challenges, and find better solutions to the problems faced by the community.”

“By being innovative, leaders can bring about positive change and make a lasting impact on the lives of the people they serve.”

Objective 2. Identify the responsive qualities of public service leaders from the perspective of the community clientele.

#### Theme 1. Responsive as actions

Community clientele believed that being responsive involves communication, feedback, and collaboration. For them, responsiveness reflects on the actions taken and the process they undergone to connect to the people. Effective leaders create communication channels, such as designated office hours or online platforms, to ensure community members can easily reach out with their concerns. They actively gather feedback and work collaboratively with the community to identify and address issues, particularly those related to financial needs and concerns.

“When leaders are responsive, they establish effective channels of communication, gather feedback, and collaborate with the community to identify and resolve issues.”

“Public service in relation to being responsive means promptly addressing the financial needs and concerns of the community.”

“They create channels for communication, such as office hours or online platforms, where community members can easily reach out to them.”

#### Theme 2. Responsive as being attentive

Responsive leaders are characterized by their accessibility and approachability, making themselves readily available to engage with community members. Emotionally, they exhibit empathy and excellent listening skills, attentively hearing the voices and concerns of those they serve. Specifically, being responsive involves paying close attention to inquiries, requests, and feedback, particularly regarding financial matters, and taking timely actions to provide accurate information and assistance.

“It involves being attentive to inquiries, requests, and feedback regarding financial matters, and taking timely action to provide accurate information and assistance.”

“...they are accessible and approachable, making themselves available to engage with the community.”

“They are approachable and empathetic...”

“...they are excellent listeners, attentively hearing the voices and concerns of community members”

“Being responsive also builds strong relationships and promotes a sense of belonging within the community.”

“...responsive leaders are approachable and accessible.”

“When implementing new policies or initiatives, responsive leaders actively seek feedback and input from the community to ensure that their needs and perspectives are considered.”

#### Theme 3. Responsive as commitment

Responsiveness in leadership is seen as a clear demonstration of a leader's dedication to the well-being of their community. Responsive leaders show genuine commitment by prioritizing the community's needs and interests, like in financial matters. They considered responsive leaders as individuals who manifest proactiveness in solving community concerns and provide solutions to them.

“When leaders are responsive, they demonstrate a genuine commitment to serving the community's best interests and prioritize their needs.”

“When leaders are responsive, they demonstrate their commitment to serving the community's financial interests and are able to address any issues or questions that arise.”

“Responsive leaders are proactive, taking prompt action to resolve issues and provide appropriate solutions.”

#### Theme 4. Responsive as being transparent

Community clientele emphasized that transparency is a fundamental aspect of responsive leadership. Responsive leaders are transparent in their actions, consistently providing clear and timely information to the public. This transparency is crucial as it builds trust, particularly in the financial management of the community. By being ‘transparent’ and ‘accountable’, these leaders ensure that the community is well-informed about the decisions and actions taken. This open communication fosters a sense of trust and confidence among community members, reinforcing the leader’s reliability and integrity.

“They are also transparent in their actions, providing clear and timely information to the public.”

“Responsiveness is crucial because it ensures transparency and builds trust in the financial management of the community.”

“...they are transparent and accountable, ensuring that the community is well-informed about decisions and actions taken.”

## 6. Discussion

Objective 1. Identify the innovative qualities of public service leaders from the perspective of the community clientele.

The findings revealed three primary themes relevant to the innovative skills of young leaders—their creative minds, actions, and perceptions towards change. Community clientele considered young leaders as people who manifest creativity, practical action, and a forward-thinking vision to address ground-level challenges within their community. They are individuals who have critical skills that strive for change through critical thinking and positivity. Essentially, these skills are the trajectory on how the community perceives young leaders of today.

There is no specific philosophy for youth leadership development, yet successful programs do exist and thrive<sup>[92]</sup>. Creativity can be linked to the innovative skills of an individual<sup>[93]</sup>. Effective leadership requires imaginative thinking in human connections and dealing with unexpected situations<sup>[94]</sup>. Similar themes

emerged in this study analyzing the concept of innovative leadership among young leaders. For example, young leaders within the community should be *“thinking outside the box and implementing fresh ideas to improve the quality of life.”* In this study, innovation was characterized by creative thinking, with community members describing young leaders as individuals who discover new and creative ways to address community needs and concerns.

Literatures on innovative leadership indicated that innovative leaders have the capacity to remove barriers to innovation, promote cooperation across many departments, and amplify creativity at all levels of the business through their guidelines and procedures<sup>[95-97]</sup>. At its core, innovative leadership consists of both the development of novel concepts and the execution of inventive strategies for successfully working through community changes<sup>[98]</sup>. The perceptions of community clientele about ‘innovative leadership’ among young leaders appears to be simple and straightforward. For example, one clientele said that *“leaders can enhance service delivery and make it more effective and available to all.”* It is believed that being an innovative young leader does not require a person to have high power—they only need to have forward-thinking actions. Consequently, they are individuals who can transform minimal resources into productive and meaningful outcome.

Following the concept of ‘creative minds’ and ‘forward-thinking actions,’ innovative leaders are someone who wanted to strive for change. This might be their essential quality of being ‘innovative’ in a sense, they manifest eagerness to create ‘positive change’ and make ‘a lasting impact’ on their community. Although it sounds vague, it still offers opportunity to analyze how this quality has impacts on people’s action, especially in the context of self-efficacy and motivation. This follows the concept of ‘motivation to lead’ as described by Badura et al.<sup>[99]</sup>. They argued that a fundamental element of this process of leadership is the inner desire which compels an individual to assume a leadership role. Individuals with a strong need for power, a minimal desire for social connections, and a strong ability for self-control are more likely to emerge in leadership positions<sup>[100]</sup>. Possibly, the motivation to lead provides the foundation for innovative and creative thinking, as it empowers leaders to pursue visionary goals and implement transformative strategies within their communities. Leaders who exhibit creative thinking are not just responding to external demands but are driven by an internal compulsion (*e.g.*, drive for change) to find novel solutions and envision new possibilities. These traits enable leaders to harness their creativity and innovative thinking effectively, driving change and fostering an environment where new ideas can flourish.

Objective 2. Identify the responsive qualities of public service leaders from the perspective of the community clientele.

There were four major themes for the concept of responsiveness in youth leadership—their actions, commitment, attentiveness, and transparency. In essence, responsiveness in this study highlighted the importance of communication, feedback, collaboration, and empathy. Responsive youth leaders demonstrate their commitment by prioritizing community needs, taking proactive steps to address concerns, and ensuring transparency in their actions to build trust and confidence.

For Smith<sup>[64]</sup>, a responsive leader can be characterized as an individual who employs well-established and effective behaviors to react effectively to the challenges they experience. Specifically, it is imperative to possess a strong motivation to acquire knowledge about individuals and their surrounding environment within the context of their work<sup>[66]</sup>. For example, Brown et al.<sup>[65]</sup> believed that the diversity within educational institutions necessitates the active engagement of school leaders in the role of bridge builders, facilitating the integration and support of students from diverse cultural backgrounds. This concept is often viewed as culturally responsive leadership which is centered on leadership philosophies, habits, and

strategies that aim to foster accessible educational environments for learners and their families from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds<sup>[67]</sup>. Remarkably, the same concept emerged among young leaders within small communities. For example, one community clientele said that youth leaders “...are excellent listeners, attentively hearing the voices and concerns of community members.” Similar perceptions indicated that “they are accessible and approachable” and “actively seek feedback and input from the community”. Community clientele believed that being responsive encompasses more than just taking action; it involves having empathy, which is reflected in the leaders' ability to genuinely connect with and understand the experiences and concerns of the people they serve.

Aside from being ‘empathic,’ ‘approachable,’ and ‘accessible,’ responsive youth leaders display commitment to their work. With commitment, leaders have a strong desire to respond to their goals<sup>[68]</sup> and want to achieve sustainability within their organization<sup>[101]</sup>. In workplaces, effective leadership requires a strong commitment to problem-solving<sup>[101]</sup> and presents initiative and responsibility<sup>[103]</sup>. A leader prioritizes obtaining answers and completing initiatives, even if they are beyond the scope of their work<sup>[69]</sup>. Similar themes emerged in the context of responsive young leaders. For example, community clientele believed that “they demonstrate a genuine commitment to serving the community's best interests” and “proactive [in] taking prompt action to resolve issues and provide appropriate solutions.” This commitment translates into proactive and prompt actions to resolve community issues, reflecting their genuine dedication to the community's best interests. This further reflects to their actions like “being transparent,” ‘seeking feedback,’ and ‘accountable.’ Community clientele believed that responsive youth leaders not only have problem-solving capabilities but also ensure the sustained well-being and development of the communities they serve.

## 7. Limitation

The primary limitation of this study lies in its small sample size, with only 12 participants from the community clientele providing insights into the innovative and responsive traits of public service leaders. While the study offers valuable qualitative data, the limited number of participants restricts the generalizability of the findings. With such a small sample, it is challenging to ensure that the views expressed are representative of the broader community or diverse perspectives within it.

Reliance on community clientele may introduce a bias, as these participants might have unique experiences or personal connections that do not necessarily reflect the larger population's perceptions. The qualitative nature of the research, while offering in-depth insights, also means that the findings are inherently interpretative and may be subject to bias in the thematic analysis.

The absence of a comparative group, such as public service leaders themselves or different demographics, limits the ability to contrast and corroborate the community's perceptions. Consequently, the findings should be viewed as preliminary, highlighting specific community perceptions rather than definitive conclusions about the innovative and responsive traits of young leaders in public service across broader contexts. Future research could benefit from a larger and more diverse sample size, as well as a mixed-methods approach to provide a more comprehensive data of innovative and responsive leadership traits.

## 8. Conclusion

Community clientele perceived innovative traits in young public service leaders through three primary themes: creative minds, actions, and a forward-thinking vision. Regarding responsive traits, the study identified four major themes: actions, commitment, attentiveness, and transparency.

Innovative young leaders were seen as individuals who bring creative and practical solutions to community challenges, utilizing critical thinking and positivity to drive change. Their innovative traits are characterized by the ability to think outside the box, implement fresh ideas, and predict and adapt to emerging patterns and challenges. The study then hypothesizes that young leaders who exhibit creativity and forward-thinking actions are essential for achieving positive change and making a lasting impact on their communities. Their motivation to lead, driven by an inner desire for change and innovation, might empower them to pursue visionary goals and implement transformative strategies effectively.

Responsive leaders create effective communication channels, actively gather feedback, and collaborate with the community to address concerns, particularly those related to financial matters. They are characterized by their accessibility, approachability, and empathetic nature, making themselves available to engage with the community and attentively listening to their voices and concerns. Commitment was a significant aspect of responsive leadership, with leaders demonstrating a genuine dedication to serving the community's best interests by taking proactive steps to resolve issues and providing appropriate solutions.

The analysis might be used in integrating the concepts of innovative and responsive youth leaders. Since the youth is now in a limelight calling them to create change in the community, the findings opened new opportunities to build their skills following the leadership values identified. There is a growing need to develop theoretical foundations for youth leadership and integrate this into community response and development strategies.

## Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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