



Through the Cracks: A Schein-Informed Case Study of Organizational Culture and Institutional Change in a Local College

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ABSTRACT

Local higher education institutions face a persistent problem with organizational culture. This study aims to holistically understand organizational behavior in a local college in Region XI. A single-case study approach was employed to determine how visible structures, proclaimed values, and behavioral patterns lag in institutional growth and change. The primary data were collected using key informant interviews, focus group discussions, and document reviews. Findings highlight glaring issues, including procedural delays, concentration of leadership, and rigid organizational boundaries. Emergent coping strategies, such as controlled decision-making, management of informal structures, and collaborative action, were recognized as ways to mitigate institutional volatility. The study illustrates how leadership, faculty participation, and cultural context shape domain governance, professional development, and resource allocation. In higher education, it is relevant to theory for framing Schein's model concerning governance and socio-political adaptive leadership. These findings provide practical insights for administrators and policymakers seeking to strengthen governance, foster adaptive leadership, and guide future reforms in higher education institutions confronted by similar cultural challenges. Furthermore, these results can be empirically substantiated in future studies using exploratory factor analysis (EFA), regression, mediation analysis, and structural equation modeling (SEM), potentially informing the development of more robust and context-sensitive organizational models.

Keywords: Organizational culture, local college, visible practices, stated ideals, deep-rooted assumptions, case study

INTRODUCTION

Persistent issues in the organizational culture of Local Universities and Colleges (LUCs) require more than superficial fixes (Jin & Bojing, 2022). Erdem (2016) found that academic institutions lack a deep culture. Maison (2018) reported a continued lack of clarity in institutional culture in many higher education settings. Zeine et al. (2011) argue that these cultural problems need focused research.

Internationally, differences show that these cultural issues are widespread in higher education institutions. For example, studies have documented culture problems in Kuwait's universities (Al-Zufairi & Al-Enezi, 2021), China (Coman & Bonciu, 2016), the USA (Maison, 2018), and Indonesia (Nurochim et al., 2023).

In the Philippines, many LUCs nationwide have cultural inconsistencies (Palencia, 2022). Studies in Iloilo City also report problems in organizational culture, especially in cultural typology and leadership practices (Lagon, 2022). Research on SVD educational institutions shows challenges in aligning institutional values with policies (Tampol & Aguilin, 2021). Moreover, organizational culture problems greatly impact performance. Governance inefficiencies reduce institutional outcomes, faculty morale, and student success. Weak culture creates inconsistent accreditation, unstable faculty retention, and makes essential obligations harder to fulfill (Booc, 2023).

Furthermore, gaps in governance structures frequently result in administrative and financial bottlenecks that impede faculty efforts, undermine student engagement frameworks, and stifle faculty development. Despite the critical impact of organizational culture on achieving institutional objectives, there remains a gap in the literature regarding LUCs in Region XI. Developing robust organizational models is expected to strengthen institutional

support, enhance leadership effectiveness, and sustain academic functions, thereby ensuring the long-term viability of the system (Millado et al., 2024).

Statement of the Problem

The objective of this study was to better understand the organizational culture of a regional higher education institution. More specifically, it tried to answer this primary research question:

1. What are the key problems, issues, challenges, and concerns that are related to the organizational culture of the local college?
2. What approaches and coping mechanisms does the college currently employ to address organizational culture challenges?
3. What insights and realizations have leaders and administrators gained in the process of confronting cultural issues, aligning values with practice, and fostering institutional behavior and development?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational Culture in Higher Education

Organizational culture in higher education shapes operational efficiency, governance, staff engagement, and innovation. The literature shows that institutional culture is more than surface practice; it also shapes how values are applied in daily work and decision-making. Patricio et al. (2023) and Popelo and Melnychenko (2022) argue that misalignments between values and practices lead to inefficiencies. This leads to stagnation. Coman and Bonciu (2016) highlight that rigid hierarchy suppresses innovation, especially in settings dominated by centralized authority.

The physical and symbolic environment within educational institutions has also been identified as a key indicator of institutional pride and identity. Drori et al. (2017) and Hautaniemi (2022) emphasize the importance of spatial aesthetics and facility maintenance in fostering engagement and creativity. Their findings suggest that institutional environments significantly influence stakeholders' perceptions and motivation, corroborating the argument that infrastructure renewal is foundational to cultural reform.

A common theme is the gap between spoken values and real behaviors. Dees (2021) warns that when systems fail to reinforce talk about ethics or leadership, trust fades. Ihsan et al. (2021) and Zhu et al. (2016) note that without structural support, values stay symbolic. This fails to unite people. Similarly, Arifin et al. (2020) show that collaboration and ethics only last when built into the organization.

Deep cultural beliefs about authority and hierarchy shape institutions. Westover (2024), Mazur (2018), and Selart and Schei (2016) note that high power distance discourages innovation and teamwork. This leads to stagnation. Ihsan et al. (2021) stress the lack of shared control in hierarchies, which stops inclusive decisions. Resistance to change, often called tradition, reinforces these barriers and blocks reforms (Ali, 2020; Erdem, 2016; Myers et al., 2022).

Coping mechanisms within institutional culture often revolve around formalized procedures and rigid operational guidelines. While such mechanisms offer consistency, they may hinder adaptability. Drori et al. (2017) and Westover (2024) caution against over-reliance on legacy systems, which can conflict with evolving priorities. Okraszewska (2016) and Ihsan et al. (2021) likewise argue that outdated norms—if left unexamined—can limit creative responses to emerging challenges. Hautaniemi (2022), Ali (2020), and Patricio et al. (2023) advocate for periodic reassessment of institutional protocols to ensure they remain empowering and relevant.

Leadership and accountability are central themes in the organizational culture literature. While leaders are often expected to model ethical behavior and drive collaborative efforts, several studies point to the limitations of top-down leadership structures. Ihsan et al. (2021), Sedarmayanti et al. (2020), and Dees (2021) highlight that inconsistent leadership practices undermine trust and credibility. Westover (2025) stresses the importance of

transparency in reinforcing authentic accountability, while Painter (2021) and Smith and Egitim (2024) underscore the need for institutional systems that facilitate and reward interdepartmental collaboration.

Underlying many coping strategies is the assumption that institutional stability is best achieved through centralized control. However, literature suggests that such assumptions can limit institutional responsiveness. Erdem (2016), Ali (2020), and Saad and Kaur (2020) emphasize that deeply ingrained power dynamics often discourage innovation and inclusive governance. Westover (2024) contends that unless cultural norms are critically examined, institutions risk reinforcing outdated practices that hinder progress.

Modern perspectives on organizational culture also focus on transformation through faculty development, ethical governance, and financial efficiency. Troyan and Kravchenko (2021) and Knysh et al. (2023) advocate for digital integration and adaptive platforms to support academic innovation. Gorina (2024) highlights the impact of structured, well-supported environments on creativity and institutional performance.

Faculty development has emerged as a strategic pillar for organizational growth. Dhawan (2019), Jadhav (2019), and Kamel (2016) illustrate that professional development initiatives enhance teaching quality and research engagement, particularly when institutions offer financial and structural support. Luthra et al. (2023) and Snehi (2019) further emphasize the importance of recognition and incentives in sustaining faculty morale and performance.

From a governance perspective, ethical leadership and participatory decision-making are consistently identified as key drivers of institutional cohesion. Brown (2017), Davidovitch and Iram (2015), and Elugbaju et al. (2024) argue that transparent and data-informed leadership not only builds trust but also improves operational outcomes. Technological investments, leadership training, and efficient administrative structures have been shown to enhance institutional resilience (Jiang & Xue, 2021; Pesce, 2015).

Finally, financial governance remains a critical component of cultural sustainability. Transparent budgeting and strategic resource allocation are essential for maintaining equity and performance. Tymchak (2021), Dmitrienko (2023), and Karlibaeva (2023) note that limited funding can hinder institutional development, particularly in areas such as faculty recruitment, infrastructure, and student support. Studies by García et al. (2019), Harrison and Bazy (2017), and Wyland et al. (2023) demonstrate that institutions with aligned financial and cultural strategies are more likely to foster inclusive, high-performing environments.

METHODOLOGY

In this qualitative study, we employed a single-case study design to explore the organizational culture of a local college in Region XI. Drawing on Yin's (2018) framework, this approach allowed for an in-depth, contextual examination of institutional behaviors and cultural dynamics. The study site was purposively selected for its relevance to the research focus and representation of local higher education institutions. Key informants were identified using criterion-based purposive sampling and included the Human Resource Head, the Head of Student Affairs and Services, and a Program Head, all of whom had at least three years of institutional experience. These participants were assigned pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality: Marites (IDI-HR1), Ronald (IDI-OSAH1), and (FGD-PH). We developed a semi-structured interview guide informed by Creswell and Poth's (2018) qualitative inquiry principles. Experts in higher education research reviewed the guide to enhance its clarity, alignment with the study objectives, and contextual appropriateness.

Ethical clearance was obtained before the study was conducted. Following informed consent, we conducted key informant interviews and one focus group discussion using audio recordings, field notes, and institutional documents. The data were transcribed and analyzed using Colaizzi's method (Morrow & Smith, 2000), which provided a structured process for extracting significant statements, formulating meanings, and clustering these into thematic categories. We incorporated strategies such as member checking and peer debriefing to improve interpretive accuracy and reduce bias. The in-depth interview technique was grounded in the guidance of Boyce and Neale (2006), while the focus group discussion was structured following Krueger and Casey's (2015) recommendations.

To ensure trustworthiness, we applied Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) evaluative criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. We strengthened credibility through the triangulation of sources and the validation of findings with participants. Rich contextual descriptions were provided to facilitate transferability, and detailed procedural documentation ensured dependability. Confirmability was addressed through reflective journaling and maintaining an audit trail. In line with the perspectives of Shenton (2018), Tracy (2010), and Denzin and Lincoln (2018), we also emphasized authenticity, ensuring the participants’ voices were faithfully represented and grounded in their lived experiences. These methodological choices contributed to the study’s rigor, transparency, and ethical integrity.

RESULTS

As we explored the Local College’s organizational culture through the lens of Schein’s theory, we realized its challenges went beyond structure. They were deeply cultural. What stood out to us was how visible problems like inefficient processes and inadequate facilities were only on the surface. Beneath them were clashing ideals, unspoken norms, and long-held beliefs about hierarchy, leadership, and change. These shaped how people behaved, how decisions were made, and how progress was delayed. In response, the college seemed to rely on structured coping mechanisms, protocols, hierarchical control, and accountability, but often at the cost of collaboration and innovation. We saw well-meaning leaders trying to work within these constraints, leaning on authority and established norms to keep the institution moving. This reflection reminds us of Edgar Schein’s insight: “The only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture.” In this Local College, that culture, both its strengths and its limitations, continues to shape its path forward.

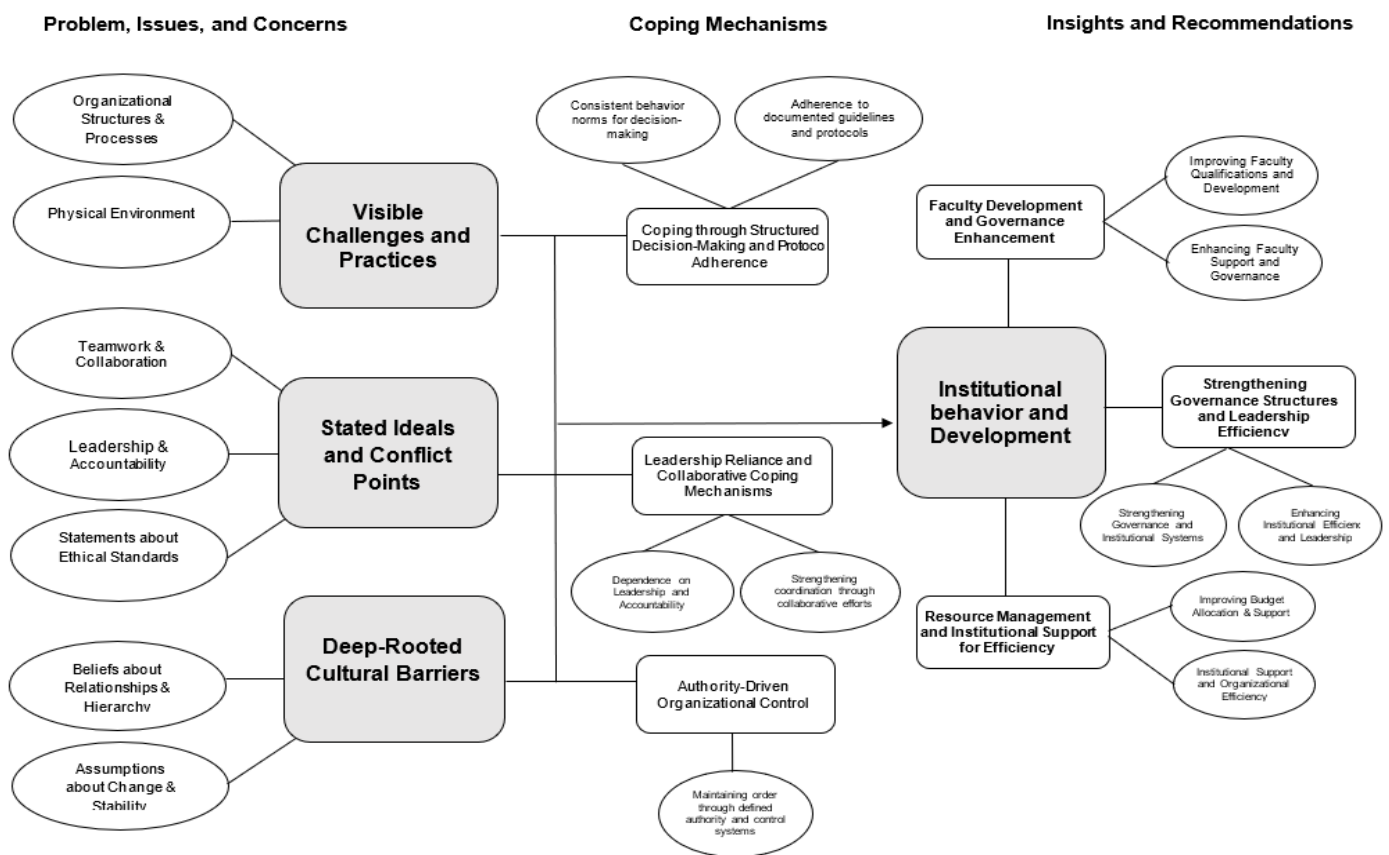


Figure 1. Modified Paradigm on the Organizational Culture of a Local College Through the Lens of Schein’s Organizational Culture Theory

Problems, Issues, and Concerns on the Organizational Culture

In reflecting on the visible challenges faced by the Local College, we were particularly drawn to how the institution’s organizational structures and physical environment shaped its day-to-day operations. We observed outdated processes, unclear reporting lines, and excessive bureaucracy that slowed decision-making and

innovation. These issues were compounded by the state of the physical environment, poorly maintained facilities, limited instructional spaces, and a lack of essential resources, all of which signaled a system in urgent need of revitalization. The strain was not just logistical; it affected the morale and productivity of both staff and students. As Peter Drucker once said, “There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all.” That line stuck with us because it echoed the inefficiencies we saw, not from a lack of effort but from systems that no longer served their purpose. These visible elements are more than surface issues; they reflect deeper misalignments in how the organization is structured to serve its mission.

Visible Challenges and Practices

In reflecting on our analysis of the college, it became clear that many of its core challenges stemmed from visible elements of its organizational culture, particularly in how structures, processes, and the physical environment are configured and experienced daily. We noticed inefficiencies in administrative routines, ambiguous reporting lines, and rigid systems that stifle innovation and responsiveness. These operational constraints are further exacerbated by the condition of the physical environment: aging or insufficient facilities, a lack of essential equipment, and overcrowded spaces that make even basic tasks a struggle. What struck us most was how these visible limitations quietly but powerfully erode morale, drain energy, and compromise the productivity of both staff and students. As John F. Kennedy once said, “The time to repair the roof is when the sun is shining.” Unfortunately, the college has long delayed the necessary repairs, both in practice and systemically, making the weight of its organizational burdens even harder to bear.

Organizational Structures and Processes. As we listened to participants, we saw how the institutional structure itself has become a source of demotivation. One participant noted, “The number one motivator for faculty members is their salary. One of the concerns here is the delay in salary, which can range from 15 to 20 days.” (FGD-PH). We found this incredibly familiar, having worked with colleagues who often waited weeks beyond payday, sometimes resorting to personal loans to get by. Marites highlighted this further: “The delay in salary is a significant concern... sometimes, the budget allocation for the COS also causes salary delays of 15 days or even a month.” (Marites). Her words revealed that these delays are embedded in budget-planning failures. Ronald added, “Hiring practices visibly prioritize candidates holding doctorate or master’s degrees or at least those who have earned graduate-level academic units.” (Ronald). While we agree on the intention to improve qualifications, this comment made me reflect on how such policies might unintentionally exclude deserving educators without systemic support for advanced study. Collectively, these perspectives deepened my understanding that organizational process reform must prioritize timely compensation, equitable opportunity, and holistic faculty well-being.

Physical Environment. The condition of the college’s facilities emerged as a deeply emotional topic. FGD-PH shared, “Some faculty members didn’t even have a proper office. Our office back then was just made of amakan (woven bamboo).” That statement immediately reminded us of our early years in education, when working conditions were far from ideal yet full of quiet resilience. Marites emphasized the challenges of rapid student growth: “We have 5,000 students, but we cannot accommodate them all in a regular face-to-face setup. With the rapid construction of classrooms, we are hopeful we can soon accommodate all students.” (Marites). Her words brought to mind the ongoing challenge of overcrowded lecture rooms and the strain it places on both faculty and learning outcomes. Ronald, meanwhile, pointed to an overlooked issue: “There are already many new buildings and facilities... but sometimes they are not really used properly or not maintained well.” His insight reminded us that expansion without sustainability is incomplete. Buildings must not only be built, but also maintained, scheduled, and managed with intention. These reflections convinced us that a supportive learning environment depends not only on physical infrastructure but also on thoughtful planning and resource stewardship.

Stated Ideals and Conflict Points

This theme examines the dissonance between the college’s professed organizational values, such as teamwork, accountability, and ethical standards, and the reality of how decisions and relationships unfold in daily operations. Despite official rhetoric emphasizing unity and meritocracy, participants revealed structural and cultural barriers that hinder collaboration, dilute leadership autonomy, and compromise fairness. These conflicts

highlight the urgent need for greater alignment between institutional ideals and lived practices to foster a more transparent, inclusive, and principled educational environment.

Teamwork and Collaboration. Although the college frequently cites collaboration as a core institutional value, the lived experiences of its employees suggest otherwise. One participant noted, “In our institution, there is a visible gap between employees with academic background and those appointed from the LGU, which sometimes causes misunderstandings and lack of unity...” (FGD-PH). We have observed this same divide, where communication and cooperation between the academic and LGU-affiliated staff break down due to differing norms and expectations. Marites added, “There have been challenges in the implementation of policies because employees from the academe and those from the LGU sometimes interpret policies differently.” Her point reinforced our view that structural fragmentation undermines team cohesion. Ronald echoed this, sharing, “There was an adjustment period... we say we follow policies and office manual, yes, but in actual, sometimes not clear who will do what...” These narratives made us realize that collaboration cannot be achieved without role clarity and inclusive dialogue. Without these foundations, the ideal of teamwork becomes performative rather than transformative.

Leadership and Accountability. In reflecting on leadership at the college, we encountered recurring tensions between academic authority and political influence. FGD-PH candidly shared, “Decisions are not solely made by the academic council but must also reflect the perspectives of the board of trustees, chaired by the municipality's local chief executive.” This statement struck us as a clear indicator that institutional autonomy is compromised, especially when leadership must accommodate political interests. Marites confirmed this pattern: “Political intervention from the LGU sometimes affects the academe...” From our own experience, we have seen politically influenced appointments and budgeting delays that stall academic progress. Ronald summarized this complex dynamic well: “The administration has been supportive... However, political intervention remains a problem.” His words reminded us that even well-meaning administrators are often constrained by the political pressures tied to funding and decision-making. To uphold academic integrity, the college must establish firmer boundaries that protect leadership structures from political interference.

Ethical Standards. While the college proclaims a commitment to fairness, transparency, and meritocracy, participant experiences revealed ongoing contradictions between these ideals and hiring practices. As FGD-PH explained, “The mayor usually wants to hire people from the town... we try to follow ethical hiring based on merit and qualification, but sometimes... it’s like the value of fairness, not always applied.” This made us reflect on how local loyalties, rather than qualifications, can sway hiring. Marites added, “Hiring should follow CHED requirements... but when there is political pressure, the school sometimes cannot decide freely...” Her words brought to mind instances in which appointments seemed predetermined, reducing the transparency of the recruitment process. Ronald emphasized this further: “Political connections affect who will get a plantilla position... we have a policy, yes, but in actual practice, the process is not always fair...” These reflections revealed to us how the college’s ethical standards often remain aspirational, compromised by systems that reward familiarity over fairness. Restoring trust and integrity requires more than policy. It demands consistent, courageous enforcement and institutional safeguards that uphold values in practice, not just in print.

Deep-Rooted Cultural Barriers

This theme highlights how deeply embedded cultural beliefs about hierarchy, authority, and institutional change shape the leadership dynamics within the college. While the institution may articulate aspirations of inclusivity and progress, these are often undermined by long-standing habits of deference to authority and resistance to reform. These cultural patterns, though less visible than structural issues, quietly but powerfully constrain decision-making, autonomy, and innovation. Transforming leadership at the college requires more than policies; it calls for a redefinition of power, participation, and institutional memory.

Beliefs about Relationships and Hierarchy. One of the most pervasive cultural dynamics at the college is the continued dominance of hierarchical thinking, which limits dialogue and reinforces passive compliance. “There are times when the academic council implements certain rules without consultation. Many teachers hesitate to express disagreement to avoid potential repercussions.” (FGD-PH). This reflection resonated with us deeply. We have witnessed faculty with strong ideas choose silence, fearing it could jeopardize their standing. Marites

reinforced this with, “The policies we do not agree with are still implemented because they have already been approved by the head of the administration.” Her statement confirmed our sense that even valid objections are routinely overridden by hierarchical authority. Ronald added a revealing layer: “We just follow what the OIC decides... people think it’s normal to wait for higher-ups before doing anything, even small things...” His words reminded us how this dependence becomes institutionalized, creating a culture where initiative is discouraged, and leadership becomes synonymous with control rather than facilitation. These reflections have solidified our belief that for shared governance to thrive, the college must intentionally cultivate a culture of trust, voice, and distributed leadership.

Assumptions about Change and Stability. Throughout the study, it became clear that the college’s approach to change is often reactive rather than strategic, driven by shifting leadership priorities and funding uncertainties. “Despite having a strategic direction, some programs are discontinued or delayed due to shifts in leadership and funding constraints.” (FGD-PH). This comment brought to mind several initiatives we have seen collapse mid-implementation due to administrative turnover. Marites echoed this sentiment: “There are institutional programs, but some of them do not push through due to changing priorities.” Her words reminded us how transient institutional commitments can feel, like every new plan starts from scratch. Ronald summed up this cultural inconsistency by stating, “We have plans for the institution, but we haven’t been able to fully execute them since we haven’t had a solid start in terms of planning...” His reflection made us realize that the issue is not just about follow-through; it is about planning cultures that lack ownership and continuity. From these insights, we concluded that without a shift toward institutional resilience and memory, the college risks repeating the same cycles of half-realized visions and short-term solutions. A more profound cultural shift is required, one that values sustainability, strategic continuity, and execution as much as aspiration.

Coping Mechanisms to Address Problems in the Organizational Culture

As we reflected on the Local College’s coping mechanisms, we saw a pattern of survival rather than transformation. People relied on structured protocols and consistent norms to provide predictability in an otherwise disorganized system. We noticed how leadership became the default anchor; those in authority were not just expected to decide but to stabilize the institution. Collaboration, though limited, was used strategically to manage pressing issues, not necessarily to innovate or grow. What struck us most was the underlying tension: the system did not invite change; it managed problems around it. This reminded us of John Maxwell’s words, “A leader knows the way, goes the way, and shows the way.” However, in this context, leadership seemed to carry not just direction but also the burden of institutional balance. It left us wondering, how sustainable is a culture that leans so heavily on a few to compensate for what the system fails to provide?

Coping Through Structured Decision-Making and Adherence to Documented Protocols

This theme examines how the college navigates organizational instability by relying on structured decision-making systems and adhering strictly to documented protocols. These formalized processes create a sense of consistency and predictability, offering psychological safety and institutional stability amidst resource limitations and leadership transitions. While these systems are instrumental in maintaining order, the findings reveal an underlying tension: reliance on structure often comes at the cost of emotional investment and collective innovation. In this case, coping is strategic, but not always transformative.

Consistent Behavior Norms for Decision-Making. The college relies heavily on consistent behavioral norms, such as incentive-based policies, to reinforce faculty development and professional growth. “For every unit we complete or earn in our doctorate or master’s degree, a corresponding amount is added to our salary. This motivates faculty members to pursue graduate studies.” (FGD-PH). This approach reminded us how crucial predictability is for motivating progress: when effort is reliably rewarded, engagement deepens. Marites affirmed the inclusive nature of this policy: “Salary increments also apply to Contract of Service (COS) employees, providing additional income for part-time work and making faculty development more attractive.” Her comment highlighted how the college extends professional incentives equitably, which, in our experience, strengthens organizational commitment across employment ranks. Ronald added, “Although there are no faculty scholarships, salary increments serve as a way to support teachers pursuing higher education.” His insight reminded us that even without formal grants, consistent acknowledgment through salary adjustments can sustain

motivation. These practices reveal that while the college may not have expansive resources, it compensates by maintaining explicit behavioral norms that uphold fairness and promote long-term faculty engagement.

Adherence to Documented Guidelines and Protocols. The college's strict adherence to documented policies has become a central mechanism for managing operational complexities, especially in budgeting and resource allocation. "We changed some policies so teachers do not have to worry too much about money issues that are not really their job... we make sure funds are used properly." (FGD-PH). This approach resonated with us because it shields faculty from administrative strain, allowing them to focus on teaching. Marites added, "Some rules were adjusted... just to make sure the school's budget is really going where it should. It helps us avoid wasting money on things that are not really needed." Her point reflects how structured, yet flexible, protocols can enhance both accountability and efficiency. Ronald further clarified, "When we encounter funding problems, we follow internal procedures by submitting formal requests... ensuring that budget adjustments are documented and processed." His words made us realize how much these systems contribute to transparency and calm during crises. These reflections led us to conclude that such procedural systems serve not as bureaucratic constraints but as safeguards against chaos, ensuring that institutional actions remain grounded, fair, and purposeful, even in unpredictable contexts.

Leadership Reliance and Collaborative Coping Mechanisms

This theme examines how the college balances centralized leadership with emerging collaborative practices to manage institutional complexity. Leadership is heavily relied upon to manage inconsistencies, navigate political pressures, and guide daily operations. At the same time, staff and faculty are beginning to embrace more participatory governance through shared initiatives and inclusive dialogue. This dual approach, rooted in authority and evolving teamwork, reveals a transitional organizational culture. While leadership provides strategic direction and accountability, collaborative mechanisms promote empowerment, coordination, and resilience. Together, they reflect a coping strategy that blends structure with flexibility.

Dependence on Leadership and Accountability. In the college, reliance on leadership is deeply tied to accountability systems that mediate political influence and resource limitations. "At first, I thought leadership was all about idealism, but I realized that running a local college also means navigating political factors wisely... while keeping financial decisions as independent as possible." (FGD-PH). This statement resonated with us as we reflected on the realism that defines leadership in underfunded, politically embedded institutions. Marites expanded on this by emphasizing responsible budgeting: "Since we rely on government funding, we carefully manage the budget... based on institutional needs rather than political preferences." Her insight reminded us how leaders act as financial stewards who protect fairness and transparency. Ronald's view reinforced this commitment: "We know that political influence is always present... decisions are based on policy, not external pressures." Having participated in similar documentation-based processes, we recognize the power of formal approval flows to build trust and shield academic priorities. These reflections affirm that dependence on leadership, when anchored in policy and accountability, enhances governance integrity and stabilizes the college amidst external complexities.

Strengthening Coordination Through Collaborative Efforts. While centralized leadership remains dominant, collaboration is increasingly becoming a vital coping mechanism that fosters inclusion and unity. "Before, leadership was too centralized... but now, everyone can talk, can suggest something for the organization, you know... it feels more open now." (FGD-PH). This shift toward openness mirrors what we have experienced: a growing willingness among leaders to include more voices. Marites affirmed this cultural turn: "All faculty, even just a little, experienced chance to grow more because now we work together more and decide together with new kind of leadership..." Her words reminded us how collaboration can double as professional development, encouraging initiative and deepening faculty engagement. Ronald offered a thoughtful balance: "Now we try to balance the leadership... not too centered, not too loose... it helps departments to work together more..." His statement captured the delicate act of leading without dominating and collaborating without chaos. These accounts reveal that the college is moving toward participatory governance, not by discarding structure, but by reimagining it as a shared space for growth. We have seen how this fosters mutual respect, more adaptive problem-solving, and a community invested in its progress.

Authority-Driven Organizational Control

This theme examines how the college uses hierarchical authority and structured protocols as a primary coping mechanism to maintain order, especially in politically influenced and resource-constrained contexts. Formalized control systems, ranging from budget oversight to procedural compliance, serve as protective tools that ensure decisions are made fairly, transparently, and without undue influence. While such a structure may limit flexibility and stifle innovation, it also provides predictability and operational discipline. Through these systems, the college stabilizes its internal processes, safeguards institutional integrity, and creates a sense of security for stakeholders navigating external pressures and internal complexities.

Maintaining Order Through Defined Authority and Control Systems. The college's reliance on formal authority and control systems reflects a conscious strategy to insulate decision-making from political interference and organizational ambiguity. "In running a local college, we learn that many decisions, especially about money, must go through proper steps... we try to follow the system, so even if politics around, we just stick to process, you know... to keep things not messy." (FGD-PH). This insight reminded us of how process compliance can serve not as a bureaucratic burden but as a stabilizing force. Similarly, Marites highlighted how rule-based budgeting protects fairness: "Because we depend on government money, we have to manage really carefully... we use clear rules and control system to decide how to use the budget, so everything still fair, not just because someone in higher place says so." Her reflection emphasized that structure serves not only governance but ethics. Having engaged in these systems ourselves, submitting forms, navigating approvals, and documenting expenditures, we have come to appreciate how defined procedures uphold transparency and reduce favoritism. Ronald captured this logic succinctly: "We know sometimes politics try to influence, but we do not just decide right away... we make sure every request go through the correct documents and approval flow... that way, all is safe, more proper, less problem, I think." His statement confirmed our belief that the college's strict adherence to formal controls is not about rigidity; it is a deliberate form of institutional resilience. By grounding authority in procedure rather than personality, the college copes with its external and internal challenges through principled, accountable, and consistent systems.

Insights and Realizations to Enhance Organizational Culture

As we reflected on the needed changes at the Local College, it became clear that institutional behavior and development must be intentionally cultivated. Enhancing faculty qualifications, reinforcing governance, and securing resources are not isolated goals; they are interconnected commitments to growth. When faculty are supported, and governance structures are strengthened, the culture begins to shift from mere survival to purposeful advancement. Efficient systems and sound resource management are the backbone of this transformation. What resonated with us most was the idea that institutional reform requires both heart and structure. As Nelson Mandela once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." For that change to happen, institutions themselves must be willing to evolve, starting with how they lead, support, and believe in their people.

Faculty Development and Governance Enhancement

This theme examines the importance of faculty qualifications, material support, and inclusive governance in driving the college's academic growth and operational effectiveness. It highlights how empowering educators through accessible professional development opportunities and enhancing institutional support systems not only improve instructional quality but also advance accreditation readiness and participation in governance. Despite significant challenges, such as salary delays, political interference, and a lack of facilities, there is a clear aspiration among faculty to grow, contribute, and lead. The college's ability to meet these aspirations depends on its commitment to removing systemic barriers and prioritizing people-centered governance.

Improving Faculty Qualifications and Development. Strengthening faculty qualifications emerged as a central concern for both institutional credibility and individual professional growth. "We realize many faculty still have no master's or PhD... so they really cannot get promotion or tenure yet. Most are still studying graduate, but because of this, the school also hard to reach accreditation level, you know... it becomes one big challenge." (FGD-PH). This reflects how a lack of qualifications directly hinders both personal advancement

and institutional accreditation. “Our salary does not really support faculty who want to study more. Some stop or delay graduate school because of high tuition, no subsidy, and salary late sometimes... so it’s hard, really.” (Marites). This underscores the financial obstacles faculty face in pursuing advanced studies. “We notice in accreditation reports school still does not meet the needed number of faculty with master’s and PhD. Without that, it hard to pass the standard... we realize also that renewing accreditation become harder, like that.” (Ronald). Collectively, these insights reveal the need for structured development programs, financial support mechanisms, and long-term incentives. Investment in qualifications is not optional; it is a prerequisite for institutional progress.

Enhancing Faculty Support and Governance. The ability of faculty to thrive is closely tied to financial stability, working conditions, and genuine involvement in governance. “Now salary delay is a big problem... sometimes weeks, sometimes months. It really affects our financial, you know. Too many approvals step in payroll, so salary comes late. Some faculty need to get loans just to survive, like that.” (FGD-PH). Delays in compensation undermine not only morale but also day-to-day performance. “We see now that office space is not enough... still old, and no fast internet or new computer. Some faculty even share one table on one PC. Also, the classroom does not have the technology, so it very hard to make teaching better, really.” (Marites). This reveals how inadequate infrastructure limits teaching quality and productivity. “We understand now that decisions in school, like hiring or policy, still go through LGU... that’s why delays always happen. Political people in a meeting sometimes they change policies not fit for academics. Faculty and staff were not really involved, just wait for a result, like that.” (Ronald). Such political interference diminishes the role of academic stakeholders in decision-making, rendering governance performative. These accounts show that faculty cannot meaningfully contribute unless they are financially secure, adequately equipped, and institutionally empowered. Real reform means modernizing systems and upholding the academic community’s voice in shaping its future.

Strengthening Governance Structures and Leadership Efficiency

This theme focuses on the essential relationship between institutional governance, leadership capacity, and operational effectiveness in local colleges. Faculty and staff insights revealed that improving governance is not just about enforcing better policies; it is about creating systems that reinforce accountability, ensure timely resource flow, and protect academic autonomy. Effective leadership, supported by structured governance, helps stabilize operations, boost morale, and promote a culture of shared direction. When governance is transparent and leadership is efficient, institutions become more resilient, responsive, and capable of long-term academic impact.

Strengthening Leadership and Institutional Systems. Participants emphasized the urgent need to improve institutional systems, especially in finance, resource mobilization, and governance clarity. “We realize we need to fix the finance system, you know... set a clear deadline for salary and improve how money flows. If salary comes on time, staff feels better, and school shows that it really cares for them.” (FGD-PH). Timely compensation was repeatedly tied to staff morale and perceptions of institutional care. “We see now that management must talk more with LGU... to get budget for fixing buildings and also for tech improvement. If we invest like that, it helps faculty and staff work better, more productive.” (Marites). This highlights how infrastructure and equipment upgrades directly affect institutional performance. A balance between political ties and academic independence was another key concern. “We understand it’s important to have a rule for governance... to show where politics can go and where it should not. So, academic decisions stay clean, but still, we keep a good relationship with LGU... balance, like that.” (Ronald). These reflections point to the need for governance models that simultaneously foster institutional diplomacy and uphold educational integrity.

Enhancing Institutional Efficiency and Leadership. The effectiveness of governance was also closely tied to administrative reliability and the accessibility of resources. “If we want faculty to stay motivated and stable, payroll must be improved. Maybe LGU or top management can focus on this... like making one team just to handle finance, so salary does not delay. If salary comes on time, morale goes up, you know.” (FGD-PH). Participants stressed that operational efficiency begins with dependable financial systems. Facility improvement was also considered a high priority. “Workplace need better facility and technology... like new office, faster computer, more organized resource. If we start with a most urgent need, then slowly improve, it helps staff work better, really.” (Marites). Better infrastructure, even incremental, enhances staff productivity and institutional



morale. Finally, the protection of academic autonomy was a recurring theme. “I think it is important to protect academic integrity... top management and LGU must make a rule that separates politics from school decisions. If academic leaders join in making policy, then schools follow a standard and right direction.” (Ronald). These accounts show that actual leadership efficiency is grounded in fairness, transparency, and educational values, not just administrative speed.

Resource Management and Institutional Support for Efficiency

This theme explores how effective resource management and institutional support directly influence organizational performance and morale at the college. Participants consistently linked delays in budget allocation, misalignment with academic priorities, and weak support systems to challenges in meeting both instructional and operational goals. While structural inefficiencies often hinder productivity, small, intentional acts of care, from timely disbursement to workplace solidarity, emerged as powerful tools for building institutional loyalty and effectiveness. The findings emphasize that beyond funding, the presence (or absence) of timely, responsive support reflects the college’s broader commitment to equity, stability, and shared growth.

Improving Budget Allocation and Institutional Support. Participants strongly emphasized the connection between budget adequacy and institutional stability. “Honestly, sir, we realize if the budget increases, it will really help, you know. Now, hard to hire more teachers because there are not enough funds for salaries. But student numbers keep growing, so the only way is to raise the budget. That way, we can meet the demand and give students the right education.” (FGD-PH). This highlighted the direct impact of budget limitations on staffing and instructional quality. Participants also pointed to the importance of alignment with external stakeholders: “When talking about the budget, sir, we feel more talk with the LGU is needed. Sometimes, they do not see what the school really needs. Education has different priorities, not the same as theirs. If they don’t understand that, support will always be not enough.” (Marites). This response revealed the ongoing need for stronger partnerships with local government to ensure education-specific resource priorities are met. The theme of chronic underfunding recurred across narratives: “We realize budget is big issue... for many years, we wait for correct allocation, but still we do not receive the full amount. We hope someday, most of the funds for student services will go to us... now, it's not enough, really.” (Ronald). This highlights systemic issues in fiscal planning and allocation that undermine institutional sustainability.

Institutional Support and Organizational Efficiency. Efficient operations were shown to rely not only on funding but on structured, values-aligned support systems. One participant explained how campus-wide routines contribute to order: “We realize it is important to keep things more organized, especially for school activities. Like every first Monday, we have Mass and the weekly Rosary, too... the campus ministry takes care so it does not disturb the class. This way, students and teachers can join, but no problem with the schedule, you know. It helps things run smoothly.” (FGD-PH). Others emphasized how workplace culture and mutual support improved morale: “Sir, we see that building a strong workplace comes from small things... like our Damayan. When teachers have a birthday, get sick, or lose someone, we give them small help. Not just money, but it shows care. It really helps teachers feel happy and like they belong. It is why some stay longer.” (Marites). Such gestures, while informal, played a critical role in fostering loyalty and emotional well-being. Institutional care also extended to students: “For students, sir, we know not all can pay. So, the school gives financial assistance to those who really need it. Without that, some might stop studying already. This kind of support makes school more open to everyone and still follows values, you know.” (Ronald). These responses reveal a shared belief that institutional efficiency is rooted in relational trust and responsive support systems, not just policy compliance.

DISCUSSION

Problems, Issues, and Concerns on Organizational Culture

In reflecting on the college's organizational culture, we began to see that its challenges go far deeper than surface-level inefficiencies. We observed visible issues, including fragmented structures, outdated facilities, and procedural delays that disrupted daily operations and lowered morale. These operational weaknesses made me question how effective systems could be built without a strong foundation. My observations echoed Patricio et



al. (2023) and Popelo and Melnychenko (2022), who emphasized that progress falters when institutional processes fail to reflect core values. Similarly, Coman and Bonciu (2016) highlighted how rigid hierarchies silence the most valuable insights, a phenomenon we witnessed in the centralized, bureaucratic governance. We also found that physical conditions, like overcrowded classrooms and neglected spaces, projected a lack of institutional pride. This supported the findings of Drori et al. (2017) and Hautaniemi (2022), who argue that the physical environment shapes creativity, engagement, and identity. Observing these daily realities made us realize that improving structure and space is not superficial; it is foundational to cultural renewal.

As we looked closer, we saw a more troubling pattern: a disconnect between the college's espoused values and its actual practices. While teamwork, ethical leadership, and transparency were often highlighted in official materials, we rarely saw these values actively supported or modeled. Departments remained isolated, and leadership lacked consistency in communication and accountability. This gap reminded me of Dees (2021), who warned that empty rhetoric breeds disillusionment. Ihsan et al. (2021) and Zhu et al. (2016) reinforced the idea that values need structural reinforcement to become meaningful, while Arifin et al. (2020) showed that without tangible systems, collaboration and ethics remain symbolic. In this light, we began to understand why staff morale was low and trust in leadership was fragile. These experiences made us reflect on how deeply institutions must commit to embedding their values in everyday operations, not just in mission statements.

Beyond what is visible and stated, we realized that the most difficult challenges of the college stem from entrenched cultural beliefs. One of the clearest barriers we noticed was the way authority was perceived: influence was seen as belonging only to senior positions, while junior staff often remained silent. This dynamic resonated with Westover (2024), who described how hierarchical mindsets suppress innovation. Mazur (2018) and Selart and Schei (2016) also illustrated how high power distance reduces collaboration and creativity, something we saw firsthand. Ihsan et al. (2021) noted that without shared ownership, innovation is nearly impossible, and we found this especially true in the lack of inclusive decision-making. We also observed a broader fear of change. Even when reform was needed, the institution clung to tradition, avoiding experimentation. Westover (2024) and Myers et al. (2022) speak to how resistance to change weakens growth initiatives, while Ali (2020) and Erdem (2016) caution that tradition, when mistaken for excellence, can lead to cultural stagnation.

Looking back, we have come to believe that the problems at the college cannot be fixed by structural adjustments alone. A fundamental transformation requires a cultural shift that aligns the institution's daily practices with its highest ideals. It means challenging assumptions about hierarchy, creating systems that genuinely support collaboration and accountability, and fostering a physical and social environment that reflects pride, engagement, and adaptability. This reflection has made it clear to us that cultural reform is not just an abstract goal; it is a daily practice that must be lived by everyone in the institution, from leadership to students. Without this, any reform will remain surface-level and unsustainable.

Coping Mechanisms to Address Problems in the Organizational Culture

In reflecting on the coping mechanisms used at Local College, we began to understand how the institution manages its organizational culture through a combination of visible structures, aspirational values, and deeply rooted assumptions. On the surface, we noticed that formal guidelines, documented protocols, and standardized decision-making processes offer clarity and consistency in daily operations. Initially, we saw these tools as efficient and reassuring, especially in complex academic settings. However, we gradually realized that they also introduce rigidity. For example, consistent behavioral norms, while stabilizing, can sometimes prevent innovation, as Drori et al. (2017) and Westover (2024) caution. Okraszewska (2016) and Ihsan et al. (2021) also prompted me to consider how unchecked legacy norms can clash with evolving priorities and limit creative responses. The emphasis on documentation brought similar tensions. Although it reduced ambiguity, it also encouraged compliance over initiative. This was echoed in the work of Hautaniemi (2022), Ali (2020), and Patricio et al. (2023), who all stress the need to regularly adapt protocols to remain relevant and empowering. From my perspective, these coping mechanisms reflect a culture that values stability, but we now see the importance of complementing that with reflection, adaptability, and openness to change.



Digging deeper, we saw how the college relies on espoused values such as leadership and collaboration to address gaps between ideals and practices. While these values are frequently mentioned, we observed inconsistent application. One key coping strategy is the institution's strong dependence on leadership and accountability. At first, we thought this was a strength; leaders set direction and reinforced ethical standards. But over time, we noticed that decision-making was often top-down, leaving staff disempowered. This disconnection reminded us of Ihsan et al. (2021), Sedarmayanti et al. (2020), and Dees (2021), who argue that when accountability is not modeled by leadership, it loses credibility and undermines trust. Westover (2025) further highlighted the importance of transparent practices in building authentic accountability. Similarly, we observed efforts to promote interdepartmental collaboration, but silos and a lack of shared systems weakened these intentions. Painter (2021), Dees (2021), and Westover (2024) helped us see that real collaboration requires more than aspirational language. It demands systems that support and reward cooperative efforts. Through this reflection, we have come to realize that leadership and teamwork must be practiced consistently, not just spoken about, for them to shape culture meaningfully.

What struck us most, however, were the cultural assumptions beneath these strategies, particularly the belief that stability is best preserved through control and hierarchy. We noticed that decisions were often centralized, and authority was strictly defined, creating a predictable yet rigid environment. At first, we could appreciate the comfort this brought during times of uncertainty. However, as we engaged more with staff and faculty, we saw how these control systems often discouraged autonomy and slowed down necessary change. This perspective was supported by Erdem (2016) and Ali (2020), who both highlight how excessive structure can hinder creativity and responsiveness. Saad and Kaur's (2018) insights about unconscious cultural norms also resonated with us. We began to see how many of these assumptions operate beneath the surface, shaping daily behavior without being openly questioned. Westover (2024) emphasized that unless these beliefs are confronted, outdated power dynamics will continue to limit progress. This made us think deeply about the hidden barriers that even well-intentioned systems can reinforce.

Reflecting on all of this, we now understand that while Local College's coping mechanisms offer order and consistency, they may also inhibit growth if not balanced with cultural introspection and adaptability. The college appears to be navigating change cautiously, using structure to preserve identity. However, as we have learned, true resilience does not come from control alone. It comes from the ability to evolve. If the institution wants to remain relevant and responsive in a rapidly changing educational landscape, it must commit not only to structural reforms but to cultural transformation. That means reassessing its values, loosening hierarchical constraints, and creating space for inclusive, participatory practices that align with its stated ideals.

Insights and Realizations on the Organizational Culture

Through my engagement with the Local College, we have come to realize that cultivating a strong organizational culture hinges on three foundational pillars: faculty development, ethical leadership, and institutional efficiency. We observed that efforts to support faculty growth, improve governance, and align financial decisions with strategic priorities were aimed not only at institutional stability but also at long-term sustainability. These realizations helped us appreciate the importance of transparent policymaking, participatory decision-making, and a continuous improvement mindset. As Troyan and Kravchenko (2021) and Knysh et al. (2023) highlighted, integrating digital tools, flexible learning, and adaptive platforms significantly modernizes education. We also resonated with Gorina's (2024) emphasis on the importance of structured environments for enhancing creativity and learning outcomes. These insights solidified our belief that sustainable academic growth requires investment in both human resources and innovation-driven infrastructure.

Reflecting specifically on faculty development, we came to see that improving qualifications and providing ongoing support are vital for institutional success. At Local College, we noticed the positive impacts of faculty training and mentorship, though financial barriers often limit access to further education. Dhawan (2019) and Jadhav (2019) confirmed that structured training pathways and development initiatives enhance teaching quality and boost research engagement. Luthra et al. (2023) also stressed that institutional support through grants and funding is essential to overcoming these financial obstacles. We found ourselves agreeing with Kamel (2016), who noted that faculty development is closely tied to institutional credibility. Moreover, when faculty are incentivized, through scholarships, salary adjustments, or recognition, their engagement and morale rise

significantly, as Snehi (2019) and Morris and Miller (2023) both observed. From what we have seen, when faculty are empowered, the institution becomes more resilient and impactful.

Turning to leadership and governance, we have come to recognize how essential it is to foster ethical, participatory, and data-informed leadership structures. At the Local College, we saw how inclusive decision-making, transparent communication, and clear accountability frameworks positively influenced faculty morale and institutional cohesion. Yet we also noticed how bureaucracy and outdated processes can stall progress, a concern echoed by Brown (2017). Davidovitch and Iram (2015) reminded us that ethical leadership fosters trust and adaptability, while Smith and Egitim (2024) highlighted its connection to stronger engagement. We found Elugbaju et al. (2024) particularly relevant, as their work demonstrates how data-driven governance supports operational decision-making. Furthermore, Pesce (2015) and Jiang and Xue (2021) showed that investing in technology, leadership training, and efficient administration directly improves performance and faculty retention. These experiences reinforced our conviction that reforming leadership systems and aligning them with institutional goals is crucial for sustaining academic excellence.

Lastly, we have come to deeply appreciate the role of financial management and institutional support in shaping organizational culture. At the Local College, we observed that transparent budgeting, equitable resource allocation, and strategic funding partnerships enabled more stable and effective operations. Tymchak (2021) and Pesce (2015) emphasized that financial efficiency is key to meeting both academic and operational demands. However, as Dmitrienko (2023) and Karlibaeva (2023) point out, budget limitations often restrict faculty hiring, infrastructure improvements, and student services. From our experience, addressing these gaps through inclusive planning and diversified funding is crucial. We also saw that institutions that prioritize workplace culture and student support, through initiatives such as strategic HR management (Harrison & Bazzy, 2017) and financial aid (García et al., 2019), are more resilient and inclusive. Wyland et al. (2023), McCardle et al. (2019), and Kaul (2019) further confirmed that institutional culture thrives when support systems align with community needs. These realizations have strengthened our belief that equity, accessibility, and sustainability must guide every decision in higher education.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that the cultural challenges facing local higher education institutions extend far beyond procedural inefficiencies; they are deeply rooted in misalignments between visible practices, espoused ideals, and entrenched assumptions. Drawing from Schein's framework, the analysis showed how hierarchical mindsets, political interference, and resource constraints have constrained collaboration, ethical leadership, and institutional innovation. However, it also highlighted the potential for transformation through faculty development, inclusive governance, and strategic resource management. For meaningful and sustainable reform to occur, local colleges must move beyond coping mechanisms and instead embrace a culture of introspection, participatory leadership, and continuous learning. Ultimately, cultivating an organizational culture that aligns structure with values is not only essential for institutional growth but also imperative for advancing equity, accountability, and educational excellence in the local context.

Future Directions

While this study has illuminated key cultural dynamics within Local College, it also highlights the need for further investigation to deepen our understanding and guide actionable change. We recommend a follow-up quantitative study to validate the relationships among the core elements identified: visible challenges and practices, stated ideals and conflict points, and deep-rooted cultural barriers. An Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) can be conducted using items derived from the qualitative insights to uncover the latent factors that influence institutional behavior and development. These factors can then inform regression analyses to identify which elements significantly predict outcomes such as faculty engagement, governance efficiency, and leadership effectiveness. Mediation analysis may also reveal how coping mechanisms, such as collaborative practices, structured decision-making, and ethical leadership, serve as bridges between organizational issues and developmental outcomes. Finally, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) could be employed to construct and test a comprehensive model of how internal culture interacts with institutional performance. This future direction

aims to translate reflective insights into measurable frameworks that support evidence-based strategies for sustainable improvement in higher education.

Implications for Theory

Grounded in Schein's Organizational Culture Theory, this study reinforces the importance of examining culture across its three levels: artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions. The findings demonstrate how visible challenges (artifacts), such as procedural inefficiencies, are often misaligned with stated ideals like collaboration and ethical leadership and are ultimately rooted in deeper assumptions about hierarchy and control. By identifying coping mechanisms that operate within and across these levels, such as structured decision-making and authority-driven leadership, the study extends Schein's theory by showing how institutions actively respond to cultural tensions. It also highlights the theory's relevance for linking cultural layers to developmental outcomes such as faculty engagement, governance efficiency, and institutional sustainability, emphasizing that long-term change requires alignment across all cultural dimensions.

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study offer several practical implications for higher education leaders and administrators seeking to strengthen organizational culture. First, institutions must move beyond surface-level fixes and address the misalignment between espoused values and actual practices by consistently modeling leadership, communicating transparently, and engaging in inclusive decision-making processes. Structured faculty development programs, coupled with strategic investments in infrastructure and governance reforms, can directly enhance faculty morale, retention, and performance. Additionally, the study underscores the need for ongoing evaluation of institutional protocols to ensure they support, not hinder, collaboration, innovation, and responsiveness. Lastly, promoting ethical leadership and actively challenging rigid hierarchical norms can foster a more adaptive, participatory culture, better suited to navigating the complexities of modern higher education.

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