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Research Article

Experiences of Neophyte Barangay Councilors: A Phenomenological Study

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ABSTRACT

Effective leadership at the barangay level is essential for responsive and inclusive local governance, yet neophyte barangay councilors often face a steep learning curve as they transition into public service roles. This study explored the experiences of neophyte barangay councilors in a municipality in Zamboanga del Sur. It utilized a qualitative approach and followed a phenomenological research design, employing a semi-structured interview guide in conducting in-depth interview with seven neophyte barangay councilors as participants of this study. Data were analyzed using Moustakas' thematic analysis method. Moustakas thematic analysis is a method used to explore and interpret the lived experiences of individuals to uncover the essence of a phenomenon. This study identified four themes: bridging idealism with reality facing the challenging yet fulfilling journey of new barangay councilors, navigating leadership with limited preparation, support, and resources, and harnessing collective wisdom and collaborative network for effective leadership. The findings further reveal that newly elected officials often enter office with enthusiasm and idealism but are quickly confronted with the complexities of local governance resulting in uncertainty, administrative difficulties, and diminished confidence, especially in handling technical tasks such as drafting ordinances. It is recommended that the Department of Interior and Local Government may develop a training program targeted at neophyte barangay officials with practical workshops on legislative drafting, and project planning, as well as simulations on handling real-life governance issues.

Keywords: *Experiences, Challenges, Coping strategies, Neophyte barangay councilors*

Background

The Local Government Code states that the barangay, as the “basic political unit, serves as

the primary planning and implementing unit of the programs, projects and activities of the government” (Local Government Code [LGC] Sec.

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81). Barangay officials are responsible in formulating measures, eliminating drug addiction, maintaining cleanliness and safety, promoting well-being of women and youth rights, and maintaining barangay-owned properties and infrastructures. The residents' trust and respect toward barangay officials are reflective of the decisions and the rules they implement (Union of Local Authorities of the Philippines [ULA], (2013); Sulasula, 2024).

The role of barangay governance, including both the captain and barangay councilors, in setting direction to the people in the barangay level being at the forefront of public service cannot be overstated (Teehankee, 2020; Lardera & Bagolong, 2024). Teehankee (2020) emphasized that experienced effectively adapt to the evolving demands of governance. The Local Government Code has also emphasized that barangay governance aims to create a setting where barangay constituents, regardless of gender and economic status, can reach their greatest potential and ensuring that the community members receive governmental services fairly, effectively, and efficiently (Ghosh, 2021).

Furthermore, barangay councilors are also indispensable in the effective governance and development of local communities (Valdeheusa, 2010; Sulasula, 2024). Their proximity to the people they serve enables them to address issues promptly and personally. The barangay councilors are the least political and yet significant political figures in the community (Flores, 2019). As members of the Barangay Council, they hold a multifaceted role in local governance (Local Government Code, 1991). They are primarily responsible for enacting ordinances and resolutions necessary for the barangay's welfare (Ayson, 1989). This includes participating in the formulation of the Barangay Development Plan and Annual Budget. Councilors also play a vital role in ensuring the delivery of basic services to their constituents, such as health, sanitation, and infrastructure. Furthermore, they are expected to assist in the maintenance of peace and order, promote community development, and represent the interests of their constituents (Boysillo, 2017). In essence, Barangay Councilors are the frontliners in local legislation and service delivery,

working hand-in-hand with the Punong Barangay to uplift the lives of their community members (Local Government Code, 1991).

Scholars have previously criticized the magnanimous responsibilities that befall upon the elected barangay councilors. Tolentino et al. (2022), for one, argued that although the barangay councilors are entrusted with substantial responsibilities, they are underappreciated, mostly criticized being the closest to the constituents in terms of proximity. Bautista et al. (2023) also argued that despite the heavy burden of responsibilities tasked to barangay councilors, there are very limited opportunities afforded for them to be particularly adept to fulfil these responsibilities – leading to several issues such as inability to meet the demands of their roles, inefficiency, and effectivity. Bautista et al. (2023) further argued that the lack of opportunity for training, and development for the barangay officials has become one of the reasons for their inability to function effectively and fulfil their roles. This problem is further exacerbated by the staggering rate of neophyte officials who have been elected in 2023. As per the data available from the Department of Interior and Local Government, as cited by Palaubsanon (2024), 32% of the elected barangay officials nationwide are new to their positions – or are considered neophytes. In the local context, in one of the municipalities in the province of Zamboanga del Sur, out of the 209 barangay councilors elected last 2023 Barangay and Sangguniang Kabataan elections (BSKE), 98 of them are neophytes to their position, having neither prior experience, training, nor education to local politics.

While previous studies have extensively examined the challenges encountered by seasoned barangay councilors, particularly in the context of local budgeting processes and infrastructure project implementation (Dagohoy, 2021), there remains a notable gap in research regarding the experiences of neophyte barangay councilors. Existing studies have primarily focused on officials with years of governance experience, overlooking the unique struggles that newly elected barangay councilors face as they transition into their roles. Furthermore, most of these studies have been conducted in metropolitan cities, leaving rural and non-

urban barangays underrepresented in the academic discourse (Dagohoy, 2021). This population gap is significant because governance challenges may vary depending on the locality, resource availability, and community dynamics.

To fill this research gap, this present study aimed to explore the experiences of neophyte barangay councilors in their roles. It sought to explore the specific challenges and issues neophyte barangay councilors faced, the factors contributing to these challenges, and potential strategies they employed for overcoming them. By shedding light on these issues, this research aimed to provide valuable insights for policymakers to develop training programs, with the end goal of an overall improvement of governance at the barangay level to help them fulfil their functions as mandated by the Local Government Code of the Philippines.

This study may provide insightful on-ground experiences from neophyte barangay councilors that may serve as basis for the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) in formulating tailored training programs and interventions aimed at improving the skill set of neophyte barangay councilors. The Local Government Unit (LGU) may benefit from this study as this will serve as their basis in improving local governance by formulating policies and local ordinances aimed at improving the capabilities of future neophyte barangay councilors. Moreover, neophyte barangay councilors may benefit from this study as this will serve as their basis to gain a deeper understanding of the typical obstacles and help them anticipate and prepare for the difficulties they may encounter in their roles. By being aware of potential challenges, they can develop strategies and seek support to navigate these obstacles more effectively.

Methods

This qualitative study used phenomenological research design. Phenomenological research design focuses on exploring the essence of human experiences and understanding the meaning people attribute to those experiences. It sought to capture the underlying structures and core aspects of these experiences without imposing preconceived theories or interpretations. Conducted in one of the municipalities in

the Philippines, this study involved 7 neophyte barangay councilors from the selected barangays in a municipality of Zamboanga del Sur as its participants identified through a purposive sampling technique. Data were gathered through in-depths interviews aided by a semi-structured interview guide were analyzed through Moustakas' Phenomenological Data Analysis developed by Clark Moustakas (1994). This approach involved systematically identifying and listing all relevant statements from participant interviews. Then the identified statements underwent a refinement process to determine their relevance and necessity to the study's analysis. Once the statements were refined, they were then grouped into thematic clusters based on categorical similarities.

To uphold to the highest form of research ethics, the identity of the participants' identities were kept confidential. The researchers presented the participants with a consent form to sign, clearly stating their agreement to voluntarily participate, and possibility of withdrawal. It is underscored that the information collected from the interview was solely used for academic research and will be discarded six (6) months after the completion of the study. The researcher also guaranteed that all information obtained were kept strictly confidential, and the anonymity of the participants will be always preserved following the Philippines' Data Privacy Law.

Results and Discussion

Organized into six distinct themes, the findings shed light on the adversity and struggles in prison life, embracing spiritual support and building community in detention, finding solace and strength through faith, family, and emotional release in detention, challenges and discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ individuals in detention, pursuing personal growth and financial stability despite challenges. Each theme unravels unique challenges encountered by the participants experiencing discrimination and harassment based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

Bridging Idealism with Reality: The Challenging Yet Fulfilling Journey of New Barangay Councilors

This theme encapsulates the transitional journey of neophyte barangay councilors from their initial idealistic expectations toward the sobering realities of local governance. Such theme refers to how newly elected officials confront the mismatch between their enthusiasm to serve and the complex, often under-supported political structures they encounter upon assuming office. Their experiences underscore a process of adjustment, from believing that public service primarily entails implementing projects to realizing that it involves a broader, more demanding set of emotional and technical commitments. Despite the challenges, many expressed a growing sense of fulfillment as they discovered their capacity to respond meaningfully to community needs. The sub-themes that emerged from this transition are: (1) Inadequate Preparation and Training for Real-World Governance, (2) Emotional Pressure and Scrutiny from the Community, and (3) Discovering the Human Side of Public Service.

Inadequate Preparation and Training for Real-World Governance. The lack of adequate preparation, be it personal or technical, was a recurring narrative among participants. Several councilors noted that while orientation seminars like what the participants referred to simply as BNEO or the Barangay Newly Elected Officials (BNEO) Towards Grassroots Renewal and Empowerment for Accountable and Transparent (GREAT) Barangays Program were conducted, they focused mostly on basic responsibilities and procedural matters, leaving them unprepared for the more nuanced, everyday governance tasks. As two of the participants mentioned,

"Once elected I expected there will be orientation on what we can do. But it was only seminar on our responsibilities. Nothing would prepare you with the reality..." (P1)

"...when it came to about writing resolutions, I would write it in a paper... That is one challenge, but I cannot do anything about it."(P5)

Participant 1 revealed the gap between expectations and the actual experiences neophyte barangay councilors faced after getting elected. This sentiment underscores a sense of disillusionment as new councilors find themselves facing real governance demands with minimal training and orientation. Participant 1 also

highlights the inadequacy of the training provided in preparing neophyte barangay officials of its lack of depth in practical skill-building. P5, on the other hand, narrated the difficulty of core tasks by admitting her shortcomings on drafting paperworks. Such responses clearly articulate how neophyte councilors are often thrust into administrative duties without adequate preparation, leading to confusion, inefficiency, and feelings of inadequacy.

This gap in preparation became particularly evident in administrative functions such as writing resolutions and policy documents. Recent studies validate this gap between formal orientation and practical capacity-building in local governance. For instance, Guinid (2019) emphasized that barangay officials often lack sufficient training in legislative functions and administrative tasks, leading to inefficiencies and low confidence among first-term officials. Similarly, Floranza, (2021) observed that while decentralization grants autonomy, it assumes a level of competence that new barangay councilors do not always possess, particularly in underserved rural areas. Furthermore, Firmase & Prieto - Carolino (2021) argued for the institutionalization of continuous education and mentorship programs to address the systemic weaknesses in capacity-building among grassroots leaders. These narratives clearly indicate a pressing need for structured and contextualized training for neophyte councilors as this inadequacy in preparation reflects a disconnect between political empowerment and institutional readiness. Without accessible and applied training in governance, barangay councilors often resort to trial-and-error, potentially compromising service delivery. This initial struggle sets the stage for the broader learning curve they must undergo, which the next subtheme further explores on.

Emotional Pressure and Scrutiny from the Community. Being a new public official entails not only administrative learning but also emotional labor. This underscores the intense scrutiny and performance expectations placed on barangay councilors, even from the onset of their term. These experiences highlight that the transition into public service is not only technical but also profoundly interpersonal and emotional. As several participants noted:

"There is enthusiasm about serving the people, but we need to be careful not to make mistakes... It is like we are always watched." (P3)

"I thought that will not be a problem after elections, especially since I won, I thought we will also work together, but no." (P4)

For neophyte officials, public expectations can be both a burden and a motivation. Participant 3 captured this complexity by highlighting that his interest and enthusiasm for service to other people is often coupled by the awareness that their actions now carry responsibility and are watched by the public. This suggests that while new officials are driven to serve, the constant community scrutiny creates anxiety and fear of failure, especially among neophyte barangay councilors. Participant 4 also highlighted interpersonal political recalling the tensions among barangay councilors who come from the opposite spectrum of political parties. This reflects disillusionment and social isolation experienced by barangay councilors, even after electoral success, showing that post-election unity is not guaranteed. These utterances exemplify how the emotional pressure from community expectations, and political tensions affect new leaders' mental well-being and effectiveness.

This emotional pressure is echoed in the findings of Eutaquio (2023) who noted that neophyte officials often experience performance anxiety, especially when their legitimacy is still under evaluation by their communities. Similar findings by Firmase & Prieto - Carolino (2021) show that early-career barangay officials frequently feel isolated due to political factions and unmet community expectations, adding to their psychological burden. Meanwhile, Floranza, J. M. (2021) emphasized that these emotional pressures are intensified by the 24/7 visibility and accessibility demanded of barangay officials, making mental health and burnout key concerns. These studies affirm the necessity of psychosocial support mechanisms for new leaders who carry the dual burdens of performance and visibility.

This further demonstrates that the success of neophyte councilors is not purely a matter of skills but also of emotional resilience underlining the need for a governance culture that balances accountability with support, particularly

in small communities where reputations are quickly formed and difficult to change.

Discovering the Human Side of Public Service. Amid the technical and emotional challenges, participants revealed a transformative understanding of what it means to be a public servant. As several participants mentioned:

"That made me realize that being a councilor is not just about projects, it is also about being present for them, anytime of the day, and being constantly approachable." (P6)

"Seeing the kids happy after the event made me realize that even small efforts matter a lot in the barangay." (P7)

The experience of serving a community often redefines leadership for new officials. Participant 6 shared how he realized that part of being an elected barangay official is not just about projects and activities, but is more on about being constantly available, and present for the constituents. This realization shows a shift from a formal, project-based understanding of governance to one rooted in personal interaction and service. Participant 7 reinforced this by recalling a pleasing experience he had seeing happy the children happy after organizing an event for them in his barangay.

These sentiments reflect a shift from project-based thinking to relationship-based governance emphasizing how grassroots impact is measured not just by scale but by sincerity and presence. This also highlights the sense of community and togetherness that the barangay councilors have with the residents of their barangay further elucidating on that well known Filipino culture and tradition.

This sort of human – centered approach to grassroots governance is well reflected in well-established literatures. According to Firmase & Prieto-Carolino (2021), barangay councilors who exhibit relational engagement rather than purely transactional leadership earn higher trust from constituents. Likewise, the study of Cruz and Tolentino (2019) revealed that community-based public service that prioritizes listening and presence leads to greater citizen participation and support. Dula et al. (2021) has also highlighted the significance of "everyday leadership," where barangay officials gain moral authority through responsiveness and accessibility. These existing literatures

corroborate with the participants' realization that effective leadership is deeply rooted in empathy, relational effort, and immediate concrete services rendered to their constituents.

This evolution in perception enriches the current understanding of local governance not merely as bureaucratic management but as a lived, relational vocation. It also reflects the transformation of public officials from mere bureaucratic administrators to servant-leaders deeply embedded in the lives of their constituents, having made an impact to them through their small acts of service.

Navigating Leadership with Limited Preparation, Support, and Resources

Navigating leadership with limited preparation, support, and resources refers to the lived experiences of neophyte barangay councilors who struggle to fulfill their duties amidst administrative, political, and structural limitations. This theme captures the intersection of technical incompetence, lack of institutional mentoring, and the political dynamics that shape the work environment of neophyte barangay councilors. Despite their enthusiasm of serving, the participants revealed that they were often left to figure things out on their own, without consistent guidance or access to institutional support systems. Their early experiences of governance, therefore, were marked not only by steep learning curves but also by interpersonal challenges, systematic inaccessibilities, and political hurdles. Two subthemes emerged to illustrate these struggles: (1) Inadequate Training and Administrative Skill Gaps, and (2) Political Exclusion and Partisan Barriers.

Inadequate Training and Administrative Skill Gaps. Neophyte barangay councilors consistently emphasized how insufficient training left them ill-equipped to handle the administrative demands of governance. As several participants expressed:

"That is one challenge, but I cannot do anything about it. Computer is for the new generation, not for us already." (P5)

"One of the hardest responsibilities for me was dealing with the paperwork. Drafting ordinances or resolutions sounded easy during seminars, but when you are doing it for real, it's hard." (P6)

"For me, the most challenging administrative task is attending to paperwork, especially when making resolutions. It's hard to find the right words and legal basis for our projects." (P7)

"I thought they will teach us how to make ordinances or handle sensitive issues like domestic abuse and teenage pregnancy—but there was none." (P2)

Participant 5 expressed difficulty in adapting to technology and modern documentation, reflecting on how defeated she felt when she cannot do anything about her inability to utilize the computer for her paperwork, even arguing that such invention is no longer for her generation. This statement reflects a perceived generational barrier and lack of digital skills among some neophyte councilors, limiting their efficiency in paperwork and communication. Participant 6, on the other hand, admitted that drafting ordinances or resolutions seemed trivial easy during seminars, but are rather challenging. This suggests a disconnect between theoretical inputs he learned during training and actual practice.

These responses highlight how the limited scope of initial orientations, often delivered in draughty sessions, and only stuck to basic discussions on roles and responsibilities, fails to prepare new leaders for the technical, legal, and communication demands of barangay governance.

This administrative deficit is echoed in recent studies of Firmase & Prieto - Carolino (2021) found that many local officials in the Philippines lack functional training in legislative drafting, resulting in ineffective policy implementation at the community level. Similarly, Guinid (2019) highlighted that digital illiteracy continues to hamper the productivity of barangay officials, especially among older members unfamiliar with digital platforms and online systems. Furthermore, Floranza, J. M. (2021) emphasized that the absence of a competency-based framework in barangay leadership training contributes to the difficulty in transitioning from citizen to administrator. These findings support the participants' experiences and call for a more robust, ongoing training and capacity-building system grounded in the real administrative functions of the position.

The lack of training also reflect the broader systemic issues in grassroots leadership development. As the lowest unit of government, barangays often receive the least institutional attention, resulting in a reliance on individual effort over structured leadership systems. For neophyte barangay councilors, this translates into a sink-or-swim or pursue-or-perish reality that can undermine both confidence and effectiveness in their line of duty.

Political Exclusion and Partisan Barriers. Aside from technical challenges, participants also reported political marginalization due to electoral partisanship, political divides, and factionalism. As several participants expressed:

"Sometimes I have a project I want to do but I cannot because others won't support it—they see me differently since I'm from a different line-up." (P3)

"We propose projects, but they are not supported, maybe because we came from the other line-up; even the secretary stopped helping with resolutions." (P4)

The experiences of Participants 3 and 4 reveal how partisan politics can act as a barrier to effective governance. Participant 3 underscore how he was unable to implement any of the initial plans and project he had because he was part of the opposition line-up in the previous election. This narrative implies that even with good intentions, councilors who are not aligned politically with dominant groups face systemic exclusion. This is reinforced by Participant 4 who revealed that the projects they proposed were not supported by any member of the council.

These utterances suggests partisanship persists even after elections, undermining collaboration among and between seasoned and neophyte barangay officials in realizing project implementation. Instead of unity on common causes after election, what often prevails is factionalism that diminish the power and presence of minority councilors who often come from competing political parties to contribute meaningfully to community development, denying them of the chance of fulfill their functions and responsibilities.

This political dynamic has also been extensively documented several local studies such as

by Labonne et al. (2019) which concluded that local political culture in many barangays is characterized by enduring factionalism, where electoral alliances define access to institutional resources, systematic support, and administrative supplies. In their case study on rural barangays, Dula et al. (2021) revealed that exclusion from the dominant party's network often meant fewer opportunities to access administrative support or project approval. Meanwhile, Cruz and Tolentino (2019) argued that political exclusion is one of the reasons why otherwise capable officials disengage from legislative functions, contributing to poor policy output at the barangay level. These insights confirm that post-election partisanship undermines collegial governance and diminishes the democratic principle of equal participation in decision-making processes.

For neophyte councilors, this exclusion not only stifles their ability to contribute to their barangay's progress but also affects morale and engagement. Their potential contributions are often obstructed not by incompetence but by political dynamics beyond their control. This further limits their learning opportunities and delays their growth as public leaders.

The implications of this theme are far-reaching, particularly for governance reform and capacity development at the barangay level. It suggests that prior and post election training programs must include hands-on administrative tasks, legislative simulations, and digital literacy components to equip neophytes for the real-world demands of local governance. Moreover, policies must promote inclusive and non-partisan governance structures and guardrails to ensure that all elected officials, regardless of electoral affiliation and parties, have equal access to institutional support and participation in decision-making. Strengthening these systems will not only empower neophyte leaders but will also enhance community trust, unity, and program delivery. Institutionalizing mentorship and multi-party collaboration within barangay councils can help mitigate political exclusion and foster a more democratic and inclusive governance culture.

Harnessing Collective Wisdom and Collaborative Network for Effective Leadership

This theme refers to the adaptive strategies employed by neophyte barangay councilors to overcome the gaps in experience, knowledge, and institutional support as they entered into public office. Rather than relying solely on formal mechanisms or training, these officials turned to their personal, familial, and institutional networks particularly experienced mentors and collaborative peers to find solutions to their daily governance challenges.

This theme underscores the importance of interpersonal relationships, informal mentorship, and community-driven knowledge exchange in empowering new leaders. The coping mechanisms they developed were not just reactive responses, but proactive strategies that helped them manage tasks, navigate political realities, and maintain personal resilience. This theme is further unpacked into two subthemes: (1) Seeking Guidance from Experienced Mentors and (2) Building Support Network and Leveraging Collaboration for Effective Problem-Solving.

Seeking Guidance from Experienced Mentors. For many neophyte barangay councilors, guidance from experienced individuals whether senior officials or family members who used to be members of the barangay council, served as an anchor during uncertain times. As several participant stated:

"I usually prayed first to calm myself. Then, I talk to the captain or the senior councilors. I ask them how they handled similar situations before. Their advice helped me a lot because they already experienced those problems." (P6)

"Whenever I encountered difficulties, I would take a pause, and seek advice. My mother and father are also religious people. So they taught me to always pray. So whenever I start a project, or a meeting, or when I face problem, I pray first." (P7)

Participant 6' narrative of how he coped with challenges by seeking advice from the captain or the senior councilors illustrates a proactive coping strategy, grounded in both emotional self-regulation and knowledge-sharing with seasoned officials. Participant 7 supported this, and combined spiritual and interpersonal support, explaining how he would calm his mind of spiritual intervention first, and then

seek advice from experienced barangay officials.

These accounts suggest that mentorship was both technical and emotional, helping participants manage stress while acquiring governance skills. Mentorship as a coping mechanism aligns with recent literature on community leadership development. Labonne et al. (2019) emphasized that informal mentorship in local governance settings fosters experiential learning and adaptive leadership, especially when formal training is insufficient. Meanwhile, Sweeting and Hambleton (2019) found that emotional regulation practices such as prayer and reflection contribute to resilience among first-time public servants in the Philippines. In addition, Breva (2020) noted that proximity to more experienced colleagues provides neophyte leaders with both tactical guidance and confidence, particularly in crisis situations. These findings affirm the participants' experiences and highlight the centrality of personal relationships and inner discipline in navigating the complexities of grassroots leadership.

In this light, mentorship does not merely fill knowledge gaps, but it creates a sense of continuity in governance. By seeking advice from senior councilors, these new officials were able to integrate traditional knowledge and practices into their roles, enhancing both legitimacy and competence in their decision-making.

Building Support Network and Leveraging Collaboration for Effective Problem-Solving. Beyond individual mentorship, neophyte councilors relied heavily on social networks and collaborative efforts to address concerns and challenges they face. As some participants expressed:

"I tried to persuade them to work together, and they will agree when talking to them. But when it comes to vocation, they did not always support us... Maybe in the next election we will ask them if we can join their line-up." (P4)

"Sometimes, if it is medical or burial, I ask for help with our captain, sometimes he can help, sometimes not. Then I will go to the LGU, I ask help there. And since the mayor knows me, or the captain, he can help." (P1)

"To address the challenges we encounter, we hold open forums. We attended seminars and

training like the BNEO, during which I gained ideas and learned a lot about improving our barangay.” (P3)

“So when we came home, I still did not how to make resolutions. So I asked my husband about it. He knows about it from his experience, I also went to my co-councilor who have been councilor for some time and asked for help.” (P2)

The importance of networking and collaboration is evident in Participant 1's statement recalling how he has been aided multiple times by his colleagues in the barangay council. She also shared how she sometimes sought the help of the local government unit whenever the barangay captain was unable to provide her assistance to her needs. This illustrates how neophyte officials rely on personal and institutional connections to meet constituents' needs. Participant 2, meanwhile, shared how she turned to her family and peers for assistance when she was unable to draft the resolution herself, and asked her husband, who is an experienced barangay councilor, to do it instead. Both of these accounts show how informal support systems compensate for the lack of formal training neophyte councilors get after election.

Eutaquio (2023) found that informal support systems among barangay officials, especially family, peer, and LGU contacts who acts as buffer mechanisms during policy formulation and implementation. Valencia (2023) further observed that collaborative leadership, when cultivated early, leads to more inclusive and responsive governance in barangay settings. Meanwhile, Brevia (2020) highlighted the value of participatory training programs like BNEO or the Barangay Newly Elected Officials Program, which help new officials understand the scope of their duties and connect them with peer leaders across municipalities. These studies affirm the resourcefulness of participants in building networks that supplement institutional gaps and foster innovation in problem-solving.

The accounts also reveal a shift in how these councilors understood their role, not as solitary actors, but as part of a broader system of support. Collaboration not only helped in executing projects but also in mitigating feelings of isolation and disempowerment, particularly

when navigating partisanship or unfamiliar procedures.

This theme underscore the critical role of informal structures and social networks in grassroots leadership development. Institutionalizing mentorship programs that connect newly elected officials with experienced ones can serve as a cost-effective and culturally resonant strategy for capacity-building. Furthermore, enhancing collaborative platforms such as inter-barangay councils, LGU support mechanisms, and participatory training like BNEO can highly improve collective problem-solving and foster cohesion among officials across political lines. Recognizing and supporting these informal networks can make leadership transitions smoother and governance more responsive. Ultimately, investing in social capital not only builds individual competencies but also reinforces trust, solidarity, and accountability in local government systems.

These narratives further support with George Herbert Mead's Socialization Theory arguing that as neophyte councilors integrate into the complex social environment of local governance, they undergo a process of political and cultural adaptation that reflects Mead's concept of internalizing societal roles through interaction. The participants' gradual transition from expecting formal training to learning informally through personal observation, emotional circumstances, and community engagement illustrates how inexperienced neophyte councilors become socialized into their roles, often informally and experientially. This substantiates with the idea that role behaviors are learned through social interaction rather than formal instruction (Rohrer et al., 2018), validating Socialization Theory's relevance to this study.

These narratives also highlight poignant points that are critical for policy and capacity development suggesting that orientation programs must move beyond generic briefings and orientations toward applied, role-specific training that includes emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and values formation. Institutionalizing mentorship systems where experienced councilors guide neophytes could bridge the gap between theory and practice.

Moreover, recognizing the emotional labor involved in governance highlights the need for wellness support programs tailored to local officials. Lastly, acknowledging the relational core of public service can inspire a redefinition of barangay leadership criteria not only in terms of competency but also in terms of compassion and consistent presence.

Conclusion

There is a significant gap between the expectations placed upon neophyte barangay councilors and the preparatory support provided to them.

The findings reveal that newly elected officials often enter office with enthusiasm and idealism but are quickly confronted with the complexities of local governance without adequate training or practical orientation. This mismatch results in uncertainty, administrative difficulties, and diminished confidence, especially in handling technical tasks such as drafting ordinances or managing community programs. The lack of structured capacity-building undermines their potential for effective leadership and good governance.

Political dynamics and partisanship within the barangay governance system pose major obstacles to collaboration and service delivery.

Neophyte councilors often experience political exclusion based on electoral affiliations, limiting their ability to propose or implement projects. This partisan barrier creates a fractured working environment and fosters disengagement, diminishing the council's overall effectiveness. Such challenges highlight the need for institutional reforms that promote inclusivity, merit-based recognition, and nonpartisan cooperation in barangay councils.

Despite systemic and political challenges, neophyte councilors exhibit resilience by cultivating mentorship, faith-based coping, and collaborative networks. Their reliance on experienced mentors, familial support, and inter-agency collaboration reflects an emergent form of grassroots leadership rooted in community-based learning and interpersonal relationships. These adaptive strategies underscore the importance of collective wisdom and continuous learning in local governance. Strengthening these informal support systems through formal

mechanisms can improve the effectiveness and well-being of first-term officials.

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, it is recommended that the Philippines' Department of Interior and Local Government may develop and implement a training program targeted specifically at neophyte barangay officials that includes practical workshops on legislative drafting, barangay budgeting, and community project planning, as well as simulations on handling real-life governance issues such as conflict resolution, public accountability, and political navigation. Further, the DILG may also conduct an evaluation or assessment on the effectiveness of the BNEO training program to the elected barangay councilors. Future researchers may also undertake comparative and longitudinal mixed-methods studies that examine the performance of neophyte barangay officials in contrast with experienced ones across different settings. These studies may assess the long-term impact of orientation programs, mentorship practices, and political dynamics on governance quality and community satisfaction.

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