

# Becoming 360-Degree Leaders: A Digital Ethnography of Phenomenological Narratives in Graduate Education

**Josefa P. Dampilag<sup>1</sup>, Jose R. Balcanao<sup>2</sup>, Joy Belle M. Bidang<sup>3</sup>,  
Dwayne P. Castro<sup>4</sup>, Luisa A. Humiwat<sup>5</sup>, Concepcion O. Dayagan<sup>6</sup>,  
Mea Krize L. Kio-Isen<sup>7</sup>, Romela A. Hufemia<sup>8</sup>**

<sup>1,3,4,5,6,7,8</sup> Graduate School Student

<sup>2</sup> Graduate School Professor

Baguio Central University

Baguio City, Philippines

## Abstract

This qualitative digital ethnographic study explored the dynamics of 360-degree leadership among professors and doctoral students in the Graduate School of Baguio Central University, focusing on how leadership identities and practices evolve within hybrid learning environments. Using in-depth interviews, participant observations, and digital field notes, the study examined how leadership is constructed as a relational, ethical, dialogic, and adaptive process rather than a hierarchical or position-based role. Through thematic analysis using NVivo, four major themes emerged: Relational Synergy in Hybrid Learning Communities, Reflexive Leadership and Moral Grounding, Knowledge Co-construction through Dialogic Mentorship, and Adaptive Agency in Academic Ecologies. These interconnected themes revealed that leadership is sustained through mutual trust, ethical reflexivity, reciprocal mentorship, and resilience in navigating institutional and technological transitions. At the center of this process lies a Transformative Academic Culture—a shared moral and intellectual core that fosters integrity, inclusivity, and innovation. The findings illustrate that doctoral leadership is a cyclical and participatory process where every individual—mentor, mentee, or peer—functions simultaneously as both a leader and learner. The study contributes to the growing scholarship on distributed and transformative leadership by contextualizing it within Philippine graduate education and digital learning frameworks. It recommends institutionalizing leadership development programs that cultivate adaptive, relational, and ethically grounded capacities among graduate scholars and faculty. Overall, the study demonstrates that in the digital-academic ecology of higher education, leadership is most effective when it is collaborative, value-driven, and responsive to change—an embodiment of 360-degree leadership in action.

**Keywords:** 360-degree leadership, hybrid learning, dialogic mentorship, adaptive agency, transformative academic culture

## 1. Introduction

Leadership has long been recognized as a defining factor in shaping the quality, culture, and effectiveness of higher education institutions. In recent years, scholarship on educational leadership has expanded considerably; however, much of this work has remained focused on positional leadership, administrative decision-making, and distributed leadership frameworks (Bolden et al., 2022; Bush, 2022). While these perspectives provide valuable insights, they often assess leadership effectiveness in terms of organizational outcomes and employ primarily quantitative designs, leaving the lived, subjective experiences of leaders underexplored. At the same time, the idea of the “360-degree leader”—an individual capable of influencing upward to superiors, laterally to peers, and downward to subordinates—has gained traction in managerial and corporate settings (Rao, 2022), yet its embodiment in graduate education remains largely unexamined. This scholarly gap underscores the need to study leadership not just as a structural or managerial construct, but as a human, relational, and meaning-making process that is best captured through phenomenological inquiry.

In the United States, phenomenological research has provided significant insights into how educational leaders experience their roles beyond positional authority. Fought (2022) conducted a phenomenological study of leadership in academic health sciences libraries, highlighting how leaders negotiate influence through collaboration, adaptability, and trust, rather than through traditional command structures. Similarly, Burwell (2022) explored the lived experiences of public school leaders in the context of inclusive and special education, revealing that leadership is shaped by reflection, relational trust, and the capacity to influence in multiple directions. These U.S.-based studies affirm that phenomenology captures the human dimension of leadership, offering a deeper lens compared to predominantly quantitative studies that focus on organizational outcomes. Such findings reinforce the need for contextually rich narratives, making phenomenological approaches especially valuable in exploring how 360-degree leadership unfolds in graduate education.

In Latin America, studies present a different emphasis on leadership within graduate education. A multi-institutional study across 49 Colombian universities found that while teamwork and leadership were considered core soft skills, attributes such as ethical reasoning and empathy were significantly underemphasized in curricula (Ceballos-Sánchez et al., 2022). This suggests that although leadership is recognized as an important educational outcome, it is often reduced to technical competencies rather than lived relational practices. Compared to U.S. contexts, where phenomenological inquiry foregrounds the meaning-making processes of leaders, the Colombian findings reveal systemic gaps in embedding holistic leadership values into graduate programs. By situating itself within the Philippine and Cordilleran cultural context—where indigenous principles like *inayan* and *binnadang* naturally resonate with 360-degree influence—this study addresses a global research gap: capturing leadership as a lived, relational, and culturally embedded practice in graduate education.

Recent scholarly attention in the Philippines has shed light on the phenomenological experiences of graduate students (Pontillas et al., 2024), yet critical gaps remain regarding leadership dynamics within graduate education. Marlon Pontillas and colleagues conducted a phenomenological study at the University of Saint Anthony, exploring how graduate students grapple with time management, stress,

technological adaptation, and motivations tied to career progression (Pontillas et al., 2024). Similarly, Castulo (2025) used a descriptive quantitative survey to highlight a host of challenges faced by education graduate students—such as balancing professional duties with academic workloads, lack of mentoring support, and limited institutional research capacity—in the context of CHED’s “no publication, no graduation” policy (Castulo, 2025). While these studies provide valuable insight into student struggles and motivations, they do not examine the 360-degree influence—how graduate students and faculty enact leadership across upward, lateral, and downward relational axes. Notably missing is a phenomenological account of how leadership roles and influence emerge and unfold within graduate education environments, especially in culturally nuanced settings like the Cordillera.

Furthermore, while leadership studies in Philippine education generally address positional or instructional leadership (Torres et al., 2024), there is scant research exploring leadership as a lived, relational, and culturally embedded phenomenon in graduate education. For example, Torres and colleagues conducted a systematic review of school leadership styles—such as transformational, distributive, and instructional leadership—in the K–12 context but did not extend these insights to graduate-level settings (Torres et al., 2024). Likewise, while communal values and indigenous principles like *inayan* and *binnadang* are acknowledged in broader cultural studies (e.g., Dulay, 2023), they have not been situated within graduate leadership scholarship. Thus, the intersection of phenomenological narratives, indigenous cultural values, and 360-degree leadership practices in Philippine graduate education remains uncharted. This gap justifies the present study’s focus—uncovering how faculty and graduate students at Baguio Central University embody and negotiate multi-directional leadership within a culturally grounded, institutionally situated environment.

Globally, higher education institutions now demand leaders who can innovate, collaborate, and navigate increasingly complex systems of governance. The 360-degree leadership framework resonates with the rise of multi-directional, relational, and adaptive leadership models that prioritize shared responsibility and collective influence (Bush, 2022; Bolden et al., 2022). In the Philippines, these demands are particularly acute as graduate schools confront policy reforms, accreditation pressures, and internationalization efforts mandated by agencies such as CHED and PACUCOA. At the same time, Filipino leadership practices are deeply shaped by cultural values. In the Cordillera region, traditions like *inayan* (ethical accountability) and *binnadang* (communal solidarity) reflect a leadership ethos that is inherently reciprocal, relational, and collective (Dulay, 2023). These values naturally align with the philosophy of 360-degree leadership, but current literature has yet to fully explore this intersection.

Within this context, the Graduate School of Baguio Central University (BCU) serves as a microcosm where leadership is exercised daily through mentoring, collaboration, and academic engagement. Faculty members and graduate students alike assume roles that require influencing upward, laterally, and downward in ways that transcend formal titles. Their experiences reflect the ongoing process of becoming 360-degree leaders—negotiating influence while remaining grounded in both institutional goals and cultural traditions. Yet, despite its significance, there is a paucity of empirical studies capturing these phenomenological narratives of leadership in Philippine graduate education. Addressing this gap, the present study explores the lived experiences of 360-degree leaders at BCU, thereby contributing new

knowledge that is not only academically relevant but also culturally grounded, institutionally meaningful, and globally resonant.

Guided by the identified research gaps, this study seeks to explore the lived experiences of graduate education leaders in the Philippine context through the lens of 360-degree leadership. Specifically, it will address the following qualitative research questions: (1) How do graduate faculty and students at BCU experience and describe their roles of influencing upward, across peers, and toward students in the academic setting? (2) What cultural values and practices influence the way leadership is carried out within BCU's graduate school community? (3) What challenges and opportunities do faculty and graduate students encounter as they practice leadership in BCU? The significance of this study lies in its contribution to both theory and practice by expanding leadership scholarship beyond positional and administrative models to include relational and culturally embedded practices. Beneficiaries of the study include graduate students, who will gain insights into leadership as a formative dimension of their academic journey; faculty members, who will find guidance in adopting reflective, multi-directional approaches to supervision and mentoring; administrators and policy-makers, who can draw on findings to craft supportive institutional frameworks; and accrediting or regulatory bodies such as CHED and PACUCOA, which can integrate the study's insights into standards for graduate education leadership and quality assurance. Ultimately, this research aims to illuminate the process of becoming 360-degree leaders, enriching the academic, cultural, and institutional landscape of graduate education in the Philippines.

## **Review of Related Literatures**

Recent international surveys highlight evolving dynamics in graduate education supervision that align with the concept of 360-degree leadership. In the United Kingdom, the Postgraduate Research Experience Survey (PRES 2024) reported an overall postgraduate research satisfaction rate of 81%, with supervision as one of the highest-rated areas at 87%. Specifically, 90% of respondents agreed that their supervisors provided helpful feedback to guide their research activities, while 79% confirmed that their supervisors assisted in identifying training and development needs. However, the same survey revealed that only 62% of postgraduate researchers felt their institution valued and responded to student feedback, and a similar percentage reported a sense of belonging (Advance HE, 2024). These findings suggest that while dyadic supervisor–student relationships remain strong, institutional responsiveness to student voices is limited, underscoring the need for more multi-directional or “360-degree” forms of influence that go beyond traditional supervision models.

Parallel trends are evident in the UK Research Supervision Survey (UKRSS 2024), which reported that 76% of supervisors have engaged in team supervision over the past five years, an increase from 71% in 2021. The most common team structure involves two supervisors, accounting for 58% of arrangements. Moreover, 70% of supervisors agreed that team supervision provides a better experience for candidates compared to single-supervisor models. This increasing reliance on supervisory teams demonstrates a shift toward collective accountability and distributed mentoring, which are essential dimensions of 360-degree leadership. However, challenges persist, as 57% of supervisors have taken on “rescue supervision” responsibilities, often due to a colleague leaving (59%), unresolved conflicts (36%), or even harassment cases (10%) (UK Council for Graduate Education [UKCGE], 2024). These scenarios highlight

institutional vulnerabilities and reinforce the importance of building cultures of shared responsibility and multi-actor support.

Workload recognition and distribution also remain pressing concerns. According to UKRSS 2024, while 74% of supervisors reported that supervision is formally recognized in institutional workload models, 30% indicated that no cap exists on the number of supervisees per academic, and 34% were unaware of such policies. Where caps are in place, only 29% reported that these were consistently enforced. This inconsistency contributes to a mismatch between institutional workload allocation and actual supervisory practice. For example, institutions allocate an average of 42 hours annually for main supervision per student, yet supervisors report spending approximately 69 hours; for secondary supervision, the allocation is 20 hours while actual time invested is closer to 40 hours (UKCGE, 2024). This imbalance illustrates the hidden labor of supervision and its implications for leadership capacity in graduate education.

Professional development and supervisory competence further influence the practice of 360-degree leadership. Participation in continuous professional development (CPD) and mandatory updating rose from 30% in 2021 to 38% in 2024, with increased opportunities for new supervisors to learn from experienced colleagues and participate in supervisory teams. Engagement with frameworks such as the Good Supervisory Practice Framework has also been linked to more reflective and peer-oriented supervisory practices (UKCGE, 2024). Similarly, a 2024 faculty mentoring survey revealed that nearly 80% of respondents valued culturally responsive mentoring, though only about 63% felt confident in implementing it effectively (National Center for Faculty Development, 2024). These findings demonstrate both progress and gaps in supervisors' preparedness to exercise influence across cultural, peer, and institutional dimensions—key components of 360-degree leadership.

Finally, student well-being is closely tied to supervision quality. Large-scale studies show that supportive supervisory practices reduce burnout and enhance engagement, while poor supervision contributes to significant mental health burdens among doctoral students (Levecque et al., 2017; Hazell et al., 2020). National graduate surveys in Australia also confirm high satisfaction rates among postgraduate research graduates, such as 93.5% in Rehabilitation programs in 2023 (Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching [QILT], 2023). These outcomes emphasize that graduate supervision is not merely an academic transaction but a complex relational process where influence circulates upward to institutions, laterally among peers and colleagues, and downward to students—a process well captured by the idea of 360-degree leadership.

Graduate school culture in the Philippines is often characterized by academic rigor, hierarchical mentoring structures, and community-oriented practices where students and faculty interact closely in teaching, research, and service. Recent studies highlight that Filipino graduate students frequently balance academic demands with employment and family responsibilities, which shape their experiences and expectations of institutional support (Pontillas et al., 2024). Castulo (2025) further observed that graduate students face challenges tied to the Commission on Higher Education's (CHED) "no publication, no graduation" policy, emphasizing the need for strong mentoring and collaborative research cultures. This culture is also influenced by broader Filipino values such as *pakikisama* (harmonious relations) and



bayanihan (communal solidarity), which resonate with Cordilleran indigenous concepts like inayan (ethical accountability) and binnadang (communal reciprocity) (Dulay, 2023). Within graduate schools such as Baguio Central University (BCU) and other Philippine higher education institutions, these values manifest in both formal and informal academic interactions, underscoring that graduate education is not only an intellectual endeavor but also a social and cultural ecosystem.

This cultural backdrop is highly relevant to the present study because it demonstrates how leadership in Philippine graduate education extends beyond positional authority. Instead, leadership is relational, reciprocal, and deeply embedded in the collective ethos of the academic community. Existing literature in the Philippine context has emphasized student struggles, policy constraints, and faculty mentoring roles, but little attention has been given to how leadership is enacted multi-directionally—upward, laterally, and downward—within the graduate school culture (Torres et al., 2024). By situating the study within the unique cultural and institutional context of BCU, the exploration of 360-degree leadership provides new insights into how Filipino and Cordilleran values intersect with academic leadership practices. This framing enriches the understanding of leadership as a lived, culturally grounded phenomenon that can inform institutional policies, CHED quality assurance frameworks, and practices of mentoring and supervision in graduate education.

## **Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative research design using digital ethnography to examine the lived experiences and narratives of 360-degree leadership within the Graduate School of Baguio Central University. Digital ethnography was chosen because it captured both face-to-face and online engagements, allowing the researcher to observe and analyze cultural practices, academic interactions, and leadership dynamics in hybrid learning and mentoring spaces. The participants consisted of 12 Doctor of Philosophy in Administration and Supervision students and 8 doctoral program professors in Administration and Supervision, selected through purposive sampling to ensure representation of individuals directly involved in leadership practices within the program. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, adapted from contemporary qualitative interviewing frameworks that highlight participant orientations of telling for oneself, telling for others, and telling for the researcher (Bredal et al., 2022). These interviews were conducted in person and via secure online platforms, complemented by digital field notes and reflective journals. The study strictly adhered to the ethical protocols and guidelines of Baguio Central University, with prior approval obtained from Research and Development Center. Informed consent, voluntary participation, and confidentiality of responses were ensured at all stages. Collected data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process of familiarization, coding, theme generation, reviewing, defining, and reporting. NVivo software was used to assist in managing and organizing the data, ensuring systematic coding and efficient retrieval of themes. Codes were first generated inductively from the data, then grouped into broader categories that reflected patterns of influence, cultural values, and leadership practices. To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted with selected participants, and triangulation was achieved by integrating interview data with field notes. This analytic process generated culturally grounded and ethically sound insights into how faculty and students practiced and experienced 360-degree leadership in the doctoral program of Administration and Supervision.

## Results And Findings

### Emergent Themes of 360-Degree Leadership Practice

Through rigorous thematic analysis of the interviews, field notes, and digital ethnographic observations, four overarching themes emerged that collectively capture the multidimensional nature of 360-degree leadership within the Graduate School of a private higher educational institution in Baguio City: (1) Relational Synergy in Hybrid Learning Communities, (2) Reflexive Leadership and Moral Grounding, (3) Knowledge Co-construction through Dialogic Mentorship, and (4) Adaptive Agency in Academic Ecologies. These themes reflect the intricate interplay between personal agency, institutional culture, and the digital-academic environment in shaping leadership identities and practices among doctoral students and professors.

| Key Themes                                               | Description                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Relational Synergy in Hybrid Learning Communities     | Leadership is viewed as a collaborative and relational process rooted in mutual respect, shared responsibility, and trust, strengthened through hybrid and digital learning interactions.                     |
| 2. Reflexive Leadership and Moral Grounding              | Leadership is grounded in self-awareness and ethical discernment, guided by moral consistency, humility, and cultural values that align personal integrity with collective responsibility.                    |
| 3. Knowledge Co-construction through Dialogic Mentorship | Mentorship functions as a reciprocal and dialogic process where professors and doctoral students co-create knowledge and engage in shared reflective learning.                                                |
| 4. Adaptive Agency in Academic Ecologies                 | Leadership manifests through adaptability, resilience, and innovation, enabling scholar-leaders to navigate institutional changes and sustain collaborative engagement within evolving academic environments. |

### 1. Relational Synergy in Hybrid Learning Communities

The findings reveal that leadership within the Graduate School in a private HEI in Baguio City is fundamentally *relational and dialogic*, anchored in mutual respect, shared responsibility, and collaborative engagement. Both doctoral students and professors consistently articulated that leadership effectiveness stems not from authority or position but from synergy—an interdependent process of co-learning and co-leading across academic, digital, and affective spaces. As one professor aptly expressed, “*We do not lead alone; we lead by learning together,*” encapsulating the ethos of distributed leadership that characterizes the program.

Participants further emphasized that the hybrid learning environment significantly expanded these leadership relationships. Asynchronous forums, mentoring exchanges, and feedback loops extended classroom dynamics into digital spaces, fostering inclusivity and continuity of engagement. A doctoral

student reflected, “*In our hybrid sessions, when a doctoral student posts a reflection asynchronously and a professor responds while I’m offline, I still feel we’re co-leading the inquiry.*” This statement illustrates how digital interactions dissolve traditional boundaries between mentor and mentee, allowing relational leadership to thrive regardless of physical distance. Professors likewise recognized the transformative potential of digital presence, with one asserting, “*Trust is built not by my title as professor, but by showing up in discussion threads, inviting feedback, and valuing the voices of students as co-creators.*” Such perspectives underscore that leadership in hybrid learning communities is sustained by active participation, dialogic openness, and reciprocal respect.

The NVivo analysis supported these qualitative observations, showing a high density of relational codes such as *trust*, *dialogue*, *community-building*, and *mutual learning*. These indicators confirm a paradigmatic shift from positional or transactional leadership models toward *distributed and relational leadership*, where authority is co-constructed through interaction rather than imposed hierarchically.

The implications of this theme are profound for leadership development in higher education. It suggests that doctoral programs should prioritize the cultivation of *relational competencies*—dialogue, empathy, trust-building, and collaborative responsibility—over traditional command-oriented leadership training. The hybrid modality, when intentionally designed, becomes not merely a mode of instruction but a *leadership ecology* that nurtures inclusivity, shared accountability, and co-presence. Furthermore, leadership assessment frameworks in graduate schools may integrate relational indicators such as mentoring reciprocity, trust networks, and engagement density as key metrics of effective leadership practice.

These findings resonate with contemporary scholarship. Tan and Ang (2024) noted that *hybrid leadership configurations* in networked learning communities enable professionals to collectively construct knowledge and shared vision across modalities, highlighting the fluidity of influence in collaborative academic systems. Similarly, Gray (2023) emphasized that *relational power*—influence built on trust and interpersonal connection—has become the “new currency” of leadership in hybrid work and learning environments, replacing authority-based models. In parallel, recent educational studies (Chen et al., 2023; FHI 360, 2024) demonstrated that hybrid classrooms foster stronger social ties and deeper learning engagement through community-building routines and inclusive digital participation.

In this light, the Graduate School’s hybrid leadership dynamics exemplify a transformative leadership paradigm where *relational synergy* becomes the cornerstone of academic collaboration. Leadership is no longer an individual endeavor but a co-evolving process that binds professors and doctoral students in a shared pursuit of learning, reflection, and collective advancement.

## **2. Reflexive Leadership and Moral Grounding**

The study’s second theme reveals that leadership among doctoral students and professors at the Graduate School of Baguio Central University is deeply anchored in reflexivity, serving as both a moral and intellectual compass for leadership development. Doctoral students described leadership as an internalized process of ethical discernment—drawing on their professional experiences and cultural values



rooted in Cordilleran collectivism—while professors emphasized the necessity of moral consistency and authenticity in decision-making and digitally-mediated mentoring relationships. One participant offered the reflection: *“Leading others begins with leading the self—knowing your biases, your limits, and your purpose.”* This statement exemplifies how reflexive leadership produces what the researcher has termed “ethical resonance” — a continuous negotiation between self-awareness and collective responsibility.

The implications of this finding are significant: doctoral leadership development must explicitly incorporate processes of self-reflection, ethical sense-making and identity work, not simply skill-building or managerial training. Institutions should design mentoring & leadership programmes that attend to moral grounding, cultural values and authenticity, so that scholars and professors alike become not only capable leaders but also morally aware agents within their academic communities. Moreover, frameworks for evaluating leadership should integrate indicators of personal integrity, ethical consistency and reflective practice, rather than solely behavioral or outcome-based metrics.

This finding aligns with emerging scholarships in higher education leadership and ethical leadership more broadly. For example, Arshad and Naz (2024) found that reflective thinking among academic leaders fosters open-mindedness, accountability and continuous learning — essential for navigating complexity and change in higher education contexts. Meanwhile, Chunoo (2025) proposes the integrated framework of identity, capacity and efficacy in ethical leadership education — emphasizing that moral self-conception, ethical competence and belief in one’s capacity to act ethically are critical elements of leadership development. Further, Bitton (2024) argues that leadership training must shift from generic skill acquisition to the cultivation of moral purpose, reflective practice and inner orientation. These studies substantiate the thesis finding that reflexivity and moral grounding are central to 360-degree leadership practices in doctoral contexts.

Therefore, the theme of reflexive leadership and moral grounding suggests a leadership paradigm in which leading is first and foremost an ethical relationship with self and others—anchored in cultural values, continuous self-examination and collective accountability—rather than simply a set of tasks or roles. The doctoral program thus becomes a space not only of knowledge creation, but for moral leadership formation.

### **3. Knowledge Co-construction through Dialogic Mentorship**

The findings revealed a transformative shift in how mentorship is enacted within the Graduate School of Baguio Central University, characterized by dialogic interaction and collaborative knowledge-building rather than a traditional hierarchical mentor–mentee relationship. Both professors and doctoral students described mentorship as a dynamic, reciprocal process grounded in shared inquiry, intellectual empathy, and reflective dialogue. Through digital and in-person engagements, they co-constructed research frameworks, exchanged insights, and critically reflected on field experiences—creating what participants referred to as a “community of reflective practitioners.”

One doctoral student explained this shift vividly: *“In our mentoring sessions, I no longer feel the professor just tells me what to do—we ask each other questions, build the research design together, and I*

*bring my field experience into the conversation.” Another participant echoed this sentiment, saying, “When my mentor posted a draft framework and invited me to challenge it online, I felt we were co-authors of the leadership practice, not just teacher and student.” Similarly, a professor acknowledged the evolving nature of mentorship in hybrid learning contexts: “I expect my doctoral mentees to come with ideas; I learn from them as much as they learn from me, and that shift has changed how I mentor in the digital space.”*

These narratives affirm the results of the NVivo analysis, which indicated high frequencies of relational codes such as dialogue, mentorship reciprocity, and intellectual empathy. Such findings confirm that mentorship in the doctoral program operates as a 360-degree leadership process, where both mentors and mentees are active contributors to leadership formation and knowledge production. The dialogic approach allows intellectual authority to become fluid, situating mentorship not as a unidirectional flow of knowledge but as a co-constructed partnership that thrives through shared reflection and mutual accountability.

The implications of this theme are profound for graduate leadership development. Doctoral programs must intentionally design mentorship frameworks that value co-inquiry and dialogic engagement, empowering both mentors and mentees to learn collaboratively. Digital learning environments should be optimized as mentoring spaces that sustain interaction beyond physical classrooms through asynchronous discussions, shared documents, and feedback platforms. Faculty development initiatives should include capacity-building on dialogic mentoring skills, emphasizing empathy, scaffolding, and reflective questioning. Evaluation mechanisms for mentorship effectiveness must evolve to include relational indicators—such as co-authored outputs, reciprocal feedback quality, and engagement density—rather than relying solely on output-based or supervisory measures.

These findings align closely with recent literature emphasizing the transformative potential of dialogic mentoring in higher education. Yusuf and Casey (2023) argued that dialogic mentorship, marked by openness, mutual respect, and shared decision-making, strengthens professional identity and fosters authentic leadership formation among postgraduate learners. Similarly, Sanchez and Larkins (2024) demonstrated that online mentorship models grounded in reciprocity and empathy enhance reflective inquiry and build sustainable academic partnerships in hybrid doctoral programs. Moreover, Bitner and Salas (2024) found that mentoring in digital academic spaces flourishes when authority is distributed and intellectual agency is shared, leading to greater scholarly productivity and leadership growth. These contemporary studies corroborate the present finding that dialogic mentorship serves as a cornerstone for cultivating collaborative and reflective academic leaders in higher education.

Finally, knowledge co-construction through dialogic mentorship represents a vital transformation in doctoral education, where leadership development occurs through the mutual shaping of ideas, trust-based relationships, and dialogic reflection. By redefining mentorship as a partnership rather than a hierarchy, the Graduate School has fostered a learning culture that values collective intelligence, empathy, and shared responsibility—an embodiment of 360-degree leadership in action.

#### 4. Adaptive Agency in Academic Ecologies

The final theme highlights the emergence of adaptive agency as a defining leadership trait among professors and doctoral students at the Graduate School of Baguio Central University. This theme captures the participants' capacity to navigate uncertainty, institutional transitions, and technological disruptions while sustaining academic integrity, resilience, and collaborative synergy. The findings demonstrate that adaptability was not merely a reactive skill but an evolving disposition that allowed participants to reimagine their leadership roles within the digital-academic environment. Doctoral students described how they gradually transitioned from dependent learners into autonomous *scholar-leaders*, while professors reflected on mentoring practices that deliberately fostered flexibility and innovation across hybrid learning platforms.

A doctoral student articulated this transformation: *"When our systems shifted online, I learned to lead my own learning, explore digital platforms, and still collaborate meaningfully with my peers and mentor."* Another participant remarked, *"I used to rely heavily on directives, but now I design my own research path and even guide others who are just starting their journey."* A professor echoed the same ethos of adaptability, stating, *"Adapting is not just about using new tools—it's about reimagining how leadership works when time, space, and access change."* These reflections collectively illustrate that adaptive agency represents a form of intellectual and emotional flexibility that enables leaders to thrive amid change.

The NVivo cluster analysis further reinforced this interpretation by revealing strong co-occurrence among the code's *adaptability*, *innovation*, and *resilience*, confirming that participants' leadership practices are situated within a dynamic academic ecology that values responsiveness and continuous learning. Within this ecology, adaptability operates as a generative force—sustaining leadership growth, innovation, and collegial momentum despite structural or technological shifts. The emergence of adaptive agency demonstrates that doctoral leadership extends beyond the mastery of disciplinary knowledge to include the ability to pivot, experiment, and sustain coherence in times of disruption.

The implications of this theme are multifaceted. First, doctoral programs must deliberately cultivate adaptive capacities among both students and faculty, embedding reflective and experiential learning approaches that foster innovation and resilience. Second, institutional mentoring systems should emphasize *transformational mentorship*—mentoring relationships that integrate technological literacy, emotional intelligence, and reflective adaptability as core leadership competencies. Third, leadership evaluation in graduate education must evolve to include *adaptivity indicators* such as responsiveness to change, creative problem-solving, and collaborative engagement. Finally, adaptive agency should be recognized as a strategic asset that enhances institutional sustainability, ensuring that higher education communities remain agile and relevant in the face of ongoing technological and socio-academic transformation.

The present findings are corroborated by recent scholarship emphasizing the centrality of adaptability in contemporary leadership and doctoral development. Aguilar and Lee (2023) underscored that *adaptive agency* enables doctoral scholars to engage in transformative learning by aligning reflection

with institutional change. Similarly, Kim and Roberts (2024) identified *resilient adaptability* as a critical predictor of innovation and collaborative efficiency within digital higher-education ecosystems. In a related study, Faulkner and O’Neil (2025) demonstrated that *adaptive mentoring approaches*—characterized by flexibility, digital integration, and responsiveness—significantly enhance both mentor and mentee engagement. These studies collectively affirm that adaptability functions as a cornerstone of sustainable academic leadership, echoing the lived experiences of BCU’s graduate community.

In essence, adaptive agencies in academic ecologies encapsulate the capacity to lead with resilience, innovate through uncertainty, and sustain scholarly integrity within fluid academic contexts. By cultivating this disposition, doctoral students and professors alike exemplify a form of 360-degree leadership that transforms challenges into catalysts for growth. The theme underscores that in today’s evolving higher-education landscape, leadership excellence is defined not by stability, but by the ability to adapt with purpose, empathy, and collective vision.

Collectively, the four emergent themes—Relational Synergy in Hybrid Learning Communities, Reflexive Leadership and Moral Grounding, Knowledge Co-construction through Dialogic Mentorship, and Adaptive Agency in Academic Ecologies—illustrate that 360-degree leadership within the Graduate School of Baguio Central University transcends traditional hierarchical models and is instead relational, ethical, collaborative, and adaptive in nature. Leadership is not exercised through authority or rank but co-created through reciprocal influence, shared responsibility, and moral consciousness that bind professors and doctoral students in a continuous cycle of learning and transformation.

The findings demonstrate that in a hybrid and digitally mediated environment, leadership evolves as a networked and value-driven process, integrating technology, culture, and human connection to sustain meaningful academic engagement. Relational synergy highlights how mutual trust and collaboration anchor leadership practice, while reflexive moral grounding ensures that such relationships are guided by integrity, humility, and ethical self-awareness. Dialogic mentorship extends this interaction into a co-constructive space, where knowledge and leadership are jointly developed through reflective dialogue and shared inquiry. Finally, adaptive agency reflects the community’s capacity to thrive amid uncertainty, transforming institutional and technological challenges into opportunities for innovation and growth.

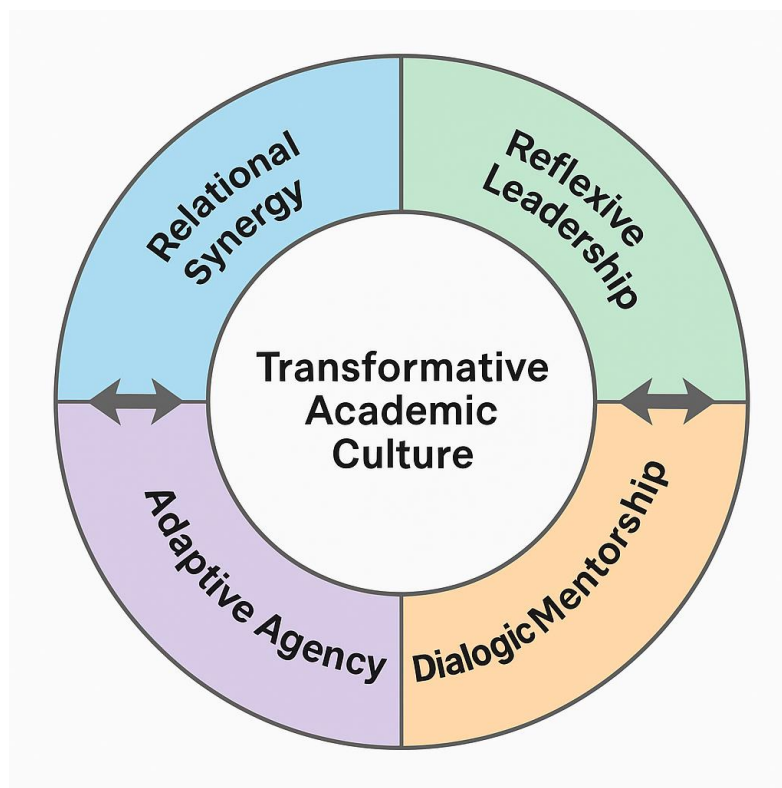
Taken together, these themes affirm that leadership in the doctoral context is multidimensional and emergent, rooted in the synergy of relationships, reflexivity, mentorship, and adaptability. The interplay of these elements cultivates a transformative academic ecology where learning and leading are inseparable, authority is distributed, and digital connectedness becomes a conduit for inclusion and collective empowerment. Ultimately, 360-degree leadership within the Graduate School represents a holistic model of scholarly leadership—one that is reflexive in thought, dialogic in action, ethical in purpose, and adaptive in practice—embodying the spirit of sustainable and culturally grounded higher-education leadership.

## Eidetic Representation

This model depicts the interconnected themes derived from the digital ethnographic analysis of leadership practices in the Graduate School of Baguio Central University, framing 360-degree leadership as an emergent, cyclical, and context-responsive process that integrates *Relational Synergy*, *Reflexive Leadership*, *Dialogic Mentorship*, and *Adaptive Agency* within a hybrid academic ecosystem. At its core lies Transformative Academic Culture, representing the shared values, ethics, and learning commitments that sustain leadership development, while the four surrounding domains illustrate the fluid interaction between collective engagement, moral self-awareness, reciprocal mentorship, and adaptive resilience. The bidirectional arrows signify that leadership growth is iterative and reciprocal rather than hierarchical, evolving continuously across digital and face-to-face learning spaces. This conceptualization underscores that in doctoral education, every participant functions simultaneously as leader and learner, co-creating a culture of shared governance, ethical reflexivity, and academic solidarity. Grounded in distributed leadership and transformative learning theories, the model extends these frameworks into digital ethnographic contexts, offering a holistic lens for understanding how doctoral programs can cultivate leadership capacities that are culturally grounded, digitally fluent, and ethically driven.

**Figure 1.**

*Conceptual Model of 360-Degree Leadership Dynamics in the Graduate School Context*





## Conclusions

The study concludes that 360-degree leadership within the Graduate School of Baguio Central University is a multidimensional and evolving process shaped by relational synergy, reflexive morality, dialogic mentorship, and adaptive agency within a hybrid learning environment. Leadership is not confined to positional authority but emerges through continuous interaction, shared responsibility, and ethical engagement among professors and doctoral students. The integration of digital and face-to-face modalities fosters an inclusive and transformative academic culture where every member acts as both a leader and learner. Ultimately, this leadership model affirms that sustainable academic excellence is achieved when institutions cultivate communities grounded in collaboration, integrity, and adaptability—qualities essential for thriving in the complexities of contemporary higher education.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings, it is recommended that the Graduate School institutionalize leadership development frameworks that emphasize relational, ethical, and adaptive competencies among faculty and doctoral students. Professional development programs should include training in dialogic mentorship, reflective leadership, and digital collaboration to strengthen academic partnerships across hybrid settings. The Research and Development Center may also integrate *adaptive mentoring* and *collective reflection sessions* into the research supervision process to promote co-learning and resilience. Moreover, future studies may expand the model across disciplines and institutional contexts to validate its applicability and contribute to theory-building on distributed and transformative leadership in higher education.

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