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Research Article

To What Extent Are Academic Leaders Empowered To Act In A Family-Managed School In Region XII? An Emancipatory Analysis

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Abstract

Introduction: Family-managed private schools appoint non-family professionals as academic leaders while retaining major decisions within the founding family. However, little is known about these leaders' decision-making authority, particularly in Philippine private schools.

Objective: This study examined the empowerment of academic leaders in family-managed private schools in Region XII, Philippines, focusing on leadership experiences, negotiation of constraints, perceptions of substantive or symbolic authority, and conditions enabling emancipation.

Methods: Using a qualitative emancipatory design, the study drew on Transformational Leadership Theory, Weber's theory of authority, and Emancipatory Critical Theory. Ten non-family academic leaders from five schools were purposively selected. Interviews underwent reflexive thematic analysis using the 5E emancipatory lens (Engage, Educate, Experience, Empower, Enact). Ethical approval was granted by the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (GS-ER-03-26-065).

Results: Six themes captured leadership experiences, including bounded decision spaces, hierarchical approval dependence, family-mediated power, and supportive familial stewardship. Leaders exercised eight forms of agency, including professional dialogue, evidence-based advocacy, strategic accommodation, and principled resistance. Authority was substantive in instruction and faculty supervision, negotiated in shared decisions, constrained in finance, staffing, and policy, and symbolic during overrides. This revealed an Appointment-Empowerment Gap between formal responsibility and actual decision power. Nine enabling conditions emerged, particularly clear decision rights and alignment of authority with accountability.

Conclusions: Empowerment is domain-specific and relational, with family support and control coexisting. The Emergent Emancipatory Model and its Leadership Authority Continuum (symbolic, constrained, negotiated, substantive, emancipated) inform governance reforms through written decision rights, justified overrides, and transparent leadership pathways.

Keywords: Academic leadership, Appointment-Empowerment Gap, decision authority, emancipatory research, family-managed schools, non-family leaders, Philippines, private schools

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1. Introduction

Family-managed private schools form part of basic education in many countries, including the Philippines. In these schools, a founding family holds ownership and major strategic decisions, while appointed professionals such as principals, program heads, and academic coordinators run daily academic work. A formal appointment gives these leaders a title and a set of responsibilities. The appointment alone does not give them authority. Research on family firms shows owners keeping decision power close and confining non-family executives to operational roles (Calabrò et al., 2018; Miller & Le Breton-Miller, 2021). Whether schools follow the same pattern, and how academic leaders experience the arrangement, has received little attention.

Under the Governance of Basic Education Act of 2001, Philippine school heads serve as instructional leaders and managers of their schools (Republic Act No. 9155, 2001). Studies from Mindanao describe this authority as shaped by structural and organizational conditions. Dubalan and Quines (2025) linked the empowering leadership of school heads with teacher job satisfaction in Region XII public schools. Adlawan and Quines (2025) connected instructional leadership with teacher engagement through school climate. Mosal and Base (2025) found administrators in Cagayan de Oro City negotiating authority amid scarce resources and cultural expectations of consensus. In a private school, Tangente (2025) found non-managerial academic heads "leading without a map," relying on passion, protocols, and informal collaboration. Most of these studies used surveys and focused on public schools. Few examined how family ownership shapes the authority of formally appointed leaders. To the authors' knowledge, no recent study in Region XII has applied a critical emancipatory lens to this question.

1.1. Family Ownership and Non-Family Leadership

Family firm research explains why authority in family-managed organizations rarely follows the organizational chart alone. Decisions reflect socioemotional wealth, the family's interest in continuity, identity, and control (Åberg et al., 2024). Informal authority shapes outcomes beyond formal structures (Breuer & Knetsch, 2022), and informal family interaction operates alongside formal governance practice (Gimenez-Jimenez et al., 2025; Hu et al., 2024). Socioemotional priorities shape the risk taking of non-family managers (Ng et al., 2022), while a more balanced distribution of structural power between family and non-family executives improves innovation (Wei & Chen, 2023).

Family involvement also generates support. A stewardship perspective links family firms with altruism and social capital (Azizi et al., 2022), and employees of family firms report stronger perceived organizational caring (Christensen-Salem et al., 2021). Families shape the emotional connection of non-family employees through deliberate management approaches (Hsueh et al., 2023), and human resource management in family firms reflects an interplay of formal and informal practice (Casprini et al., 2024). Studies of professionalization examine non-family managers, external executive hiring, and formal family governance structures (Fabel et al., 2022; Fang et al., 2022; Thakur & Sinha, 2024). Professionalization strengthens the effects of family ownership on financial performance and sustainability reputation (Piyasinchai et al., 2024). This literature rarely examines schools.

1.2. Principal Autonomy and Decision Rights

School leadership research treats autonomy as layered and conditional. School autonomy policies raise principal autonomy and job satisfaction (Horwood et al., 2022), yet principal power meets limits under wider institutional controls (Peck & Lewis-Durham, 2022). Autonomy varies across contexts and decision domains (Wermke et al., 2022) and appears as "controlled autonomy" under funding and governance regimes (Kasa & Ait Si Mhamed, 2023). Accountability structures shape how principals perceive autonomy (Niesche et al., 2023), and a systematic review describes school leader autonomy as multidimensional, formed by decision capacity and external control (Nordholm et al., 2025). Devolution reshapes roles and relationships without guaranteeing freedom (Gavin & Stacey, 2023). Higher-level administrators tighten control when pressure rises (Liljenberg & Samuelsson, 2025), and principals balance accountability against professional autonomy (Ståhlkrantz & Rapp, 2026). Teachers' participation

in decisions also differs by domain, wider in teaching and narrower in organizational matters (Kärner & Jüttler, 2026). Closest to the present study, Gibson and Bailey (2024) showed the line between principalship and governance blurring in international schools where owners control the institution.

1.3. Voice, Participation, and Symbolic Leadership

A second strand of research separates having a voice from having influence. Managers act on employee ideas depending on message quality and peer endorsement (Brykman & Raver, 2023). Voice and social hierarchy shape each other (Pfrombeck et al., 2022), and perceived efficacy, safety, and consequences decide whether employees speak or stay silent (Morrison, 2023). Strategic silence sometimes makes later voice more valued (Parke et al., 2022). Voice has to pass through managerial and organizational processes before reaching implementation (Satterstrom et al., 2024). Participation turns symbolic when leaders seek input after decisions are effectively made (Westphal et al., 2023) or when administrators control the agenda of leadership teams (Stosich, 2023). School governance arrangements sometimes produce illusionary or silencing participation (Hetherington & Forrester, 2025), and the micropolitics of participative decision-making differ across cultures (Or & Berkovich, 2023). These studies frame the central distinction of this article. A leadership role is substantive when professional judgment changes decisions. A role is symbolic when the title carries responsibility without consequential influence.

1.4. Theoretical Lens and Research Questions

Three theories guided the study. Transformational Leadership Theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978) framed the question of whether academic leaders inspire change and shape institutional direction or remain confined to managerial and symbolic roles. Weber's (1947) theory of authority, with its traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal types, guided the analysis of whether power flows through formal positions or through kinship and ownership. Emancipatory Critical Theory, grounded in Habermas's (1971) account of knowledge and human interests, framed the study as an inquiry into power relations and the conditions for autonomy.

A 5E emancipatory lens operationalized this orientation. Engage refers to meaningful participation in governance and decision-making. Educate refers to critical awareness of power relations and the professional knowledge leaders bring to decisions. Experience refers to the lived realities of leaders within family-governed systems. Empower refers to the actual autonomy, trust, and decision authority granted to leaders. Enact refers to the translation of authority into concrete action and change.

Against this background, the study examined the extent to which academic leaders in family-managed private schools in Region XII were empowered to act rather than merely appointed. Four research questions (RQ) guided the inquiry:

RQ1. How do academic leaders describe their experiences of exercising leadership within family-managed schools?
RQ2. How do academic leaders negotiate, navigate, or resist institutional constraints to assert their professional authority?
RQ3. In what ways do academic leaders perceive their roles as substantive or symbolic?
RQ4. What practices, conditions, or structures enable greater leadership emancipation and authentic decision-making among academic leaders?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Design

The study used a qualitative design to examine how academic leaders experienced authority, empowerment, and governance in family-managed schools. The design took the form of an emancipatory analysis, grounded in the critical tradition, which seeks to expose structures of domination and to support more informed and autonomous action (Habermas, 1971). The aim was context-specific

and critically informed insight into leadership empowerment rather than statistical generalization. The 5E lens described in Section 1.4 structured the interpretation of the findings.

2.2. Respondents and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling identified information-rich participants (Campbell et al., 2020). The study covered five family-managed private schools in Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN), Mindanao, Philippines. Two senior non-family leaders were selected from each school, giving ten participants coded P1 to P10. Inclusion criteria required (a) a senior leadership or administrative role in a family-managed basic education institution in Region XII, (b) no membership in the owning family, (c) direct experience in institutional decision-making, and (d) at least three years of service in the institution. Members of the owning family, staff without leadership responsibilities, and personnel with less than three years of service were excluded, as were public schools, schools not managed by a family, and higher education institutions.

2.3. Research Instruments

The researcher served as the primary instrument and used a semi-structured in-depth interview guide aligned with the four research questions (Appendix A). Authorized institutional documents, including organizational charts, policy manuals, school handbooks, and administrative records, provided contextual information on formal governance arrangements.

2.4. Data Collection and Analysis

The Dean of the Graduate School of the University of the Immaculate Conception endorsed the study, and the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee (UIC-REC) granted ethical clearance. Formal request letters secured permission from authorized officials of each school. Participants signed informed consent forms and permitted audio recording. The researcher transcribed the recordings. Participants often code-switched between Filipino and English, and the researcher prepared English renderings of the quoted excerpts.

The data were analyzed through reflexive thematic analysis following six phases (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2021). In the first phase, the researcher read the transcripts repeatedly and noted accounts of autonomy, approval, trust, family influence, and constraint. In the second phase, the researcher generated codes from meaningful segments, attending to differences between formal titles and actual decision authority. In the third phase, related codes were clustered into candidate themes for each research question. The fourth phase reviewed the themes against the coded extracts, the full dataset, and the three theories. The fifth phase defined and named the themes and the forms of agency. The sixth phase produced the analytic narrative, which was then read through the 5E lens. Institutional documents informed the understanding of formal governance arrangements but did not serve as the principal basis of the themes.

Trustworthiness followed Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility rested on probing questions, cross-case comparison, and member checking. Transferability rested on descriptions of the context, the participants, and the decision domains. Dependability rested on a consistent interview guide and an audit trail of interview records, coding frameworks, analytic notes, and theme development records. Confirmability rested on reflexive memos, decision records, and verbatim excerpts linking evidence to interpretation.

The researcher acted as interviewer, transcriber, and analyst. Reflexive notes recorded personal assumptions and theoretical commitments, and the analysis guarded against portraying participants only as subjects of constraint. Interpretations were checked against participants' accounts so the critical reading remained accountable to their voices.

2.5. Ethical Considerations

The study complied with the ethical standards of the University of the Immaculate Conception Graduate School and the UIC-REC GS-ER-03-0625 on May 2, 2026. Participants received information

on the purpose, procedures, voluntary nature of participation, and the right to withdraw without consequence. Because participants discussed family owners, disagreements, and limits on their authority, names of participants, family members, and institutions were removed from transcripts and reports. This article reports participant codes only and omits position titles linked to quotes to reduce the risk of identification. Audio recordings and transcripts were stored securely and used for academic purposes only.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Academic Leaders' Experiences of Exercising Leadership within Family-Managed Schools

Six essential themes described how academic leaders experienced their authority (Table 2).

Table 1. Academic leaders' experiences of exercising leadership within family-managed schools.

Essential theme	Core ideas	Critical emancipatory interpretation
Exercising authority within bounded decision spaces	Managing routine departmental and campus concerns, supervising faculty, implementing instruction, resolving operational issues, exercising authority only within prescribed areas	Leadership authority is substantive but territorially bounded. Appointment provides a legitimate decision space, but this space narrows when decisions intersect with institutional policy, finance, staffing, or ownership interests.
Leading under hierarchical approval dependence	Seeking approval before implementation, consulting owners or administrators, waiting for affirmation, referring major decisions upward, accepting final approval above the academic leader	Formal leadership exists inside an approval-dependent governance structure. Authority to initiate does not necessarily include authority to finalize.
Experiencing the authority-responsibility tension	Being accountable for departments while lacking final authority implementing decisions made elsewhere carrying responsibility for outcomes experiencing uncertainty over the limits of authority	The data reveal an Appointment–Empowerment Gap, particularly when responsibility is delegated downward while decisive authority remains upward.
Navigating family-mediated institutional power	Considering owners' preferences, anticipating management reactions, accommodating family involvement, observing informal influence, recognizing ownership as ultimate authority	Leadership practice is shaped not merely by the organizational chart but by proprietary power, making professional authority contingent on the family governance context..
Experiencing supportive familial stewardship	Receiving material support. experiencing kindness and inclusion, obtaining resources, perceiving management as supportive, feeling treated as part of the institutional family	Family involvement does not operate exclusively as domination. It can generate relational capital, institutional support, and belonging, creating a counter-pattern to purely restrictive interpretations.
Reconciling professional judgment with institutional priorities	Protecting academic quality, balancing quality and enrollment concerns, adhering to standards, considering organizational sustainability, adjusting proposals	Academic leaders occupy a mediating position between professional values and ownership priorities, requiring continuous negotiation between educational judgment and institutional interests.

3.1.1 Exercising authority within bounded decision spaces.

Leaders held real authority over instruction, faculty supervision, and routine operations. One leader explained: "Since we are the ones checking their WLPs and curriculum guides, we are also the ones who approve the performance tasks, quizzes, and examinations that they give" (P10). Another preferred to settle matters locally: "If I can manage the issue here, I will solve the issue here" (P8). This space narrowed when matters touched finance, policy, or staffing:

> Financial matters, particularly budget proposals, are areas in which we are not really involved because the school is family-owned. When activities involve money, we really have to ask for their approval. (P10)

3.1.2 Leading under hierarchical approval dependence.

Initiatives passed through a chain of authorization: "A letter must first be submitted for approval, then it goes through the program director and afterward to the president before implementation" (P3).

The capacity to initiate did not include the capacity to finalize. As one leader put the experience, "I do not have enough authority to simply implement something because there is a constraint requiring me to ask first" (P9).

3.1.3. Experiencing the authority-responsibility tension.

Leaders remained accountable for outcomes shaped by decisions made elsewhere:

> There are situations in which I genuinely manage the department, yet my authority feels reduced when decisions are imposed without sufficient consultation. I still have to explain and implement those decisions to the teachers even when I do not fully support them. (P1)

3.1.4. Navigating family-mediated institutional power.

Ownership acted as an ultimate source of authority, often anticipated rather than exercised. One leader noted, "I can still decide, but sometimes I first consider whether my decision is aligned with what the administration wants" (P5). Another described the outcome of disagreement: "Eventually, somebody has to let go of the disagreement, and in our experience, that is usually us rather than the owners" (P2).

3.1.5. Experiencing supportive familial stewardship.

Family involvement also produced resources, care, and belonging. Leaders described owners as "extremely supportive" (P9), a faculty scholarship for master's studies (P7), and treatment that made them feel "part of the family" (P4). *Reconciling professional judgment with institutional priorities.* Leaders mediated between academic quality and institutional concerns such as enrollment and budget. When requested funds were denied, "we either revise the plan, look for another way to implement it, or postpone it" (P9).

These experiences match the domain-specific and controlled autonomy described in school leadership research (Kasa & Ait Si Mhamed, 2023; Nordholm et al., 2025; Wermke et al., 2022). They also echo family firm studies in which owners retain core decisions and informal authority shapes outcomes (Breuer & Knetsch, 2022; Calabrò et al., 2018). The authority-responsibility tension mirrors findings on shared responsibility, where higher levels tighten control under pressure (Liljenberg & Samuelsson, 2025), and on principals balancing accountability against autonomy (Ståhlkrantz & Rapp, 2026). The coexistence of support and control stands out. Stewardship research explains the care and resources leaders received (Azizi et al., 2022; Christensen-Salem et al., 2021), while socioemotional wealth explains the family's retention of financial and strategic control (Åberg et al., 2024). Through Weber's (1947) lens, rational-legal authority attached to positions coexisted with traditional authority rooted in ownership and kinship, and the latter prevailed in high-stakes matters.

3.2. Ways Academic Leaders Negotiate, Navigate, or Resist Constraints to Assert Professional Authority

Leaders were not passive. Eight themes, each linked to a form of agency, described how they asserted professional authority (Table 3).

Table 2. Ways academic leaders negotiate, navigate, or resist constraints to assert professional authority.

Essential theme	Core ideas	Form of agency	Emancipatory interpretation
Negotiating through professional dialogue	Explaining recommendations, communicating consequences, requesting reconsideration	Negotiated	Leaders convert professional knowledge into influence even when they lack final decision rights.
Mobilizing expertise and evidence	Technical explanations, professional standards, student consequences, policy grounding	Epistemic	Expertise becomes an alternative source of power capable of counterbalancing positional ownership authority.
Working through legitimate institutional channels	Meetings, academic councils, operational plans, written proposals	Procedural	Leaders claim authority by using the institution's own formal structures and procedures.
Building collective professional voice	Consulting teachers, representing departmental decisions, mobilizing stakeholders	Collective	Individual authority is strengthened when professional claims become collective rather than personal.
Practicing strategic accommodation	Following decisions after disagreement, choosing when to insist accepting boundaries, maintaining working relationships	Accommodative	Compliance is not always passivity; it can be a deliberate strategy for preserving influence and institutional relationships.
Creating alternative decision pathways	Mobilizing parents/PTCA, finding legitimate means to address needs, solving problems locally	Adaptive	Leaders create usable decision space when formal pathways are slow or constrained.

Essential theme	Core ideas	Form of agency	Emancipatory interpretation
Protecting professional standards despite override	Continuing to uphold standards, maintaining quality expectations, refusing to abandon professional principles persisting after rejected recommendations	Resistant	Resistance often appears as principled persistence rather than direct confrontation.
Expanding trust through demonstrated competence	Performing well, proving decision quality, building credibility, earning management confidence	Developmental	Authority is partially negotiated through accumulated trust, making empowerment relational rather than solely positional.

3.2.1. Negotiated and epistemic agency.

Leaders explained consequences and grounded proposals in evidence and policy. "I explain what may happen to the students if something is not implemented and what may happen if we proceed with it" (P3). Safety and standards served as leverage: "When there is a problem with the wiring, it has to be addressed because it concerns safety" (P4). *Procedural and collective agency.* Leaders used operational plans, written proposals, and academic councils. One leader consulted teachers before council meetings: "What I present to the Academic Council represents the decision or position developed within our department" (P1). Another kept the department's perspective in view: "Even if I know that the final approval is not mine, I still make sure that the perspective of my department is heard" (P9).

3.2.2. Accommodative and adaptive agency.

Leaders chose when to insist and when to yield. "You need to be submissive because no matter how much you want something, if you keep insisting and they still do not want it, there is nothing more you can do" (P6). Others found alternative routes: "If they cannot approve it immediately, sir, I would just provide another option" (P4). Parents and the parent-teacher community association served as an additional source of support (P8). *Resistant and developmental agency.* Some leaders held firm on standards: "They may be the ones to bend the rules, but I will not be the one to do so" (P2). Demonstrated competence widened discretion over time. One leader reported raising enrollment from "a little over fifty students" to "more than 280" (P7), and another observed, "I think they trust me when it comes to research" (P2).

These strategies show agency without full decision rights. Persuasive framing and issue-selling (Brykman & Raver, 2023; Lauche & Erez, 2023) and the use of expertise against positional power (Coll et al., 2024) describe the negotiated and epistemic forms. Strategic accommodation resembles strategic silence, which preserves the value of later voice (Parke et al., 2022), and the weighing of voice risks (Goel et al., 2024). Adaptive pathways parallel bricolage leadership (Lowery et al., 2023), and principled persistence mirrors teachers' principled resistance to curricular control (Huddleston et al., 2025). Collective voice reflects the stabilizing role of collective leadership (Eckert et al., 2024). Developmental agency fits evidence that managers delegate more to employees with task-specific knowledge (Van Triest & Williams, 2024). In transformational terms, leaders developed teachers, initiated programs, and defended quality. The reach of this influence depended on the decision space granted to them.

3.3. Academic Leaders' Perceptions of their Roles as Substantive or Symbolic

Leaders did not describe their roles as wholly substantive or wholly symbolic. Their position on a continuum shifted with the decision domain (Table 4).

Table 3. Academic leaders' perceptions of their roles as substantive or symbolic.

Essential theme	Manifestation	Position on the continuum	Emancipatory meaning
Substantive authority in professional domains	Supervising instruction, managing faculty, implementing programs, resolving routine problems	Substantive	Professional authority is real where leaders possess recognized expertise and delegated jurisdiction.
Negotiated authority in shared decisions	Recommending, defending proposals, consulting management, participating before approval	Negotiated	Leadership has influence but not decisional sovereignty.
Constrained authority in high-stakes decisions	Major staffing, policy, finance, and strategic directions requiring approval	Constrained	Leadership title carries responsibility but decision rights contract at higher organizational stakes.
Symbolic authority during override or post hoc implementation	Implementing decisions made elsewhere, rejected recommendations, approval needed for matters within one's role	Symbolic	Formal recognition becomes detached from meaningful influence.

Essential theme	Manifestation	Position on the continuum	Emancipatory meaning
Fluid authority across decision domains	Being substantive in routine operations but constrained or symbolic in institutional decisions	Hybrid, domain-specific	Empowerment is not a stable trait of a person or position; it changes according to the decision domain..
Internalized conditionality of leadership	Anticipating whether management will approve, modifying conduct before consultation, accepting owner prerogative	Conditioned agency	Power can operate before an explicit veto by shaping what leaders believe is possible to propose or implement

Substantive authority in professional domains covered instructional supervision, faculty management, and academic planning: "For academic planning and the curriculum pre-presentation, I am the one who prepares and shapes the documents" (P5). Negotiated authority in shared decisions meant recommending and defending proposals before higher officials: "If the proposal is acceptable and you are able to defend it, then it can proceed. If it is not accepted, then perhaps you have to wait" (P7). Constrained authority in high-stakes decisions applied to budget, policy, and staffing: "Once a matter involves an additional budget, a school-wide policy, or something outside the approved operational plan, I have to elevate it for approval" (P1).

Symbolic authority during override or post hoc implementation emerged when decisions arrived ready-made. One leader recalled a uniform change announced at the last minute, which leaders then had to communicate and implement (P10). Another described the effect of unexplained rejection:

> This can create trust issues or even self-doubt on the part of the leader when recommendations are rejected, especially when there is no proper justification and the only reason appears to be that the owner does not want the proposal. (P2)

The same leader rejected the label of a ceremonial role within the research office, showing *fluid authority across decision domains*. *Internalized conditionality* completed the pattern. Leaders learned to pre-screen their proposals: "If one proposal was not approved, you consider whether another one might have a better chance of being accepted" (P2). Others treated the operational plan as a "golden rule" and drafted the plan with care before submission (P1).

Together these themes reveal an Appointment-Empowerment Gap, the distance between the responsibility attached to a formal appointment and the decision power available to the appointee. The symbolic end of the continuum mirrors the decoupling of participation from decisions in strategic management (Westphal et al., 2023) and in instructional leadership teams (Stosich, 2023). Unexplained rejection also illustrates why voice needs a route to implementation before participation feels meaningful (Satterstrom et al., 2024). Override after delegation resembles de-delegation, in which granted powers are later curtailed (Thatcher et al., 2023). Internalized conditionality shows power operating before any veto. Leaders anticipated refusal and adjusted proposals, a pattern consistent with research on hierarchy and silence (Morrison, 2023; Pfrombeck et al., 2022). The domain-specific variation supports a view of empowerment as a property of decisions rather than of persons or positions (Kärner & Jüttler, 2026; Wermke et al., 2022).

3.4. Practices, Conditions, and Structures Enabling Greater Leadership Emancipation

Nine themes identified the practices, conditions, and structures enabling greater emancipation. Each theme maps onto a dimension of the 5E lens (Table 5)

Table 4. Practices, conditions, and structures enabling greater leadership emancipation.

Essential theme	5E dimension	Core practices and structures	Transformative function
Institutionalizing clear decision rights	Enact	Written delegation, defined domains, explicit limits, final authority on routine matters	Converts revocable discretion into protected authority

Essential theme	5E dimension	Core practices and structures	Transformative function
Aligning authority with accountability	Empower	Matching leadership responsibilities with actual decision rights, allowing leaders to act within assigned functions	Reduces responsibility without power and closes the Appointment-Empowerment Gap
Professionalizing family-school governance boundaries	Enact	Separating ownership and academic functions, preventing informal bypassing, using official positions and formal meetings	Shifts decisions from kinship toward role-based governance
Institutionalizing consultation and justified override	Enact	Consultation before reversal, professional justification, documented reasons, feedback mechanisms	Prevents arbitrary override and makes power deliberative and accountable
Cultivating trust-based delegation	Empower	Allowing routine decisions without repeated approval, trust in expertise, providing implementation space	Transforms trust from interpersonal goodwill into operational autonomy
Strengthening participatory governance	Engage	Functional councils, departmental consultation, teacher and stakeholder voice	Broadens decision-making from concentrated authority toward distributed professional voice
Expanding professional leadership pathways	Empower	Opening senior positions to qualified non-family members	Challenges kinship-based ceilings
Building professional capacity and resources	Educate	Leadership development, training, benchmarking, technical resources	Ensures empowerment is accompanied by competence and implementation capacity
Protecting open dialogue and dissent	Engage	Communication channels, freedom to question, disagreement without penalty	Creates conditions for critical agency rather than compliant participation

Enact conditions turned informal discretion into protected authority. Leaders called for written job descriptions: "Once a role is assigned, the person should know exactly what belongs to that role and what does not" (P5). They also called for justified override:

> A program head who is assigned to manage a department should be allowed to exercise responsibilities within that approved area. If management needs to reverse the program head's decision, consultation should first take place and the reversal should have a clear professional reason. (P1)

Professionalized boundaries meant authority tied to positions rather than kinship, and reporting lines respected rather than bypassed (P7). *Empower* conditions aligned authority with accountability and converted trust into discretion: "The greatest support that could strengthen our academic leadership is for management to give us greater trust in governing the school" (P10). Leaders also hoped for open pathways to senior posts: "I hope that a teacher or one of the professional leaders among us can eventually occupy an administrative position" (P10). *Engage* conditions included functional councils and consultation. In one school, administrators asked each leader whether they agreed or disagreed with a proposed action and why (P9). Dialogue also needed protection, since unresolved disagreement sometimes "no longer feels purely professional and begins to feel personal" (P8). *Educate* conditions included leadership development, training, and benchmarking (P1; P6).

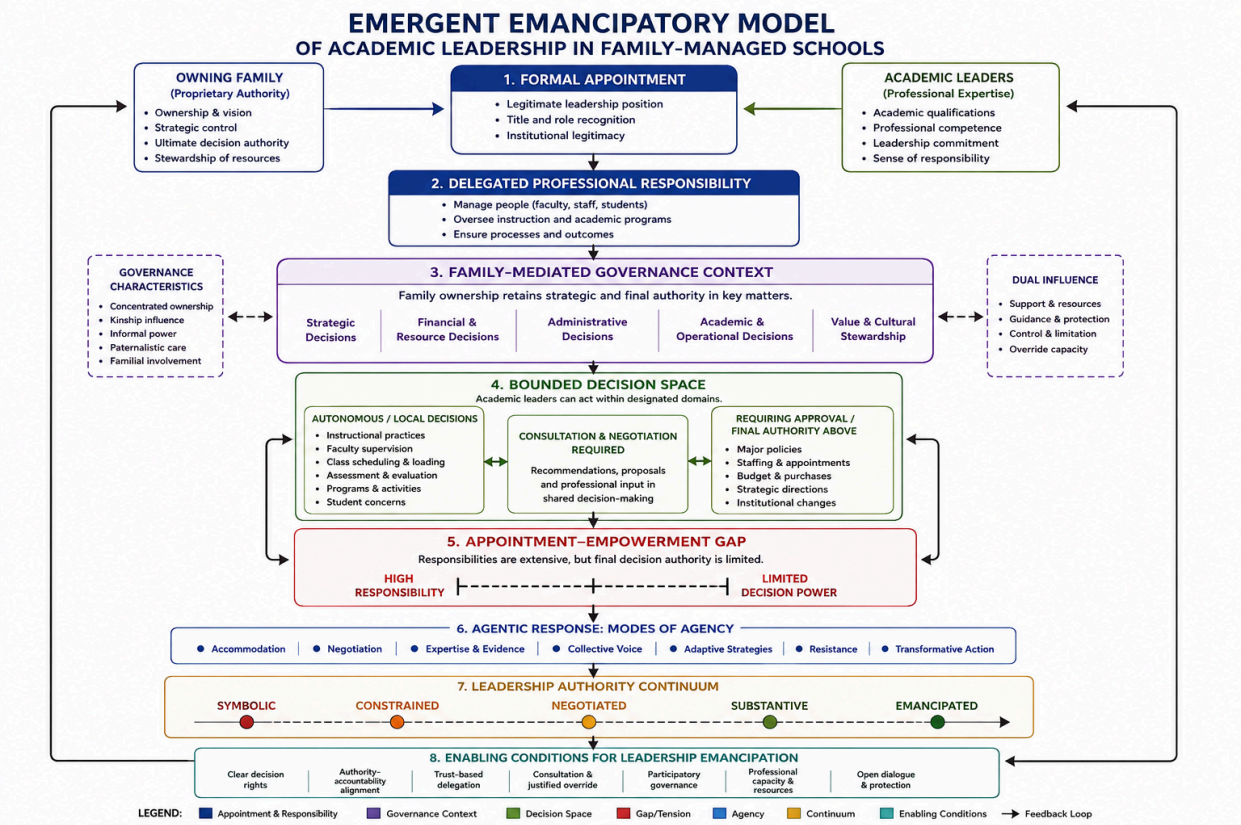
These conditions find support across several literatures. Delegation grows when managers trust employee knowledge and worry less about loss of control (Van Triest & Williams, 2024). Family firms professionalize through external executive recruitment, non-family managers, formal governance structures, and management tools bridging family and managerial views (Fabel et al., 2022; Fang et al., 2022; Leotta et al., 2023; Thakur & Sinha, 2024). A family constitution clarifies the relation between family and organizational decisions (Wieszt et al., 2025). Participation in school decisions raises commitment (Abonyi, 2024), yet participation without influence becomes illusionary (Hetherington & Forrester, 2025). Psychological empowerment supports teacher voice, while power distance weakens the

link between empowerment and speaking up (Alazmi, 2026). Protected dialogue therefore matters most in hierarchical settings.

3.5. Emergent Emancipatory Model

Figure 1 integrates the findings into the Emergent Emancipatory Model of Academic Leadership in Family-Managed Schools. The model reads from top to bottom. The owning family (proprietary authority) and academic leaders (professional expertise) converge in (1) formal appointment, which confers positional legitimacy, and (2) delegated professional responsibility. Both operate within (3) a family-mediated governance context. The context shapes (4) a bounded decision space with three zones: autonomous or local decisions, decisions requiring consultation and negotiation, and decisions requiring approval from above. Where responsibility exceeds decision power, (5) the Appointment-Empowerment Gap appears. Six contradictions sustain the gap: responsibility versus authority, expertise versus ownership, participation versus influence, trust versus control, support versus control, and formal versus informal governance. Anticipatory constraint deepens the gap, as leaders ask whether management will approve before proposing. Leaders respond through (6) modes of agency, which place them at positions on (7) the Leadership Authority Continuum: symbolic, constrained, negotiated, substantive, and emancipated. (8) Enabling conditions move leadership toward the emancipated end.

Figure 1. Emergent Emancipatory Model of Academic Leadership in Family-Managed Schools.



Feedback arrows signal a dynamic process. Demonstrated competence builds trust, trust widens delegation, and wider delegation strengthens substantive leadership. Conflict, crises, or changes in family leadership reverse the movement. The continuum describes positions of authority across decision domains, not fixed categories of leaders. One leader holds substantive authority in instruction and constrained authority in finance at the same time.

3.6. Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings extend each guiding theory. For Transformational Leadership Theory, leaders inspired and developed teachers, yet transformational influence depended on structural decision space. For Weber's theory, family-managed schools combined rational-legal and traditional authority, and traditional authority prevailed in high-stakes domains. For Emancipatory Critical Theory, power operated through approval chains and through anticipation, shaping what leaders believed possible to propose. The study also carries non-family executive research from family firms (Fang et al., 2022; Wei & Chen, 2023) into schools, and adds a domain-specific continuum to the school autonomy literature (Nordholm et al., 2025).

For practice, owners and boards of family-managed schools are advised to write down decision rights for each leadership position, separate ownership functions from academic functions, consult leaders before reversing their decisions, and document the reasons for any override. Routine professional matters need final authority at the level of the academic leader. Senior positions need transparent criteria open to qualified non-family professionals. Leadership preparation programs need content on governance relationships, policy literacy, and evidence-based negotiation, so leaders use expanded authority responsibly.

Two further implications follow. First, schools and supervisors need to separate participation as presence from participation as influence. Attendance in councils and planning sessions counts as empowerment only when professional input modifies proposals or decisions. Second, trust needs an operational form. Demonstrated competence should translate into wider decision space, and supervision should serve as a developmental process expanding responsible agency rather than a check on compliance. Family-managed schools also face intergenerational continuity. Clear professional systems and a pool of capable non-family leaders support continuity while preserving family stewardship.

4. Conclusion

The study examined the extent to which academic leaders in family-managed private schools in Region XII were empowered to act. For RQ1, leaders exercised real authority within bounded domains, depended on hierarchical approval beyond those domains, and experienced family involvement as both support and control. For RQ2, leaders asserted authority through dialogue, expertise and evidence, institutional channels, collective voice, strategic accommodation, alternative pathways, principled resistance, and demonstrated competence. For RQ3, leaders perceived their roles as substantive, negotiated, constrained, or symbolic depending on the decision domain, revealing an Appointment-Empowerment Gap. For RQ4, emancipation depended on clear decision rights, authority-accountability alignment, professionalized governance boundaries, consultation and justified override, trust-based delegation, participatory governance, open leadership pathways, professional capacity, and protected dialogue.

Leadership emancipation in family-managed schools does not require the removal of family stewardship. Emancipation requires protected, accountable, and consequential decision space for professional leaders. The Emergent Emancipatory Model offers owners, leaders, and researchers a framework for diagnosing and closing the gap between appointment and empowerment.

5. Limitations of the Study

Several limitations qualify the findings. First, the study drew on ten non-family leaders from five schools in one region, which limits transferability to other settings. Second, the study did not include family owners, whose perspectives on delegation and override remain unexamined. Third, interviews addressed sensitive matters of power and family authority, and participants working under owner control may have offered partial or guarded accounts. Fourth, one researcher conducted the coding and interpretation, and the emancipatory lens shaped the analysis, although reflexive memos, member checking, and an audit trail reduced this risk. Fifth, institutional documents informed context only, and translation from code-switched Filipino and English carries a risk of lost nuance.

Future studies could address these limits. Comparative and multiple-case designs across school sizes, ownership structures, and levels would test whether the themes hold elsewhere.

Longitudinal studies would trace movement along the continuum as trust and tenure change. Studies including both family and non-family leaders would clarify how each group interprets professional authority. Researchers could also develop measures of substantive versus symbolic authority and test the enabling conditions through intervention studies.

6. Supplementary Details

6.1. Supplementary Materials & Data availability statement:
Interview transcripts are not publicly available to protect participant and institutional confidentiality. De-identified excerpts are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request, subject to UIC-REC conditions.

6.2. Author Contributions:
This journal uses the Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT) to recognize individual author contributions, reduce authorship disputes, and facilitate collaboration. The corresponding author will be responsible for all correspondence related to the paper and must ensure that the other authors are included in the communication regarding submission, revision, and publication processes. We encourage authors to include a statement in the paper that shares and accurately describes each author's contribution. To be eligible for authorship, each individual must have contributed to at least one of the following: conceptualization, methodology, formal analysis, or investigation, as well as at least one aspect of writing (either original draft preparation or writing reviews and editing).

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
Virgil John D. Bogaoan	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Danilo G. Baradillo	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

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This research received no external funding.

6.4. Institutional Review Board Statement
The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of the Immaculate Conception and approved by the University of the Immaculate Conception Research Ethics Committee GS-ER-03-0625 on May 2, 2026.

6.5. Informed Consent Statement:
Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

6.6. Conflicts of Interest:
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

6.7. Disclosure Statement:
The authors use generative AI in improving the language quality of the manuscript and generating the Emergent Emancipatory Model of Academic Leadership in Family-Managed Schools.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide for Academic Leaders

Research Title: "To What Extent Are Academic Leaders Empowered to Act in a Family-Managed School in Region XII? An Emancipatory Analysis."

Researcher: Virgil John D. Bogaoan
Duration: 45–60 minutes

I. Preparation of the Interview Equipment

• Preparation of interview materials such as audio recorder, notebook, and consent forms.
• Ensure the audio recorder is functioning properly before the interview begins.
• Prepare backup materials in case of technical difficulties.

II. Introduction

Good day. I am delighted to have you with me for this interview. My name is *Virgil John D. Bogaoan***,** a doctoral student at the University of the Immaculate Conception in Davao City, currently pursuing a Doctor of Philosophy in Education, major in Educational Leadership. This interview forms part of my dissertation titled *"To What Extent Are Academic Leaders Empowered to Act in a Family-Managed School in Region XII? An Emancipatory Analysis."*

This in-depth interview aims to explore the experiences of academic leaders working within family-managed schools, particularly how they exercise leadership, navigate institutional constraints, and participate in decision-making processes. The study seeks to understand how academic leaders negotiate their professional authority within governance systems where ownership and strategic control may be concentrated within a founding family. Furthermore, the interview will explore how academic leaders perceive their roles—whether as substantive leadership positions with genuine authority or symbolic roles with limited decision-making power. Finally, the study aims to identify conditions, practices, and organizational structures that may enable greater leadership emancipation and authentic participation in institutional governance.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your time, insights, and reflections are greatly appreciated and will contribute significantly to a deeper understanding of leadership empowerment and governance dynamics in family-managed educational institutions.

Please be assured that your identity will remain strictly confidential throughout the research process. Only a pseudonym or first name will be used in the interview transcript and related documentation. This interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. With your permission, the conversation will be audio-recorded solely for transcription and analytical purposes.

Your participation poses no known risks, and you may choose to skip any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without any obligation to explain. If at any point you need clarification about the questions or the research process, please feel free to ask.

Before we begin, let me clarify a key concept relevant to this study:

Leadership Emancipation.

Leadership emancipation refers to the extent to which academic leaders are able to exercise authentic professional authority, critical agency, and meaningful participation in institutional decision-making processes. Drawing from emancipatory leadership perspectives, this concept emphasizes the importance of enabling leaders not only to occupy formal positions but also to actively influence policies, academic directions, and institutional governance. In family-managed schools, leadership emancipation involves understanding how academic leaders interpret and respond to organizational power structures, particularly where family ownership may shape strategic decisions and leadership autonomy. In this study, leadership emancipation describes the process through which academic leaders navigate, negotiate, and potentially transform governance structures to exercise substantive leadership within their institutions.

With that, may we now begin the interview?

Interview Guide

Time of Interview : _____
Date : _____
Interviewee (Name optional) : _____
Code : _____
Division / Assignment : _____
Age : _____
Gender : _____
Years as Education Program Supervisor : _____

II. Interview Proper

Research Question	Main Questions	Probing Questions
1. How do academic leaders describe their experiences of exercising leadership within family-managed schools?	1.1 Can you describe your professional background and how you became an academic leader in your institution?	1.1.1. What motivated you to pursue a leadership role in your institution?
		1.1.2. What professional experiences prepared you for your current leadership position?
		1.1.3. What leadership responsibilities did you expect when you assumed the role?
		1.1.4. How did your expectations compare with your actual experiences as an academic leader?
		1.1.5. How does the governance structure of the institution influence your leadership role?
	1.2 What were your experiences when you first assumed your leadership position in a family-managed school?	1.2.1. What were your initial impressions about leadership within the institution?
		1.2.2. How did faculty members and administrators respond to your leadership?
		1.2.3. How did family members involved in the school interact with academic leaders?
		1.2.4. Were there expectations or limitations that shaped how you exercised leadership?
		1.2.5. How did these early experiences influence your leadership approach?
	1.3 What leadership responsibilities do you commonly perform in your role as an academic leader?	1.3.1. How do you contribute to academic decision-making in the institution?
		1.3.2. What role do you play in curriculum implementation and academic planning?
		1.3.3. How do you guide faculty members and support instructional improvement?
		1.3.4. How do you participate in institutional planning or policy discussions?
		1.3.5. Can you describe examples where you exercised leadership in addressing academic issues?
	1.4 How are leadership roles and decision-making processes carried out in your institution?	1.4.1. Who are typically involved in major academic decisions in the institution?

		1.4.2. How are academic policies or programs usually developed?
		1.4.3. What role do academic leaders play in institutional governance?
		1.4.4. How are decisions communicated to faculty members and stakeholders?
		1.4.5. How does the involvement of family members influence leadership practices?
2. How do academic leaders negotiate, navigate, or resist constraints to assert their professional authority in family-managed schools?	2.1 Have you experienced challenges or constraints when exercising leadership in your institution?	2.1.1. What types of limitations do you encounter in decision-making?
		2.1.2. Are there situations where approval from family management is required?
		2.1.3. How do these constraints affect your leadership responsibilities?
		2.1.4. How do faculty members respond to these leadership limitations?
		2.1.5. How do these challenges influence your motivation or leadership practice?
	2.2 How do you navigate or respond to these leadership constraints?	2.2.1. What strategies do you use to negotiate decisions with family management?
		2.2.2. How do you communicate your professional perspectives when disagreements arise?
		2.2.3. How do you balance institutional expectations with academic leadership responsibilities?
		2.2.4. Can you describe situations where you had to assert your professional authority?
		2.2.5. What lessons have you learned from navigating these leadership challenges?
	2.3 How do academic leaders collaborate with administrators and family owners in managing the institution?	2.3.1. How are academic leaders involved in institutional planning and governance?
		2.3.2. What forms of communication exist between academic leaders and school owners?
		2.3.3. How are disagreements or conflicts usually resolved?

		2.3.4. What practices encourage cooperation between professional leaders and family management?
		2.3.5. How does this collaboration affect your ability to lead effectively?
3. In what ways do academic leaders perceive their roles as substantive or symbolic within family-managed schools?	3.1 How do you perceive the authority associated with your leadership position?	3.1.1. To what extent can you make independent decisions in your role?
		3.1.2. What types of decisions are fully within your authority?
		3.1.3. Which decisions require approval from higher authorities or family management?
		3.1.4. How do faculty members perceive your leadership authority?
		3.1.5. How does the leadership structure influence your ability to implement initiatives?
	3.2 Can you describe situations where your leadership role felt substantive or symbolic?	3.2.1. Can you recall a situation where your leadership had a strong influence on institutional decisions?
		3.2.2. What factors allowed you to exercise meaningful leadership in that situation?
		3.2.3. Can you describe instances where your leadership role felt limited or ceremonial?
		3.2.4. How did these experiences affect your professional identity as a leader?
		3.2.5. How did faculty members respond to such situations?
4. What practices, conditions, or structures enable greater leadership emancipation and authentic decision-making among academic leaders?	4.1 What institutional practices support academic leaders' participation in decision-making?	4.1.1. What governance structures allow academic leaders to participate in institutional decisions?
		4.1.2. How are academic leaders involved in strategic planning processes?
		4.1.3. How are faculty members included in academic discussions or policy development?
		4.1.4. What leadership practices encourage collaboration among administrators and academic leaders?
		4.1.5. How does institutional culture support leadership participation?

4.2 What conditions could strengthen leadership empowerment in your institution?	4.2.1. What policies could improve leadership autonomy among academic leaders?
	4.2.2. What governance structures would support shared decision-making?
	4.2.3. How can institutions balance family ownership with professional leadership?
	4.2.4. What support systems could strengthen academic leadership?
	4.2.5. What recommendations would you propose to enhance leadership empowerment in family-managed schools?

III. Closing Statement

Thank you very much for sharing your experiences and insights during this interview. Your participation has contributed significantly to the success of this research. Your perspectives are valuable in helping deepen the understanding of how academic leaders experience and exercise leadership within family-managed schools in Region XII, particularly in relation to leadership autonomy, decision-making authority, and institutional governance.

The information you shared will help illuminate how academic leaders navigate organizational structures, negotiate constraints, and assert professional leadership within institutions where family ownership plays a significant role in governance. Your reflections will contribute to a better understanding of the conditions that either limit or enable leadership empowerment and authentic participation in academic decision-making.

Upon completion of this study, the findings may be presented in academic conferences, research forums, and scholarly publications. The results may also inform leadership development initiatives and governance practices in private and family-managed educational institutions, particularly in strengthening professional leadership and participatory decision-making structures.

Once again, thank you for your time and valuable contribution to this research.