

The *EduLegends* Zenith Model of Crisis Leadership: Competencies and Response Strategies of School Heads of the National Capital Region

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the crisis leadership competencies and crisis response strategies of experienced school heads, referred to as EduLegends, in the National Capital Region. Using a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, quantitative and qualitative data were collected through a researcher-developed questionnaire and open-ended responses. Results indicated high levels of crisis leadership competency and utilization of crisis response strategies among school heads. Regression analysis revealed that Strategic Thinking and Planning, Innovation and Technology Utilization, and Relationship-Building and Collaboration significantly predicted the extent of crisis response strategy utilization. Classification analysis further identified professional recognition and socioeconomic capacity as enabling conditions influencing crisis leadership competency. These findings informed the development of the EduLegends Zenith Model, which conceptualizes crisis leadership as a dynamic interaction between core leadership competencies, enabling conditions, and strategic responses. The study offers insights for educational leadership development and crisis preparedness in resource-diverse contexts.

Keywords: crisis leadership, crisis competencies, crisis response strategies, resilience, school heads, National Capital Region

INTRODUCTION

Educational systems are increasingly confronted with complex and recurring crises, including public health emergencies, environmental disruptions, and systemic shocks that threaten the continuity of schooling and the wellbeing of school communities [1], [2]. In such contexts, the role of school heads extends beyond instructional supervision and administrative management to encompass crisis leadership—the capacity to anticipate, respond to, and recover from disruptive events while sustaining organizational stability and trust among stakeholders. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, underscored the central role of school leaders in navigating uncertainty, coordinating rapid responses, and supporting the academic and socio-emotional needs of teachers and learners [3], [4], [18].

Crisis leadership literature emphasizes that effective leadership during disruption requires a combination of strategic decision-making, adaptability, and relational competence. Leaders are expected to engage in sense-making, communicate transparently, mobilize collective action, and implement context-appropriate strategies under conditions of pressure and ambiguity [5], [6], [16]. In educational settings, these demands are intensified by the people-centered nature of schools, where leadership

decisions directly affect students, teachers, families, and communities. As such, crisis leadership in education is not only operational but also deeply relational and ethical [7], [8], [21].

Recent studies on school leadership during crises have identified key leadership competencies such as communication, adaptability, resilience, and technological capability as critical to effective crisis response [9], [10], [19]. These studies have contributed valuable insights into how school heads manage disruptions and sustain learning continuity. However, much of the existing literature tends to examine leadership competencies and crisis response strategies as separate constructs. This fragmented approach limits understanding of how leadership capacities are translated into concrete actions during crises, particularly within localized and resource-diverse educational contexts.

In the Philippine setting, school heads operate in environments that are frequently exposed to natural disasters, public health emergencies, and infrastructural challenges. Leadership frameworks such as the Philippine Professional Standards for School Heads emphasize strategic leadership, stakeholder engagement, and ethical practice [11]. Nevertheless, there remains limited empirical research that examines how these leadership standards are enacted during real-world crises and how specific leadership competencies influence the extent to which school heads implement crisis response strategies.

Understanding crisis leadership through the experiences of veteran school heads is particularly important, as these leaders draw on accumulated professional knowledge, relational capital, and adaptive strategies developed over time. Their leadership practices offer insights into how competencies are operationalized under pressure and how contextual factors shape leadership effectiveness. Recognizing this, the present study focuses on experienced school heads, referred to as *EduLegends*, who have demonstrated sustained leadership engagement during major educational disruptions.

This study aims to address the identified gap by examining the crisis leadership competencies and crisis response strategies of *EduLegends* in the National Capital Region. Specifically, it investigates the levels of crisis leadership competencies and the extent of utilization of crisis response strategies among school heads, identifies the leadership competencies that significantly predict crisis response actions, and examines contextual factors that influence crisis leadership competency. By integrating quantitative and qualitative findings, the study seeks to move beyond descriptive accounts of leadership attributes and toward an explanatory understanding of how leadership capacities drive action during crises.

Guided by a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, the study culminates in the development of the *EduLegends Zenith Model*, a framework that conceptualizes crisis leadership as a dynamic interaction between core leadership competencies, enabling conditions, and crisis response strategies. The model highlights that effective crisis leadership represents a peak—or zenith—state achieved when strategic, adaptive, and relational competencies are aligned with contextual supports [16], [21].

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a convergent parallel mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine crisis leadership competencies and crisis response strategies among school heads. The mixed-methods approach was selected to capture both measurable leadership capacities and contextualized leadership experiences during crises, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of how competencies translate into action [12]. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed independently, and integrated during interpretation.

Participants and Research Context

Participants were experienced school heads from public and private basic education institutions in the National Capital Region, Philippines. These school heads, referred to as *EduLegends*, were selected based on the following criteria: (a) sustained experience as a school head, (b) direct involvement in managing schools during major crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic or natural disasters, and (c) demonstrated leadership engagement during periods of educational disruption. The National Capital Region was selected as the research context due to its exposure to recurrent crises and its central role in the Philippine education system.

Research Instruments

Quantitative data were gathered using a researcher-developed questionnaire measuring crisis leadership competencies and crisis response strategies. Crisis leadership competencies were assessed across nine domains, including communication, strategic thinking and planning, innovation and technology utilization, relationship-building and collaboration, coaching and trustworthiness, adaptability, resilience, decision-making, and emotional intelligence. Crisis response strategies were measured across five domains related to crisis management, communication, technological adaptation, emotional and psychological support, and policy-related responses.

To complement the quantitative data, the instrument included open-ended questions that invited participants to describe challenges encountered during crises and strategies they found effective in managing disruptions. These qualitative responses provided contextual depth and supported the development of the *EduLegends Zenith Model*.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the instrument was established through expert review by specialists in educational leadership and research methodology. Revisions were made based on feedback to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study objectives.

Reliability testing yielded acceptable internal consistency coefficients, indicating that the instrument reliably measured the intended constructs.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted following ethical research standards. Participants were informed of the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and provided informed consent prior to participation. Data were collected concurrently for both quantitative and qualitative components to align with the convergent design.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive statistics were used to determine the levels of crisis leadership competencies and the extent of utilization of crisis response strategies. Multiple regression analysis was employed to identify leadership competencies that significantly predicted the utilization of crisis response strategies. Classification analysis was further used to examine contextual variables influencing crisis leadership competency.

Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis, involving systematic coding and categorization of responses to identify recurring themes related to leadership practices and challenges during crises. Quantitative and qualitative findings were integrated during interpretation to inform the development of the *EduLegends* Zenith Model.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and responsible data handling were strictly observed throughout the study. All data were anonymized and used solely for academic purposes.

RESULTS

This section presents the findings of the study on the crisis leadership competencies and crisis response strategies of *EduLegends* in the National Capital Region. Results are organized to highlight (1) the overall levels of leadership competencies, (2) the extent of utilization of crisis response strategies, (3) predictive relationships between competencies and strategies, and (4) data-driven patterns that informed the development of the *EduLegends* Zenith Model.

Level of Crisis Leadership Competencies of *EduLegends*

Table 1 presents the summary of the level of crisis leadership competencies demonstrated by *EduLegends* across the nine identified domains. Overall, the results indicate that *EduLegends* exhibited a high level of crisis leadership competency, suggesting strong leadership capacity during disruptive situations.

Table 1. Summary of Level of Crisis Leadership Competencies

Crisis Leadership along:	Weighted Mean	Description
A. Decision-Making & Problem-Solving;	4.33	Proficient
B. Adaptability & Flexibility;	4.33	Proficient
C. Emotional Intelligence & Empathy;	4.35	Proficient
D. Communication & Stakeholder Engagement;	4.41	Proficient
E. Strategic Thinking & Planning;	4.25	Proficient
F. Resilience & Stress Management;	4.35	Proficient
G. Innovation & Technology Utilization;	4.11	Proficient
H. Relationship-Building & Collaboration; and	4.49	Proficient
I. Coaching & Trustworthiness	4.46	Proficient
Grand Mean	4.34	Proficient

Note: This table presents the overall mean scores and descriptive interpretations of the crisis leadership competencies demonstrated by EduLegends across nine competency domains.

Among the nine domains, Relationship-Building and Collaboration and Coaching and Trustworthiness emerged as the highest-rated competencies. These findings suggest that *EduLegends* place strong emphasis on interpersonal relationships, mentorship, and ethical leadership when navigating crises. Competencies related to Strategic Thinking and Planning, Communication and Stakeholder Engagement, and Decision-Making and Problem-Solving were also rated at a high level, reflecting the importance of foresight, clarity, and timely action in crisis contexts.

Competencies such as Innovation and Technology Utilization and Resilience and Stress Management likewise demonstrated high mean scores, indicating that *EduLegends* were generally capable of adapting to changing conditions and managing personal and organizational stress during crises.

Level of Utilization of Crisis Response Strategies

Table 2 summarizes the level of utilization of crisis response strategies employed by *EduLegends*. Results reveal that *EduLegends* reported a high extent of utilization across all five response strategy domains.

Table 2. Summary of Level of Utilization of Crisis Response Strategies

Crisis Response Strategies	Weighted Mean	Description
A. Crisis Management & Decision-Making;	4.44	Highly Utilized
B. Technological Adaptation;	4.23	Highly Utilized
C. Communication;	4.54	Fully Utilized
D. Emotional and Psychological Support	4.41	Highly Utilized
E. Policy Development	4.46	Highly Utilized
Grand Mean	4.42	Highly Utilized

Note: This table summarizes the extent to which EduLegends utilized various crisis response strategies across five strategy domains during educational crises.

The most utilized strategies were those related to Communication and Crisis Management and Decision-Making, highlighting the central role of clear

information dissemination, coordination, and rapid response during crises. Strategies involving Emotional and Psychological Support were also highly utilized, underscoring the importance of addressing the socio-emotional needs of teachers, learners, and stakeholders during periods of uncertainty.

The utilization of Technological Adaptation and Policy Development strategies further indicates that *EduLegends* actively engaged in adjusting instructional modalities, implementing digital solutions, and revising school policies to align with crisis demands.

Predictors of Crisis Response Strategy Utilization

Table 3 presents the results of the multiple regression analysis predicting the level of utilization of crisis response strategies. Findings indicate that crisis leadership competencies significantly predicted the extent to which crisis response strategies were utilized by *EduLegends*.

Table 3. Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Level of Utilization of Crisis Response Strategies

Predictors	B	SEB	β	t	p
constant	0.887	0.195	-	4.547	.000
A. Decision-Making & Problem-Solving;	-0.008	0.089	-0.008	-0.087	0.931
B. Adaptability & Flexibility;	-0.01	0.081	-0.012	-0.125	0.900
C. Emotional Intelligence & Empathy;	-0.056	0.09	-0.064	-0.624	0.534
D. Communication & Stakeholder Engagement;	0.15	0.11	0.174	1.372	0.173
E. Strategic Thinking & Planning;	0.184	0.089	0.23	2.058	0.042
F. Resilience & Stress Management;	-0.011	0.102	-0.012	-0.111	0.912
G. Innovation & Technology Utilization;	0.197	0.055	0.252	3.593	0.001
H. Relationship-Building & Collaboration;	0.412	0.133	0.481	3.101	0.003
I. Coaching & Trustworthiness	-.045	.107	-.054	-.422	.674

Note: $F=48.506$, $R^2=.820$, Adjusted $R^2=.803$

Dependent Variable: Level of Utilization of Crisis Response Strategies

Specifically, competencies related to Relationship-Building and Collaboration, Innovation and Technology Utilization, and Strategic Thinking and Planning emerged as significant predictors of response strategy utilization. These results suggest that school heads who demonstrated stronger relational, adaptive, and strategic competencies were more likely to implement comprehensive and effective crisis response strategies.

Significant Predictors of Crisis Leadership Competencies and Response Strategies

Figures 1 and 2 present the classification trees identifying the most significant predictors of crisis leadership competency and the level of utilization of crisis response strategies among *EduLegends*. Unlike traditional descriptive analyses, classification tree modeling highlights the hierarchical importance of predictor variables and illustrates how specific profile and competency factors influence leadership outcomes.

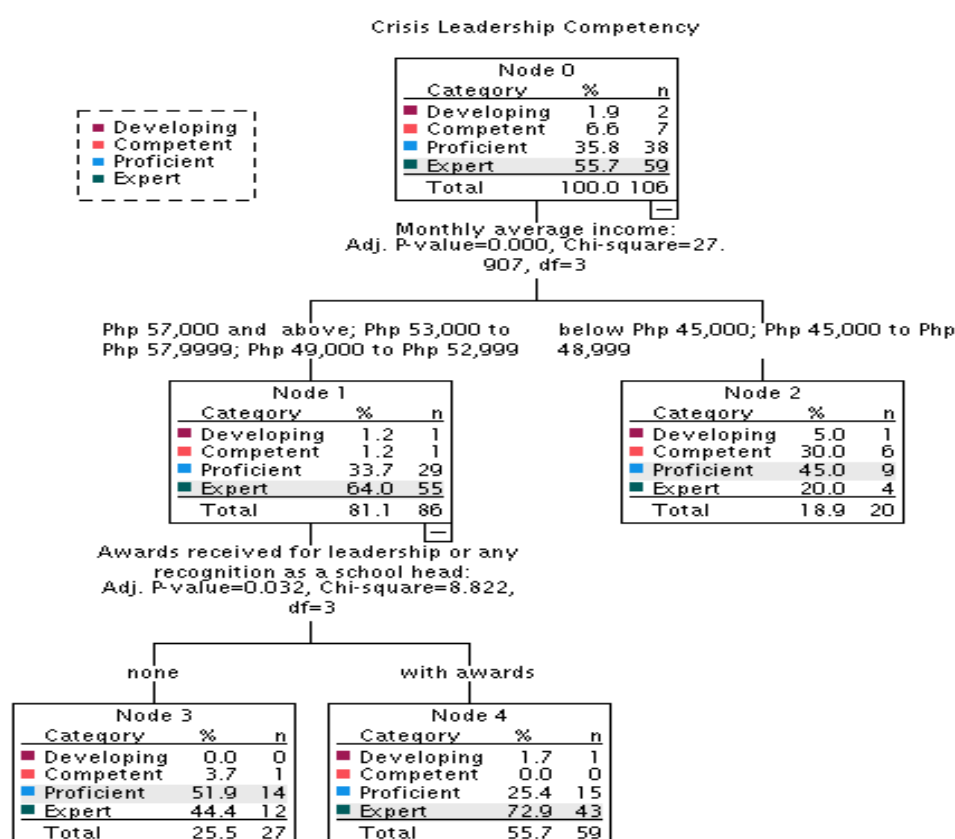


Figure 1. Classification Tree of Crisis Leadership Competence

Figure 1 shows the classification tree of crisis leadership competence, revealing that leadership awards received emerged as the most significant predictor of higher competency levels. *EduLegends* who had received leadership awards were more likely to demonstrate higher levels of crisis leadership competence, suggesting that professional recognition is associated with sustained leadership effectiveness during crises. Among those without leadership awards, average monthly income further differentiated levels of crisis leadership competence, indicating the potential influence of access to resources and professional stability on leadership capacity.

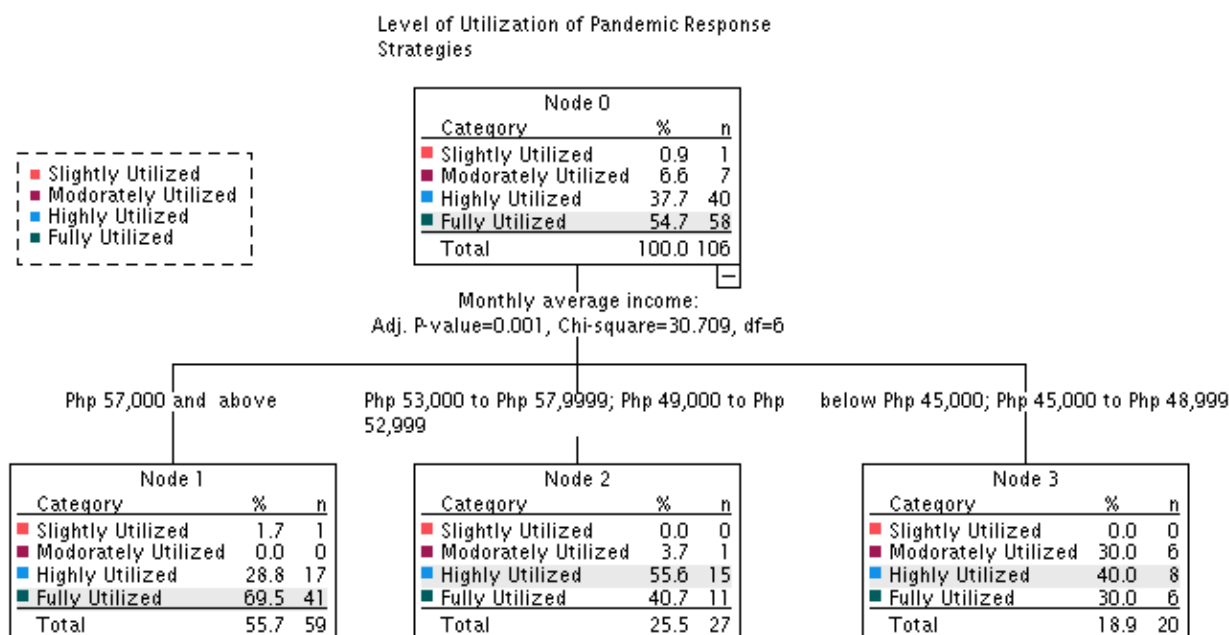


Figure 2. Classification Tree of Level of Utilization of Crisis Response Strategies

Figure 2 illustrates the classification tree of the level of utilization of crisis response strategies, identifying crisis leadership competencies as the most significant predictors of strategic response. *EduLegends* who demonstrated higher levels of relational, strategic, and adaptive competencies were more likely to exhibit higher utilization of crisis response strategies. This finding underscores that leadership competencies function as foundational drivers of action-oriented responses during crises.

Taken together, the classification trees complement the regression findings by demonstrating that crisis leadership competencies and selected profile factors do not merely correlate with response strategies but serve as key predictors that shape how school heads respond to crises. These results further informed the structure of the *EduLegends* Zenith Model by clarifying which leadership attributes exert the strongest influence on crisis preparedness and response.

Development of the *EduLegends* Zenith Model

Figure 3 presents the *EduLegends* Zenith Model, which was developed by synthesizing quantitative and qualitative findings of the study. The model illustrates the dynamic and multidimensional relationship between crisis leadership competencies and crisis response strategies, positioning the school head as the central agent of crisis leadership.

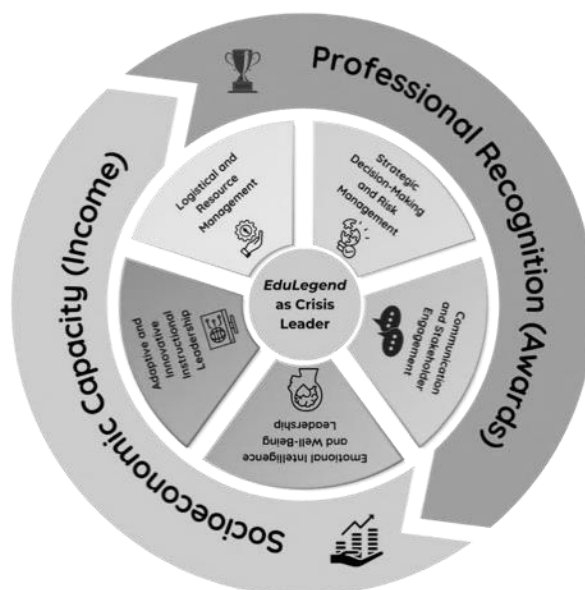


Figure 3. The *EduLegends* Zenith Model

The model highlights how core leadership competencies—particularly relational, strategic, and adaptive capacities—inform the selection and implementation of response strategies during crises. It reflects a progression from internal leadership competencies to external action-oriented strategies, emphasizing the role of trust, collaboration, innovation, and emotional intelligence in sustaining educational continuity and community well-being.

The *EduLegends* Zenith Model encapsulates the collective experiences of seasoned school heads and provides a conceptual framework for understanding effective crisis leadership in educational settings.

DISCUSSION

This study examined the crisis leadership competencies and crisis response strategies of experienced school heads and identified key leadership capacities and contextual factors that shape effective crisis response in educational settings. The findings demonstrate that while school heads generally exhibit high levels of crisis leadership competency, only specific competencies uniquely predict the extent to which crisis response strategies are implemented. This distinction highlights the difference between competencies that are highly valued and those that directly drive leadership action during crises.

Among the nine assessed competency domains, Relationship-Building and Collaboration and Coaching and Trustworthiness emerged as the highest-rated areas. These findings underscore the relational and ethical orientation of school leadership during crises, where trust, mentorship, and collaborative engagement are critical for sustaining morale and organizational stability. Consistent with prior research, relational leadership enables school heads to mobilize stakeholders, foster shared responsibility,

and maintain cohesion under conditions of uncertainty [7], [8], [21]. At the individual competency level, Communication recorded the highest weighted mean, reinforcing its central role in ensuring transparency, coordination, and trust during periods of disruption [9], [10], [18].

Regression analysis further revealed that Strategic Thinking and Planning, Innovation and Technology Utilization, and Relationship-Building and Collaboration uniquely and significantly predicted the utilization of crisis response strategies. This finding suggests that effective crisis response is driven not solely by relational or ethical leadership values, but by the integration of foresight, adaptability, and collaboration into concrete leadership action. Strategic Thinking and Planning enables school heads to anticipate challenges, align decisions with institutional goals, and implement systematic responses [5], [6], [16]. Innovation and Technology Utilization reflects adaptive leadership practices that support instructional continuity, communication, and organizational coordination in disrupted contexts [18], [19]. Relationship-Building and Collaboration, as both a highly rated domain and a significant predictor, highlights the dual role of relational leadership as both a valued competency and a functional driver of crisis response.

Beyond leadership competencies, the study identified professional recognition and socioeconomic capacity as significant predictors of crisis leadership competency. These factors function as enabling conditions that shape the context in which leadership is exercised, rather than as direct determinants of crisis response strategies. This finding aligns with leadership research emphasizing that contextual supports, professional legitimacy, and access to resources influence leadership effectiveness under pressure [17], [21].

Integrating these findings, the *EduLegends* Zenith Model conceptualizes crisis leadership as a peak state achieved when strategic, adaptive, and relational competencies converge and are supported by enabling conditions. The model advances crisis leadership literature by addressing the fragmented treatment of leadership competencies and response strategies noted in previous studies [3], [4], [16], [19]. By grounding the model in empirical findings from seasoned school heads, the study offers a context-sensitive framework that reflects leadership practice in crisis-prone educational environments.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study examined the crisis leadership competencies and crisis response strategies of seasoned school heads, referred to as *EduLegends*, in the National Capital Region of the Philippines. The findings demonstrate that *EduLegends* generally exhibit high levels of crisis leadership competency and consistently utilize a range of crisis response strategies when navigating educational disruptions. More importantly, the results highlight that crisis leadership competencies—particularly relational, strategic, and adaptive capacities—serve as key predictors of how school heads respond to crises.

The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings led to the development of the *EduLegends* Zenith Model, which conceptualizes crisis leadership in

education as a dynamic and interconnected process. The model illustrates how core leadership competencies inform and shape the implementation of response strategies, positioning the school head as the central agent in ensuring continuity of learning, organizational stability, and stakeholder trust during crises. By emphasizing the interaction between leadership capacities and strategic action, the model advances existing crisis leadership literature beyond fragmented competency or strategy-based approaches.

The study contributes to educational leadership scholarship by offering a contextually grounded framework derived from the lived experiences of seasoned school heads operating in a high-risk, resource-diverse environment. While the findings are situated within the National Capital Region, the *EduLegends Zenith Model* provides insights that may inform leadership development, crisis preparedness initiatives, and future research in similar educational contexts.

Future studies may further test and refine the model across different regions, educational levels, and crisis contexts to strengthen its applicability and generalizability. As educational systems continue to face complex and unpredictable challenges, leadership frameworks that integrate competence, strategy, and human-centered practice remain essential for sustaining resilient and responsive schools.

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