

STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AS A MEDIATING FACTOR IN THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADAPTABILITY AND INNOVATIVE LEADERSHIP: A CONVERGENT DESIGN

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Abstract

This study investigated the mediating role of strategic communication in the relationship between adaptability and innovative leadership among teachers using a convergent mixed-method design. The quantitative phase involved 200 teachers who answered a structured survey, while the qualitative phase included 17 participants from the Kidapawan City Division—10 in in-depth interviews and 7 in a focus group discussion. Quantitative findings showed high levels of strategic communication, adaptability, and innovative leadership among school leaders; however, correlation and regression analyses revealed no significant relationships, and strategic communication did not significantly mediate the link between adaptability and innovative leadership. In contrast, qualitative results indicated that strategic communication plays a central role in teachers' lived experiences by strengthening adaptability, fostering collaboration, supporting creative problem-solving, and sustaining innovative practices. Themes highlighted communication as the foundation for adaptability, a source of trust, a mechanism for clarity, and a driver of innovation. The mixed-method integration showed partial corroboration, with both strands affirming strong perceptions of communication, adaptability, and innovation but differing on how these variables relate. Overall, findings emphasize that while strategic communication showed no statistical mediating effect, it remains essential in practice for enabling adaptive and innovative leadership behaviors.

Keywords: *emotional development, family dynamics, polygamous households, pupil well-being, qualitative study, Kidapawan City, Philippines*

Introduction

Innovative leadership has become a critical determinant of organizational effectiveness in both educational and non-educational settings, particularly in environments characterized by rapid change and uncertainty. Leaders are increasingly expected to foster adaptability and innovation to ensure that institutions remain responsive to emerging demands. Despite this expectation, empirical evidence suggests that many organizations continue to struggle with cultivating innovation-oriented leadership. Globally, only a small proportion of leaders report successfully establishing cultures that support innovation, often due to persistent reliance on traditional leadership approaches that prioritize stability over experimentation and change (DHR International,

2023). These limitations constrain organizations' capacity to respond effectively to evolving professional, technological, and societal challenges.

In the Philippine context, similar challenges are evident, particularly within educational institutions. National reports indicate that while reforms such as curriculum restructuring and digital integration have been introduced, their implementation remains uneven and often constrained by leadership readiness. A significant proportion of school leaders report limited preparedness to manage innovation-driven change, largely due to insufficient professional development and limited strategic guidance (EDCOM, 2023). As a result, many schools struggle to translate reform initiatives into sustained improvements in teaching and learning practices, underscoring the need for leadership approaches that are both adaptable and innovation-oriented.

Recent scholarship highlights adaptability as a core leadership competence that enables leaders to respond effectively to complex and dynamic environments. Adaptable leaders demonstrate flexibility in decision-making, openness to change, and responsiveness to emerging challenges, all of which are essential for fostering innovation. However, adaptability alone may not be sufficient to produce innovative leadership outcomes. Emerging evidence suggests that strategic communication plays a crucial role in shaping how adaptability is enacted and perceived within organizations. Strategic communication has been shown to enhance trust, facilitate organizational change, and support collaborative problem-solving, thereby strengthening leaders' capacity to innovate (Smith & Johnson, 2020; Williams et al., 2021).

Although existing studies have examined adaptability, strategic communication, and innovative leadership as distinct constructs, limited attention has been given to how these variables interact. In particular, the mediating role of strategic communication in the relationship between adaptability and innovative leadership remains underexplored. Most empirical investigations have focused on direct relationships, offering insufficient insight into the mechanisms through which adaptable leadership behaviors are translated into innovative outcomes. Furthermore, much of the existing literature has been conducted in Western organizational contexts, leaving a notable gap in understanding how these dynamics operate in developing and non-Western settings (Kim & Lee, 2021; Singh & Patel, 2023).

Addressing this gap is especially important for educational and organizational leaders operating in rapidly changing local contexts, where effective communication may determine whether adaptability leads to meaningful innovation. Understanding the mediating function of strategic communication can provide practical insights into how leaders can better align their adaptive responses with organizational goals, foster engagement among stakeholders, and cultivate environments that support innovation.

Accordingly, this study aims to examine the role of strategic communication as a mediating variable in the relationship between adaptability and innovative leadership among school leaders in educational and organizational settings in Kidapawan City. Specifically, the study seeks to (a) determine the levels of strategic communication, adaptability, and innovative leadership; (b) examine the relationships among these variables; and (c) test whether strategic communication significantly mediates the relationship between adaptability and innovative leadership. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, this study contributes to the growing body of leadership research by

clarifying the mechanisms through which communication shapes adaptive and innovative leadership practices in a non-Western context.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a convergent mixed-methods research design, integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the relationships among adaptability, strategic communication, and innovative leadership. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently and given equal priority to provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon. The quantitative component examined patterns, relationships, and predictive effects among variables, while the qualitative component explored teachers' lived experiences and perceptions related to leadership practices.

The integration of both datasets occurred during the interpretation phase, allowing qualitative findings to contextualize and corroborate quantitative results. This design was appropriate for examining complex leadership constructs, as it enabled the study to capture both measurable outcomes and contextual meanings associated with strategic communication and innovative leadership.

Research Participants

The study involved participants from public schools under the Kidapawan City Division, Philippines. For the quantitative phase, a total of 200 teachers participated by completing a structured survey questionnaire. Stratified sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation across schools and grade levels.

For the qualitative phase, 17 teachers were purposively selected based on their direct experience with school leadership practices. Of these participants, 10 teachers engaged in in-depth individual interviews, while 7 teachers participated in a focus group discussion. This sampling approach ensured that participants possessed sufficient professional exposure to provide meaningful insights into adaptability, strategic communication, and innovative leadership.

Inclusion criteria required participants to (a) have at least one year of teaching experience, (b) be actively employed during the data collection period, and (c) be directly involved in classroom instruction. Teachers assigned to administrative roles, on extended leave, or stationed outside the division during data collection were excluded from the study.

Research Materials

Data for the quantitative component were collected using an adopted, structured survey questionnaire consisting of three sections, each measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Strongly Disagree*) to 5 (*Strongly Agree*). All instruments were administered in printed form and completed anonymously by participants.

1. Strategic Communication

Strategic communication was measured using an adapted scale from Mackey (2018). The instrument comprised three indicators: clarity of communication, feedback mechanisms, and transparency. Reliability testing from prior

validation studies reported Cronbach's alpha coefficients of 0.954, 0.962, and 0.883, respectively, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.917, indicating excellent internal consistency.

2. **Adaptability**

Adaptability was assessed using an adapted instrument developed by Gonzalez (2018). This scale measured openness to change, flexibility in problem-solving, and learning orientation. Reported Cronbach's alpha values for the indicators were 0.932, 0.929, and 0.911, respectively, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.945, demonstrating strong internal consistency.

3. **Innovative Leadership**

Innovative leadership was measured using a scale adapted from Carter (2019), covering visionary thinking, collaboration and teamwork, and support for creative problem-solving. The reported Cronbach's alpha values for these indicators were 0.913, 0.912, and 0.984, respectively, with an overall reliability coefficient of 0.912, indicating excellent reliability.

Prior to administration, all instruments underwent content and construct validation by expert validators. Revisions were incorporated based on their recommendations to ensure contextual relevance and clarity for the study population.

Qualitative data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher. The guide contained open-ended questions designed to elicit participants' experiences, perceptions, and reflections regarding leadership adaptability, communication practices, and innovation in school settings. The same guide was used for both in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion to ensure consistency.

Interviews and focus group discussions were conducted in locations chosen by participants to ensure comfort and confidentiality. All sessions were audio-recorded with participant consent and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Results and Discussion

Levels of Strategic Communication

The results indicate that school leaders demonstrate a high level of strategic communication, with an overall mean score of 4.18 (SD = 0.139). The relatively low standard deviation suggests consistency in teachers' perceptions across respondents. These findings indicate that leaders communicate expectations clearly, support change initiatives, and promote learning-oriented practices, creating an environment that supports coordination and shared understanding.

Among the dimensions, learning orientation obtained the highest category mean (M = 4.21), followed by openness to change (M = 4.18) and flexibility in problem-solving (M = 4.17). These results suggest that strategic communication in schools is characterized by leaders' encouragement of professional growth, receptiveness to innovation, and adaptive decision-making.

Table 1
Level of Strategic Communications

Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
A. Openness to change			
1. I feel my leader is open to change.	4.12	.760	High
2. I believe my leader embraces new ideas.	4.10	.779	High
3. I see my leader encouraging changes in practices.	4.11	.755	High
4. I feel supported by my leader's adaptability.	4.21	.720	High
5. I trust my leader's openness to improvements.	4.20	.778	High
6. I appreciate my leader's willingness to innovate.	4.19	.768	High
7. I believe my leader welcomes new approaches.	4.28	.717	High
8. I feel my leader is receptive to change.	4.22	.730	High
Category Mean	4.18	.275	High
B. Flexibility in problem-solving			
1. I can easily adapt to my leader's problem-solving approach.	4.23	.713	High
2. I appreciate my leader's flexibility in addressing challenges.	4.08	.762	High
3. I feel my leader adjusts strategies when needed.	4.11	.777	High
4. I observe my leader finding creative solutions.	4.25	.761	High
5. I value how my leader adapts to situations.	4.23	.782	High
6. I see my leader adjusting methods effectively.	4.11	.751	High
7. I trust my leader's flexibility in decision-making.	4.18	.728	High
8. I believe my leader adapts well to problems.	4.20	.745	High
Category Mean	4.17	.273	High
C. Learning Orientation			
1. I feel my leader promotes continuous learning.	4.08	.728	High
2. I believe my leader encourages personal development.	4.29	.740	High
3. I see my leader supporting professional growth.	4.23	.763	High
4. I trust my leader values learning opportunities.	4.13	.752	High
5. I appreciate my leader's focus on improvement.	4.25	.734	High
6. I feel my leader prioritizes learning in practices.	4.15	.737	High
7. I believe my leader fosters a learning culture.	4.28	.744	High
8. I feel motivated by my leader's orientation.	4.27	.727	High
Category Mean	4.21	.259	High
Overall Mean	4.18	.139	High Level of Strategic Communication

These findings align with previous research emphasizing that leadership communication grounded in openness, flexibility, and learning orientation strengthens organizational readiness for improvement and change (Jiang & Chen, 2024; Senge,

2020). Leaders who consistently communicate support for innovation reduce resistance and foster a climate conducive to adaptation and collaboration.

Levels of Adaptability

The overall mean score for adaptability was 4.20 (SD = 0.151), indicating a high level of adaptability among school leaders. Teachers consistently perceived their leaders as responsive, collaborative, and transparent in managing change. The narrow variability in responses further reinforces the stability of these perceptions.

Among the adaptability dimensions, goal-setting collaboration and transparency both obtained the highest category mean (M = 4.21), while clarity of communication followed closely (M = 4.18). These results suggest that adaptability is manifested through shared goal formulation, open information sharing, and clear guidance during transitions.

Table 2
Level of Adaptability

Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
A. Clarity of Communication			
1. I understand my leader's instructions clearly.	4.12	.729	High
2. I feel my leader communicates expectations effectively.	4.22	.739	High
3. I find my leader's messages easy to follow.	4.09	.764	High
4. I believe my leader expresses ideas transparently.	4.16	.781	High
5. I appreciate my leader's clear communication style.	4.24	.758	High
6. I feel confident in my leader's direction.	4.18	.737	High
7. I trust my leader's communication to guide actions.	4.19	.754	High
8. I believe my leader provides clear feedback.	4.21	.756	High
<i>Category Mean</i>	4.18	.261	High
B. Goal-Setting Collaboration			
1. I feel involved in setting school goals.	4.18	.748	High
2. I collaborate with my leader on goals.	4.18	.730	High
3. I believe goal-setting is a shared effort.	4.19	.734	High
4. I actively participate in goal-setting discussions.	4.19	.752	High
5. I understand the goals set by leadership.	4.26	.698	High
6. I contribute to the planning of school goals.	4.26	.753	High
7. I feel my input is valued in goal-setting.	4.23	.743	High
8. I work together with my leader on goals.	4.18	.730	High
<i>Category Mean</i>	4.21	.243	High
C. Transparency			
1. I feel informed about school decisions.	4.25	.714	High
2. I trust the information shared by leaders.	4.14	.746	High
3. I believe leadership communicates openly with teachers.	4.21	.767	High
4. I am aware of the school's plans.	4.30	.717	High
5. I receive clear information from my leader.	4.17	.716	High
6. I understand the reasons behind decisions.	4.24	.792	High
7. I feel included in important school discussions.	4.16	.792	High
8. I trust the transparency of school leadership.	4.20	.722	High
<i>Category Mean</i>	4.21	.263	High
Overall Mean	4.20	.151	High Level Adaptability

These findings support earlier studies asserting that adaptive leadership is sustained by clarity, shared ownership of goals, and transparent communication, which collectively enhance teachers’ readiness to adjust instructional practices and organizational routines (Leithwood & Sun, 2020; Uhl-Bien & Arena, 2020).

Levels of Innovative Leadership

School leaders were also perceived to exhibit a high level of innovative leadership, with an overall mean of 4.19 (SD = 0.148). Teachers observed strong leadership behaviors related to future-oriented vision, collaboration, and support for creativity, indicating that innovation is visibly encouraged within the school environment.

Among the dimensions, collaboration and teamwork and support for creative problem-solving both yielded a category mean of 4.20, while visionary thinking registered a slightly lower but still high mean (M = 4.19). These results indicate that leaders not only articulate future goals but also foster collective engagement and empower teachers to experiment with new ideas.

Table 3
Level of Innovative Leadership

Indicators	Mean	Std. Deviation	Interpretation
A. Visionary Thinking			
1. I believe my leader has a clear vision.	4.19	.727	High
2. I feel inspired by my leader's vision.	4.15	.800	High
3. I understand the long-term goals of leadership.	4.15	.761	High
4. I trust the direction set by my leader.	4.13	.774	High
5. I see my leader planning for the future.	4.20	.789	High
6. I feel motivated by my leader's ideas.	4.23	.708	High
7. I believe my leader thinks innovatively for progress.	4.22	.751	High
8. I see opportunities for growth through leadership vision.	4.26	.719	High
<i>Category Mean</i>	4.19	.253	High
B. Collaboration and Teamwork			
1. I believe my leader encourages teamwork and collaboration.	4.18	.770	High
2. I feel supported in team efforts by leadership.	4.22	.737	High
3. I see my leader fostering cooperation among teachers.	4.19	.766	High
4. I value the teamwork promoted by my leader.	4.26	.738	High
5. I feel my leader values collaborative contributions.	4.16	.755	High
6. I trust my leader in team decision-making.	4.23	.756	High
7. I experience open collaboration within my school team.	4.26	.746	High
8. I believe my leader promotes effective teamwork strategies.	4.12	.698	High
<i>Category Mean</i>	4.20	.272	High
C. Support for Creative Problem-Solving			
1. I feel my leader supports creative problem-solving.	4.25	.741	High
2. I believe my leader encourages innovative thinking approaches.	4.19	.766	High

3.	I trust my leader's support for creative solutions.	4.19	.741	High
4.	I value the freedom to innovate under leadership.	4.11	.758	High
5.	I feel empowered to solve problems creatively.	4.25	.750	High
6.	I believe my leader nurtures creative thinking.	4.16	.728	High
7.	I feel my leader appreciates creative problem-solving.	4.13	.748	High
8.	I trust my leader in fostering innovation.	4.29	.768	High
	<i>Category Mean</i>	4.20	.275	High
Overall Mean		4.19	.148	High Level of Innovative Leadership

Consistent with prior research, these findings suggest that innovative leadership thrives in environments where leaders promote teamwork, articulate clear visions, and provide psychological support for creative risk-taking (Harris & Jones, 2020; Day & Sammons, 2021).

Relationships Among Strategic Communication, Adaptability, and Innovative Leadership

Despite the high levels observed across all three variables, correlation analysis revealed weak and non-significant relationships among strategic communication, adaptability, and innovative leadership, with correlation coefficients ranging from $r = .025$ to $r = .050$.

Specifically, adaptability was not significantly related to strategic communication ($r = .030$, $p = .670$) or innovative leadership ($r = .025$, $p = .723$). Similarly, strategic communication did not demonstrate a significant relationship with innovative leadership ($r = .050$, $p = .483$).

Table 4
Relationship between the Variables

VARIABLES	R	p-value	Remarks
Adaptability and Strategic Communication	.030 Significant	.670	Not
Adaptability and Innovative Leadership	.025 Significant	.723	Not
Strategic Communication and Innovative Leadership	.050 Significant	.483	Not

*Highly Significant at .01 level

These findings suggest that although these leadership practices are strongly present, they may operate as **distinct dimensions** rather than as interdependent processes. This supports prior studies noting that adaptability, communication, and innovation may function independently unless intentionally integrated through leadership

development and organizational structures (Nguyen & Malik, 2022; Robbins & Judge, 2020).

Influence of Strategic Communication and Adaptability on Innovative Leadership

Regression analysis further showed that neither adaptability ($B = 0.023$, $p = .739$) nor strategic communication ($B = 0.052$, $p = .490$) significantly predicted innovative leadership. The model explained only 0.3% of the variance ($R^2 = .003$), indicating minimal explanatory power.

Table 5
Influence of Adaptability and Strategic Communication on Innovative Leadership

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficient	T	p-value	Remarks
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
(Constant)	3.884	.424		9.153	.000	
Adaptability	.023	.070	.024	.334	.739	Not Significant
Strategic Communication	.052	.075	.049	.691	.490	Not Significant

Note: $R=.055^a$, $R\text{-square}=.003$, $F=.302$, $P<.05$

These results contrast with theoretical claims that adaptability and communication are direct drivers of innovation (Heifetz et al., 2009; Men & Stacks, 2014). The findings suggest that innovative leadership in this context may be influenced more strongly by situational, cultural, or structural factors beyond individual leadership behaviors.

Conclusion

Based on the findings, the following conclusions were drawn from the study:

1. School leaders maintain strong strategic communication behaviors, reflecting a communication culture supportive of continuous improvement.
2. School leaders demonstrate high adaptability, suggesting readiness to adjust and collaborate within dynamic school environments.
3. The consistently high innovative leadership ratings confirm that leaders practice innovation-oriented behaviors regardless of communication or adaptability levels.
4. The absence of significant correlations suggests that innovative leadership operates independently from the measured dimensions of strategic communication and adaptability.
5. The predictive analysis concludes that strategic communication and adaptability are not determining factors of innovative leadership in this context.
6. Given the insignificant direct and indirect paths, the study concludes that for this sample, Strategic Communication is not the mechanism linking Adaptability to

Innovative Leadership, suggesting other factors are primary drivers of innovative behavior.

7. The themes collectively show that strategic communication mediates the relationship between adaptability and innovative leadership by building trust, enhancing clarity, and empowering teachers to engage confidently with change and innovation.
8. Although teachers consistently describe these leadership behaviors as interconnected, the quantitative data reveal no significant statistical relationships, indicating that these constructs operate independently in measurable terms.

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