
Superior Responsibility: Knowledge and Level of Acceptance of Heads of Government Agencies in Northern Samar, Philippines

Daisy Lily Moscare-Balanquit

College of Business Administration, University of Eastern Philippines

ABSTRACT

Superior command responsibility is commonly understood as an approach into making an individual in position of power or higher rank accountable. The purpose of this research is to find out the knowledge and level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility of the heads of government agencies in the Province of Northern Samar and to determine if significant relationship exists between the knowledge and level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility. Survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview were used for the conduct of this study. The researcher collected the quantitative and qualitative data concurrently and analyzed the two data sets separately. The result disclosed as to knowledge of the doctrine, a “much knowledgeable” rating for the entire sample and for each group; as to level of acceptance of the doctrine a “much acceptable” rating for the entire sample and a rating of “much acceptable” for Group A and “acceptable” for Group B; as to test of relationship between knowledge and level of acceptance of the doctrine, a “significant relationship” resulted for group A while “insignificant relationship” resulted in group B. Local chief executives having lower level of acceptance when it comes to taking on responsibility for the actions of subordinates suggests a need for high ethical value formation.

Keywords: *doctrine of superior responsibility, command responsibility, knowledge, acceptance, head of government agencies, leadership, governance.*

INTRODUCTION

A government that has ethics and accountability mechanism would get the trust of the people. In the 2014 report of Transparency International, the Philippines ranked 85th out of the 175 countries surveyed as to public perceptions on how corrupt their public sector is (Corruption Perceptions Index: Results, 2014). One form of mechanism to ensure high standard of ethics and accountability is the adherence to the doctrine of superior responsibility also known as command responsibility.

Political commitment to really make a change plays an important role to address the problem on deteriorating trust of the people on the government. Hence, policy pronouncements and effective implementation of policy are a must. One such policy is the institutionalization of the doctrine of command responsibility in the executive order issued by former Philippine President, Fidel V. Ramos (Executive Order No. 226, 1995). The researcher hypothesizes that respondents' knowledge on superior or command responsibility would not be significantly related to acceptance of the doctrine, thus, a leader knowledgeable on the legalities and rules on superior responsibility will not take liability for the actions of his subordinates. This study is an attempt to delineate the major empirical dimensions, using the knowledge of the

respondents and the level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility of heads of government agencies in Northern Samar, Philippines.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to:

1. Determine the respondents' knowledge of the doctrine of superior responsibility;
2. Determine the respondents' level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility;
3. Find out if significant relationship between the knowledge and the level of acceptance of the respondents of the doctrine of superior responsibility exists;

METHODOLOGY

Survey questionnaire and a semi-structured interview schedule were used for the conduct of this study. The quantitative and qualitative data concurrently collected on February 2016 were analyzed in two data sets separately. The results were merged during interpretation. During structured interview, follow-up questions based on the answers of the respondent in the questionnaire were asked. The answers were documented.

The questionnaire is composed of two parts. The first part measured the respondents' knowledge on the doctrine of superior responsibility by answering true or false to ten (10) questions. The number of correct answers were tallied. The second part measured the respondents' level of acceptance of the doctrine. Ten (10) indicators were asked. The respondents rated each indicator using a scale of 1 to 5, with 5 as very much acceptable; 4, much acceptable; 3, acceptable; 2, less acceptable; and 1, not acceptable.

The instrument was subjected to validation and pretesting. Homogeneous purposive sampling was made focusing on those who can best answer the research questions, mindful of the parameter set as to the kind of government office, respondent's rank and number of subordinates. A retrieval rate of 93.75% was achieved. After gathering the data, these were grouped into two: Group A for head of executive agencies or appointed heads of government agencies in the province of Northern Samar, and Group B for heads of Local Government Unit (LGU) or elected heads of offices. The categorization was made due to apparent difference in the assumption to office. Also, Group B, or LGU heads, manage more number of employees.

The data gathered were statistically treated, tabulated and interpreted. Mean and weighted mean were employed to analyze the knowledge and level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility of the respondents. Linear regression was used to find out if there is significant relationship between knowledge and the level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Respondents' Knowledge of the Doctrine of Superior Responsibility

Respondents' knowledge of the doctrine of superior responsibility was measured using test type questions. Table 1 exhibits the frequency distribution of the number of respondents who

got the correct answers per knowledge indicator. The respondents got an overall rating of 7.44 with a descriptive rating of “much knowledgeable”. Out of ten questions, respondents from group A got a grand mean score of 7.75 while Group B got a grand mean score of 7.07. Both groups achieved a descriptive rating of “much knowledgeable”. The results show that heads of government agencies in Northern Samar possess considerable knowledge on superior responsibility. It can be inferred that the doctrine of superior responsibility was shared, documented, categorized, codified, and was transmitted to others (Debowski, 2005). The findings of high level of knowledge may be attributed to media and influenced by education (Aminrad et al., 2013).

All or 100% of the total respondents from the two groups got the correct answer in knowledge indicator numbers 1 and 10. This means that all respondent heads were knowledgeable of the basic precept of the doctrine of command responsibility. It can be inferred that for the doctrine to apply, the head should have power of control over the subordinate (Avelino I. Razon v. Mary Jean Tagitis, 2009). Likewise, all respondents were aware that heads of office have jurisdiction to investigate and discipline their own officials and employees (Exec. Order No. 292, ADMINISTRATIVE CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES of 1987).

Knowledge indicator numbers 2 and 9 got the least number of checks from both groups. Six (6) or 37% in group A and three (3) or 21% in group B got the correct answer in knowledge indicator 2. Majority of the respondents are not aware how civil liability may attach to the superior in cases of wrongful acts, omission or negligence of subordinates. This means that majority of the head of office is not aware of Sec. 38, Book I of the Administrative Code that “a public officer shall not be civilly liable for acts done in the performance of his official duties, unless there is a clear showing of bad faith, malice or gross negligence” (Exec. Order No. 292, ADMINISTRATIVE CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES of 1987). On the other hand, it can also be inferred that heads are mindful of their actions and decisions whether or not a written order was issued by their office.

The data on the knowledge test on group A showed that only three (3) or 19% got the correct answer in knowledge indicator number 9. Majority of the respondents claim liability for approving irregular transactions even if there was reliance on good faith from the recommendations of the subordinate. Respondents are of the belief that criminal liability attaches even with the presence of good faith. This suggests that some heads had a sweeping notion that the doctrine of command responsibility is a rigid and unyielding policy that accepts no exception. This finding refutes the statement of the high court in the case of Magsuci, when it said that the application of the doctrine of command responsibility is flexible (Hermenegildo M. Magsuci v. The Hon. Sandiganbayan, 1995) (Amado Arias v. Sandiganbayan, 1989).

On the other hand, seven (7) or 50% of the respondents from group B got the correct answer in knowledge indicator number 9. However, those interviewed, and asked to explain their understanding on said indicator, majority said their answer was based on common sense and moral law. This finding suggests that group B respondents have the tendency to rely on the act of good faith rather than taking time to read interpretations and applications of certain policies.

Table 1
Respondents' Knowledge on the Doctrine of Superior Responsibility

KNOWLEDGE INDICATORS	GROUP A N=16		GROUP B N=14		TOTAL N=30	
	No. of Correct Answer s	Mean	No. of Correct Answer s	Mean	No. of Correct Answer s	Mean
1. For superior responsibility to apply, the head of office should have power of control over the subordinate.	16	1	14	1	30	1
2. Head or a superior officer is civilly liable for the wrongful acts, omission of duty or negligence of his subordinates only if there is a written order from the superior.	6	0.37	3	0.21	9	0.30
3. The doctrine of superior responsibility applies only to the military.	15	0.94	10	0.71	25	0.83
4. The Philippines requires all government agencies to institutionalize the doctrine of command or superior responsibility.	15	0.94	8	0.57	23	0.77
5. If a head of office consciously disregarded information which shows that a subordinate is committing a crime, the superior is criminally liable.	11	0.69	11	0.78	22	0.74
6. The application of the doctrine of superior responsibility is extended to cases that are criminal in nature only.	15	0.94	13	0.93	28	0.93
7. The head of office is immediately and primarily responsible for government funds and property pertaining to his/her agency.	14	0.87	5	0.36	19	0.64
8. Local governments are exempt from liability for death or injury to persons or damage to property.	13	0.81	14	1	27	0.90
9. Provincial or municipal head of office that relied on good faith on the recommendations of his/her subordinates is still criminally liable for approving irregular transactions.	3	0.19	7	0.50	10	0.33
10. Heads of agencies have jurisdiction to investigate and discipline their own officials and employees.	16	1	14	1	30	1
TOTAL	124	7.75	99	7.07	223	7.44
INTERPRETATION	Much Knowledgeable		Much Knowledgeable		Much Knowledgeable	

Respondents' Level of Acceptance of the Doctrine of Superior Responsibility

The data on respondents' level of acceptance of the doctrine of command responsibility reveals an overall rating of 3.46 or "much acceptable". Group A had a 3.62 grand mean with a descriptive rating of "much acceptable" and Group B at 3.28, with a descriptive equivalent of "acceptable". The results show that elected heads have lower level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility than appointed heads. This finding supports the study of Montiel on Philippine political culture, stating that the fact that a politician plans to run for re-election affects how a political office is run as opposed to non-re-electionist mindset who would exhibit less pressure on decision-making and decisively upholds principles regardless of the electoral consequences (Montiel, 2012).

As presented in table 2, group A rated acceptance indicators 2, 7, and 10 with the following ratings: 3.50, 3.87, 3.50 which all have "much acceptable" descriptive ratings. This shows that heads of national offices in the province yielded to the idea that superiors should be made liable for illegal acts in the office if members of immediate staff are the ones involved; be made accountable for the mistake of subordinates; and assumed blame for irregularities in the office that were repeatedly committed. Group B gave a lower mean score for these three indicators with mean value of 3.21, 3.36, and 3.0, which have descriptive ratings of "acceptable". This means that the local chief executives had lower acceptability when it comes to taking on responsibility for the actions of subordinates.

The table also shows that both groups A and B gave acceptance indicator 3 the highest rating. Both groups affirmed high acceptance in making head of office liable for documents signed. Group A gave a mean score of 4.62 and group B 4.35. Both ratings had descriptive equivalent of "very much acceptable". This indicates that heads of government offices in the province of Northern Samar would probably take the responsibility for resulting outcome of documents signed by the head. As to making the superiors liable for approving transactions even if there was reliance of good faith, both groups gave a "much acceptable" rating with an average mean score of 4.0 for group A and 3.50 for group B. This means that heads of office set a higher standard of value in terms of accountability in the management of public transaction and funds. This finding is reinforced by the acceptance theory model where superiors must build affinity and good example with their subordinates for the latter to willingly accept decisions of the superior (Griffin, 2006).

With a corresponding rating of 1.81 and 1.86, respondents Group A and B find it "less acceptable" not to explain issues where the office is involved, and to assume issues will be forgotten soon. This implies that heads of office put worth on informing the public whereabouts of the office so to avoid misunderstanding. With 3.31 or "acceptable" rating, Group A believes it is okay for head of office to publicly explain lack of participation in controversial project, as against Group B's 2.21 rating which they find it "less acceptable". This may imply particular consciousness of public image of appointed heads; whereas, less acceptable outcome on elected officials may be attributed to the idea that politics can kill idealism and that politicians prefer compromise and balance between good governance and political patronage, power sharing, coalition politics and supporters' expectation (Montiel, 2012).

Table 2
Respondents' Level of Acceptance of the Doctrine of Superior Responsibility

Level Of Acceptance	Group A Weighted N=16		Inter- Pre- Tation	Group B Weighted N=14		Inter- Pre- Tation	Total N=30		Inter- Pre- Tation
	Rat- ing	Mea n		Rat ing	Mea n		Rat- ing	Mea n	
1. Punishing superiors for the wrongful acts of subordinates is okay.	50	3.12	Accept- able	54	3.86	Much Accept- able	104	3.47	Much Accept- able
2. Making superiors liable for the illegal acts in the office if members of the immediate staff are the ones involved.	56	3.50	Much Accept- able	45	3.21	Accept- able	101	3.37	Accept- able
3. Making head of office liable for documents where s/he affixed her/his signature.	74	4.62	Very Much Accept- able	61	4.36	Very Much Accept- able	135	4.5	Very Much Accept- able
4. Liability of superiors for approving transactions even if s/he relied on subordinates to check on the authenticity of the transaction being entered into.	64	4.0	Much Accept- able	49	3.50	Much Accept- able	113	3.77	Much Accept- able
5. Strict adherence to the doctrine of superior responsibility.	67	4.19	Much Accept- able	51	3.64	Much Accept- able	118	3.93	Much Accept- able
6. Superior responsibility is made tool to reduce corruption in the government.	68	4.25	Very Much Accept- able	53	3.78	Much Accept- able	121	4.03	Much Accept- able
7. Superior responsibility presumes accountability on the part of the superior when a subordinate errs.	62	3.87	Much Accept- able	47	3.36	Accept- able	109	3.63	Much Accept- able
8. It is okay for head of office to explain to the public his/her lack of participation in a controversial project.	53	3.31	Accept- able	31	2.21	Less Accept- able	84	2.80	Accept- able
9. It is okay for head of office to keep silent and not comment on issues involving his/her office, thinking it will be forgotten soon by the public.	29	1.81	Less Accept- able	26	1.86	Less Accept- able	55	1.83	Less Accept- able

10. Presuming that a head of office has knowledge of the irregularities or illegal acts if the acts have been repeatedly committed.	56	3.50	Much Accept-able	42	3.0	Accept-able	98	3.27	Accept-able
GRAND MEAN		3.62	Much Accept-able		3.28	Accept-able		3.46	Much Accept-able

Relationship between Respondents’ Knowledge and Level of Acceptance of the Doctrine of Superior Responsibility

To test the relationship of knowledge to the level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility, linear regression analysis was employed. Processed data revealed a statistically significant relationships between Group A’s knowledge and level of acceptance of the doctrine of superior responsibility. Group A’s knowledge of the doctrine influences their level of acceptance. It can be inferred that the head of national agencies knowledge and acceptance of the doctrine enable the organization to execute and practice superior responsibility in the organization. As proposed by Horak (2001), leadership’s acceptance ultimately manifested by support enables knowledge management to be implemented in organization all over. For effective implementation of codes and charters, training and counselling service must be afforded to public officials who face issues on conflict of interests(Montiel, 2012). The significant relationship of knowledge variable to acceptance was confirmed in the study of Barr (2007), where knowledge increased, positive attitude increases about the subject. Results of a study of variables associated with global acceptance of evolution indicated that the more scientifically literate a country’s populace, the more likely they were to accept the theory of evolution (Heddy and Nadelson, 2012). Exposure to legal messages or knowledge is associated with more positive attitudes leading to changing attitudes and potential access or acceptance of certain government programs or policies (Banerjee et al., 2012).

Processed data revealed an insignificant relationship between Group B’s knowledge and level of acceptance of the doctrine. Despite Group B’s or elected heads much acceptable knowledge of the doctrine of superior responsibility, it does not influence their acceptance of the doctrine. This finding is supported by the finding of Eisenbeiss(2012) that relying on codes and regulations are unlikely to be adequate in influencing conducts. Institutionalizing doctrines, drafting codes or regulations alone are insufficient to implement change (Ethics Resource Center, 2005). This result may be attributed to many factors like strictness of each agency in terms of implementing agency rules and regulations. Possible factor also is the level of educational attainment of the heads of offices. Where graduate degree is a requirement for most appointed heads, such is not the case for elected officials. Another factor would be the amount of control and supervision coming from the upper management level. Where rigorous regulation from the national office is felt in the national government agencies, the opposite is true for local government units where only general supervision and at times none, according to some of the local chief executives, would come from the provincial office.

Table 2
**Summary of Correlation Test between Knowledge and Level of Acceptance of the
Doctrine of Superior Responsibility (at 0.10 margin of error)**

Respondent Group	β	Sig.	Interpretation
Group A	-0.292	0.082	Significant
Group B	0.057	0.194	Not Significant

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study adds to the growing number of research on superior or command responsibility, accountability, leadership, and governance. The much acceptable knowledge of both groups of respondents in this study proposes an adequate cascading of the doctrine of superior responsibility to local officials, appointed and elected alike. For the knowledge to be explicit however, it should be manifested by actions and practices. Training must be done for heads of government agencies to increase awareness of the dynamics of power, authority and influence lodged in the position of a head of office to create trust among subordinates and authenticity to the public.

Local chief executives having lower level of acceptance when it comes to taking on responsibility for the actions of subordinates suggests a need for high ethical value formation. Acceptable rating as compared to much higher rating stresses implications of the acceptance theory that authority is a power that is accepted by others. Hence, leaders should learn to accept responsibility for their authority to be accepted by subordinates. Otherwise, a serious implication for maintaining continuity of effective and efficient operation of the office may be at stake. To address the concern on relatively lower acceptance level of superior responsibility of heads of government offices, clear roles should be established. Each government office in the province of Northern Samar should institutionalize the doctrine of superior responsibility by creating a committee that would draft office guidelines and establish policies on how to deal with office transactions and projects. Chain of commands even in the civilian offices must be clear and defined.

Further study is suggested with a comprehensive emersion process to identify underlying variables for a sustained improvement of stakeholders and development of human capital. It is likewise recommended that further studies be conducted by having a wider scope and using more stringent selection of respondents such as the use of scientific procedures and case study.

REFERENCES

- i. Amado Arias v. Sandiganbayan, G.R. No. 82512 (December 19, 1989).
- ii. Aminrad, Z., Zakariya, S., Hadi, A., Sakari, M. (2013). Relationship between Awareness, Knowledge and Attitude towards Environmental Education Among Secondary Students in Malaysia. *World Applied Sciences Journal*, 22(9), 1326-1333.
- iii. Avelino I. Razon v. Mary Jean Tagitis, G.R. No. 182498 (December 3, 2009).

-
- iv. Barr, S. (2007). Factors Influencing Environmental Attitude and Behaviour: A UK Case Study of Household Waste Management. *Environment and Behaviour*, 39, 435-473.
 - v. Banerjee, S.K., Andersen, K.L., Buchanan, R.M., Warvadekar, J. (2012, March 9). Woman-centered research on access to safe abortion services and implications for behavioral change communication interventions: a cross-sectional study of women in Bihar and Jharkhand, India. *BMC Public Health*, 12. doi:10.1186/1471-2458-12-175.
 - vi. *Corruption Perceptions Index: Results*. (2014, December). Retrieved from Transparency International: www.transparency.org/cpi2014
 - vii. Debowksi, S. (2005). *Knowledge Management: A Strategic Management Perspective. 1st Edtn* (Vols. ISBN: 0-47-080538-2). John Wiley and Sons Ltd.
 - viii. Eisenbeiss, S. A. (2012). Rethinking Ethical Leadership: An interdisciplinary Integrative Approach. *Leadership Quarterly*, 23(5), 791-808.
 - ix. Ethics Resource Center. (2005). The 2005 National Business Ethics Survey. *Ethics Resource Center*.
 - x. Exec. Order No. 292, ADMINISTRATIVE CODE OF THE PHILIPPINES of 1987. (n.d.).
 - xi. Executive Order No. 226. (1995, February 17).
 - xii. Griffin, R. W. (2006). Management. *Cengage Learning*.
 - xiii. Heddy, B.C.& Nadelson, L.S. (2012, September). A Global Perspective of the Variables Associated with Evolution. *Evolution: Education and Outreach*, 5:412. Online ISSN 1936-6434. Springer USA. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s12052-012-0423-0>.
 - xiv. Hermenegildo M. Magsuci v. The Hon. Sandiganbayan, G.R. No. L-101545 (January 3, 1995).
 - xv. Horak, B. (2001). Dealing with human factors and managing change in knowledge management: A phased approach. *Topics Health Infrom. Manage.*, 21, 8-17.
 - xvi. Montiel, C. J. (2012). Philippine Political Culture and Governance. Retrieved from www.ombudsman.gov.ph/UNDP4/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/Philippine-Culture-and-Governance.pdf.