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**The Rise of Meranaw Women Leaders: A Phenomenological Exploration**

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#### Abstract

**Purpose:** This study investigates Meranaw women leaders in the Philippines, examining their leadership styles, motivations, challenges, and strategies for success.

**Methodology:** This study focuses on Meranaw women leaders in Lanao del Sur, examining how they navigate traditional patriarchal structures and contribute to societal progress. By exploring their experiences, this research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of Filipino Muslim empowerment and the evolving dynamics of gender and leadership in contemporary society.

**Findings:** Findings reveal a preference for facilitative and democratic leadership, driven by intrinsic motivations and a strong emphasis on community and collaboration. Despite facing challenges like cultural norms and resource constraints, these women demonstrate resilience and employ strategies like proactive problem-solving and community engagement.

**Unique Contribution to Theory, Practice and Policy:** The study offers recommendations for empowering future leaders, emphasizing cultural understanding, leadership training, and addressing psychological needs.

**Keywords:** *Meranaw, Women Leaders, Exploration*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This introduction explores the multifaceted concept of leadership, acknowledging its diverse manifestations across various contexts. It highlights the historical dominance of a "masculine" leadership style and the subsequent rise of women in leadership roles, emphasizing the emergence of a more "feminine" leadership style characterized by collaboration, communication, and empathy. The introduction then focuses on the specific context of the Philippines, recognizing the complex interplay of tradition, culture, and historical shifts that have shaped women's roles. It delves into the challenges faced by Filipino women, including gender stereotypes, unequal opportunities, and the "double burden." The introduction further examines the unique situation of Bangsamoro women, acknowledging their historical limitations and their recent strides towards greater empowerment, particularly through the Bangsamoro Organic Law. Finally, it focuses on the specific case of Meranaw women in Lanao del Sur, highlighting their vital roles within their communities, their contributions to cultural preservation, and the challenges they navigate within a context of traditional patriarchal structures. The introduction concludes by emphasizing the significance of studying Meranaw women leaders, arguing that their experiences offer valuable insights into the evolving dynamics of gender and power within a specific cultural context and contribute to a broader understanding of Filipino Muslim empowerment.

This study investigated Meranaw women's leadership in the Philippines using Transformational Leadership Theory (TLT) and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). TLT explored charisma, inspiration, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration in their leadership practices, while SDT examined how their leadership addressed followers' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The study aimed to understand the motivations and challenges faced by these women leaders, ultimately contributing to leadership development programs and fostering female empowerment within Meranaw communities.

This phenomenological study investigates the emergence of Meranaw women leaders in the Philippines. Drawing on Self-Determination Theory, it explores how these women's leadership journeys are shaped by their intrinsic needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The research examines the challenges they face, the strategies they employ to overcome them, and the factors that motivate their leadership. By understanding their experiences, the study aims to provide valuable insights for future generations of Meranaw women and contribute to a more inclusive and equitable society.

This research investigates the leadership experiences of Meranaw women in the Philippines. It aims to understand their leadership styles, psychological needs and satisfactions, motivational factors, the challenges they face, and to explore practical solutions to support their leadership journeys within a complex and evolving social context.

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of ten prominent Meranaw women leaders in the Philippines. It aimed to understand their motivations, challenges, and triumphs, while deconstructing traditional narratives of leadership.

Despite these limitations, the study offers valuable insights into the complexities of women's leadership in the Meranaw community and has the potential to inform policies and programs that support women's empowerment in similar contexts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research examines the unique leadership styles of Meranaw women in the Philippines, exploring how they navigate societal expectations and cultural influences. Drawing inspiration

from the Darangen epic, these women redefine leadership with a focus on collaboration, community well-being, and a blend of tradition and progress. They challenge traditional gender roles and demonstrate diverse leadership approaches. Related studies on Muslim women leaders highlight diverse experiences, challenges, and aspirations in various contexts. Research on Meranaw women leaders focuses on their career goals, challenges, and the impact of family support. However, gaps remain in understanding their lived experiences and motivations. This research aims to fill these gaps by conducting a phenomenological study to explore the personal journeys, motivations, and challenges of Meranaw women leaders, contributing to a deeper understanding of their unique leadership styles and their impact on their communities.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the leadership experiences of Meranaw women in the Philippines. In-depth interviews were conducted with 10 participants, selected through purposeful sampling, to understand their lived experiences, motivations, and challenges. Data analysis involved a multi-pronged approach, including descriptive and thematic analysis, guided by phenomenological principles. The study utilized a combination of in-depth interviews, a leadership styles questionnaire, and a survey based on Self-Determination Theory to gather data. Ethical considerations, such as informed consent and confidentiality, were prioritized throughout the research process. This research aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the leadership styles, motivations, challenges, and experiences of Meranaw women leaders, contributing to a more supportive environment for their future development.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Research Question #1**

#### **What are the Leadership Styles of Meranaw Women Leaders?**

The survey findings among Meranaw women highlight a clear preference for facilitative leadership, democratic principles, and a moderate acceptance of authoritative leadership. This inclination underscores a desire for leaders who prioritize collaboration, empowerment, decisiveness, and adaptability. Participant 1 embodies these qualities through her inclusive, empowering, and adaptive leadership style, focusing on team development and societal advocacy. Similarly, Participant 2 fosters a collaborative and nurturing environment, while Participant 4 emphasizes collaboration, adaptability, and results-oriented approaches. Participant 5 strikes a balance between democratic principles, transformational elements, and situational leadership, nurturing team morale and individual growth. Participant 6's transformational leadership style prioritizes inspiration and empowerment, fostering a supportive work environment. Participant 7 emphasizes fairness, transparency, and conflict resolution, while Participant 9 epitomizes inclusivity, empathy, and fairness in her leadership approach. Finally, Participant 10 symbolizes democratic leadership, promoting inclusivity and involvement in decision-making processes while emphasizing communication and conflict resolution. In conclusion, these diverse leadership styles reflect a shared commitment among Meranaw women leaders to foster positive work environments characterized by collaboration, empowerment, inclusivity, and fairness.

### **Research Question #2**

#### **What are the Psychological Needs and Satisfactions of Meranaw Women Leaders in Terms of Autonomy, Competence, and Relatedness?**

The review of Meranaw women leaders' psychological needs and satisfactions in terms of autonomy, competence, and relatedness offers profound insights into their motivations and experiences. Autonomy emerges as moderately valued, indicating a desire for independence while navigating the complexities of collaboration and individual decision-making. Competence, however, warrants attention, with some participants expressing occasional self-doubt despite external validation. Addressing this through leadership training and mentorship could bolster confidence and effectiveness. Relatedness stands out as a significant aspect, emphasizing the importance of positive relationships in providing support and motivation. Encouraging collaboration and fostering supportive networks among Meranaw women leaders could enhance their sense of belonging and empower them to thrive. Overall, Meranaw women leaders demonstrate diverse approaches to leadership, with a common emphasis on inclusivity, respect, and a commitment to continuous personal and professional growth. Their reflections underscore the interconnectedness of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in shaping their leadership journeys, highlighting the importance of fostering supportive environments where individuals feel valued, empowered, and motivated to excel.

#### Research Question #3

##### **What Motivational Elements Influence the Formation of Meranaw Women Leaders?**

In summary, the formation of Meranaw women leaders is a complex interplay of intrinsic motivations such as personal growth and satisfaction, extrinsic rewards, cultural pride, and a strong sense of duty and community service. These leaders' motivations are deeply personal and rooted in their values, experiences, and cultural heritage, guiding their commitment to making a positive impact on their community.

#### Research Question #4

##### **What Challenges do Meranaw Women Leaders Encounter in their Leadership Roles?**

The narratives presented by the participants illuminate the multifaceted challenges encountered by women leaders in the Meranaw community, as well as the diverse strategies employed to navigate these obstacles. Participant 1 grapples with personal, cultural, and resource-related challenges, emphasizing proactive problem-solving, community engagement, and faith-driven resilience as essential components of her leadership approach. In contrast, Participant 2, operating in a supportive environment, underscores the importance of respecting traditional gender roles and collaborating with male counterparts. Participant 3's leadership journey is marked by familial and political strife, highlighting the complex interplay of personal and societal dynamics. Logistical and financial challenges characterize Participant 4's experience, prompting a focus on effective communication and community understanding to overcome obstacles. Participant 5 navigates cultural expectations, balancing high standards with a positive work environment through clear communication and leading by example. Participant 6 advocates for gender equality through Islamic principles, empowering women through community-based initiatives. Participant 7 addresses challenges stemming from community dynamics by fostering mutual respect and effective communication among colleagues. Finally, Participant 9 emphasizes open communication, acceptance, and initiatives supporting women's well-being as crucial strategies for combating gender bias and promoting gender equality. Collectively, these narratives underscore the resilience, adaptability, and commitment of women leaders in overcoming challenges and driving positive change in the Meranaw community.

#### Research Question #5

### **What Practical Solutions Can be drawn from the Study's Findings?**

The insights provided by the participants offer a comprehensive roadmap for empowering and supporting future Meranaw women leaders. Participant 1 underscores the importance of humility, collaboration, and recognizing one's reliance on others, emphasizing a mindset of service and community impact. Participant 2 advocates for a deep understanding of Islam and embracing one's identity as a Muslim woman, rejecting competition with men and emphasizing adherence to traditional gender roles. Participant 3 highlights the broader purpose of serving the community and the potential for women to bring a less confrontational approach to leadership. Participant 4 recommends leadership courses, cultural understanding, and gradual ascension to leadership roles within the community. Participant 5 emphasizes personal development, cultural advocacy, and leadership impact, promoting self-belief, cultural preservation, and gender equality. Participant 6 stresses family communication, cultural awareness, and community support, urging women to integrate nurturing qualities into their leadership style. Participant 7 advocates for shared leadership and continuous learning opportunities to empower future women leaders. Participant 8 encourages embracing nurturing leadership qualities and challenging negative stereotypes, promoting a leadership approach rooted in love and care. Participant 9 advises humility, resilience, and self-awareness, emphasizing the importance of community support and staying true to one's values. Lastly, Participant 10 underscores integrity, faith, and cultural identity as essential pillars of leadership, urging future leaders to maintain their principles amidst challenges. Collectively, these recommendations form a holistic framework for nurturing strong and effective women leaders in the Meranaw community, ensuring their success and impact for generations to come.

### **Implications**

The implications drawn from the study's findings are profound for the empowerment and support of future Meranaw women leaders. Firstly, understanding the diverse leadership styles exhibited by Meranaw women leaders is crucial for organizations and communities seeking to cultivate effective leadership. Embracing facilitative, democratic, and authoritative leadership approaches can foster collaboration, empowerment, and inclusivity within leadership structures. By recognizing and valuing these diverse styles, organizations can create environments that leverage the strengths of Meranaw women leaders, ultimately driving positive outcomes and community impact.

Secondly, addressing the psychological needs of Meranaw women leaders in terms of autonomy, competence, and relatedness is essential for nurturing their growth and satisfaction in leadership roles. Providing opportunities for autonomy while fostering a sense of competence through training and mentorship can bolster their confidence and effectiveness. Moreover, fostering supportive relationships and networks among Meranaw women leaders can enhance their sense of belonging and motivation, ultimately contributing to their resilience and success in leadership.

Thirdly, understanding the motivational elements influencing the formation of Meranaw women leaders sheds light on the drivers of their commitment and dedication. By recognizing the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations driving their leadership journeys, organizations and communities can tailor support systems and incentives to align with their values and aspirations. Cultivating environments that foster personal fulfillment, cultural pride, and a sense of duty to the community can inspire future generations of Meranaw women leaders to make meaningful contributions and drive positive change.

Fourthly, acknowledging the challenges faced by Meranaw women leaders is crucial for developing targeted strategies to address these obstacles. By proactively addressing personal, cultural, familial, logistical, and financial challenges, organizations and communities can create supportive frameworks that empower women leaders to overcome adversity and thrive. Implementing adaptive strategies focused on proactive problem-solving, collaboration, and resilience can equip Meranaw women leaders with the tools and resources needed to navigate the complexities of leadership effectively.

Finally, embracing the practical solutions drawn from the study's findings can pave the way for the empowerment and support of future Meranaw women leaders. By fostering humility, cultural understanding, family communication, shared leadership, and adherence to values amidst challenges, organizations and communities can create nurturing environments that enable women leaders to flourish. Investing in leadership development programs, mentorship initiatives, and networking opportunities tailored to the needs of Meranaw women leaders can further enhance their skills, confidence, and impact. Ultimately, by embracing these implications and recommendations, organizations and communities can unlock the full potential of Meranaw women leaders, driving positive social, economic, and cultural change for generations to come.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendations derived from the study's findings hold profound importance and offer tailored guidance to Meranaw women leaders themselves, the Meranaw community, policymakers, and academics alike. For Meranaw women leaders, these recommendations serve as a roadmap for navigating their leadership roles effectively, empowering them to leverage their diverse leadership styles, address their psychological needs, and overcome the challenges they may encounter. By embracing collaboration, empowerment, and inclusivity, Meranaw women leaders can foster positive work environments and drive meaningful change within their community. Furthermore, these recommendations provide Meranaw women leaders with practical strategies for personal and professional growth, enhancing their confidence, resilience, and impact.

Within the Meranaw community, implementing these recommendations can catalyze social and economic development by promoting gender equality, leadership development, and community empowerment. By fostering environments that value inclusivity, respect, and collaboration, the Meranaw community can harness the full potential of its women leaders, leading to enhanced community cohesion, prosperity, and well-being. Moreover, these recommendations encourage the Meranaw community to recognize and celebrate the unique contributions of women leaders, fostering a culture of appreciation and support for their endeavors.

Policymakers can leverage the insights gleaned from this study to inform policies and initiatives aimed at advancing gender equality, leadership development, and community empowerment among Meranaw women. By incorporating recommendations such as leadership training programs, cultural awareness initiatives, and support networks into policy frameworks, policymakers can create enabling environments that facilitate the growth and success of Meranaw women leaders. Furthermore, policymakers have the opportunity to address systemic barriers and promote inclusive policies that foster gender parity and equitable opportunities for Meranaw women leaders to thrive.

For academics, these recommendations offer valuable insights into the intersection of women's leadership, cultural dynamics, and community development within the Meranaw context. By

further exploring the implications of these findings, academics can contribute to the body of knowledge on women's leadership, cultural diversity, and community resilience. Additionally, academics can use these recommendations to guide future research endeavors, informing scholarly discourse and advancing understanding of effective leadership strategies and practices in diverse cultural contexts. Overall, these recommendations underscore the importance of collaboration among stakeholders to empower Meranaw women leaders, strengthen communities, and drive positive societal change.



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