

### Title:

**\*\*Bantillo vs. The Intermediate Appellate Court and Sumcad: A Philippine Supreme Court Decision on Judicial Discretion and Amended Complaints\*\***

### Facts:

Rosita Zafra Bantillo filed a Complaint for Reconveyance against Elsa Maniquis-Sumcad regarding a 240 square meter parcel of land in Midsayap, North Cotabato, claiming to be the surviving heir and representing other heirs of the deceased spouses Candido and Maria Zafra. Sumcad, who claimed ownership via Original Certificate of Title No. P-35267 and sought Bantillo's removal, filed a "Motion for Bill of Particulars" requesting specifics on Bantillo's heirship and representation authority. Bantillo contested the motion's relevance but agreed in court to specify heir names and present a power of attorney, leading to a court order on July 5, 1982, directing Bantillo to amend her complaint accordingly.

Despite an agreed amendment, Bantillo delayed filing the amended complaint beyond the prescribed ten-day period, leading Sumcad to file a motion to dismiss for non-compliance. Bantillo cited judicial vacancy as a cause for delay and eventually submitted an amended complaint almost eleven months late, which Sumcad challenged for tardiness. The Court of First Instance then dismissed the amended complaint and the case, a decision upheld by the Intermediate Appellate Court, citing Bantillo's unreasonable delay and non-compliance with court orders.

### Issues:

1. Whether a "Motion for Bill of Particulars" by Sumcad was appropriate,
2. If the trial court correctly applied Rule 12 regarding compliance with the court order for an amended complaint,
3. Whether the trial court's dismissal of Bantillo's complaint was justified given the delay in filing the amended complaint.

### Court's Decision:

The Supreme Court found the "Motion for Bill of Particulars" appropriate, as it sought clarity on Bantillo's standing to sue, which Bantillo failed to specify in her original complaint. The Court also held that Rule 12 was rightly applied as Bantillo did not comply within the specified period, making dismissal within the court's discretion. However, the Court deemed that the amended complaint's dismissal, which was merely a formal requirement not affecting the substance of Bantillo's claim or prejudicing Sumcad, contravened the principles of substantial and expeditious justice. The appellate court's

decision was reversed, and the trial court was directed to admit Bantillo's Amended Complaint and proceed with the case.

**### Doctrine:**

This case establishes or reiterates the discretion of trial courts in handling procedural non-compliance but underscores the paramountcy of resolving cases on their merits rather than on technicalities. Amendments that do not cause substantial prejudice should be allowed to promote substantial justice.

**### Class Notes:**

- A "Motion for Bill of Particulars" can be filed to clarify ambiguities in a party's pleadings, particularly regarding legal standing or capacity to sue.
- Non-compliance with court orders, including those directing an amendment of pleadings, must adhere to Rule 12's stipulated periods unless justified and excused by the court.
- Trial courts have discretion in dismissing non-compliant pleadings but must balance this against delivering justice on substantive issues rather than technical grounds.

**### Historical Background:**

This case illuminates the procedural intricacies within the Philippine judicial system, highlighting the balance between technical compliance and the overarching goal of substantive justice. It underscores the courts' role in navigating between strict adherence to procedural rules and enabling fair resolution of disputes based on their merits.