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Research Article

Examining the Culture of Excellence (CoE) within a Private Philippine Higher Education Institution amidst of the Global Health Crisis

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ABSTRACT

Excellence is one of the thriving drives that any Higher Education Institution in Philippines to be attuned regardless of the challenges imposed by the society, especially during the initial phase of the global health crisis. The context of excellence in Higher Education has different vantage points that have great indicators or manifestations of being excellence in different foundational pillars of Higher Education Institutions. With this, the researchers examined the Culture of Excellence among the employees of a Private Philippine Higher Education Institution

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during the pandemic COVID-19 through a descriptive-correlational research design. Thus, the researchers developed and validated a research instrument that suited for the intention of the study. The developed research instrument was digitized and floated accordingly. Whereas, respondents were determined through the collaboration of the purposive and stratified sampling techniques. Afterward, the collected data was statistically analysed using frequency, percentage, weighted mean, standard deviation, and appropriate correlational analysis. It revealed that the respondents agree that they observed the indicators of Culture of Excellence despite of the global health crisis and modality of working. Furthermore, age and educational background were statistically related to their perception towards the Culture of Excellence. Based on these insights, the researchers created a proposed action plan to further harness and strengthen the said culture among the employees of the institution.

Keywords: *Culture of Excellence, Global Health Crisis, Higher Education Institution, Pandemic COVID-19*

Introduction

The novel coronavirus, COVID-19 pandemic paved different pathways for Philippine Higher Education Institutes (HEIs) to be creative in responding to the unprecedented impact to the educational sector. Whereas, HEIs implemented proactive policies for the continuance in providing educational services (Joaqui et al., 2020). With this, a new era in the field of education has opened up to a variety of ways of offering distance education and techno-dependence. However, these were confronted with several challenges and issues such as disruption of learning processes, highlighted the inequality in accessing education, lack of adequate infrastructure, and preparedness in delivering educational services in the new normal (Radina and Balakina, 2021; Dubey and Deepak, 2020). In comparison with HEIs in the Southeast Asian region, these challenges and issues were observed. These HEIs explored various approaches and frameworks to address the needs of their respective stakeholders during this pressing time. Consequently, it was observed that HEIs are driven and guided with their respective cultural organization pillars to excel. Whereas, the Culture of Excellence (CoE) emerged to be one of the notable traits of HEIs during this pressing time.

Aforementioned, CoE is one of the organizational cultures that paved the way for HEIs to

be creative and strategic in providing quality educational services to their respective stakeholders. This has been observed even before the pandemic period among HEIs. Japos (2022) reported that the CoE greatly influences HEIs in responding to the demands of the society manifested through their high employability, passing rate in licensure examinations, and global competitiveness. This encompasses the quality of teaching and research, support to students, relations with the community, and management of resources. On one hand, Khan and Matlay (2009) mentioned that strong institutional culture that values internal customers can help achieve a motivated workforce, loyalty, high performance, innovation and a distinctive institutional competitive advantage. Hence, these findings are relevant and applicable during this pressing time that HEIs, especially the majority of the institutions are transitioning to the new norm of educational services. In support, Mintorm and Cheng (2014) mentioned that culture of excellence is described in an organizational context encouraging behaviors that, when deployed, continuously improve task performance which involves employees across the different departments, units, schools, or colleges. Furthermore, Kok and McDonald (2015) mentioned that the CoE among HEIs have themes characterized by change management,

research and teaching, communication, strategy and shared values, leadership, departmental culture, rewards and staffing which can be used to harness CoE within the HEIs. In addition, Shobaki, et al. (2016) discussed that CoE has dimensions manifested through excellence in the domains of leadership, service, and knowledge within the HEIs. In addition, Rahman et al. (2016) investigated the CoE among Higher Learning Institutions in Malaysia. It was mentioned that integrity and accountability, positive traits, political freedom, rebranding and upholding reputation, and force-order. Meanwhile, Abatayo and Regis (2018) emphasized that the CoE among HEIs has the features of leadership, instruction, research, and community valuing. However, there is a disparity of perception between the teaching and non-teaching personnel with respect to the CoE as reported. This signifies there are prevailing challenges, concerns, and issues revolving around the notion of CoE among HEIs across the different nations and countries.

Besides the unprecedented impact of COVID-19, Philippine HEIs thrive to be centers of excellence in order for them to support the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Economic Community 2025. Whereas ASEAN member states officially launched their joint effort to work towards free flow of trade in services within the region. In support, the 2022 World's Universities with Real Impact (WURI) Rankings reflected the commitment of Philippine HEIs in accelerating internationalization, strengthening diplomatic relations, expanding linkages, and fostering partnerships to bring more HEIs in international rankings. It is inevitable that the efforts of the Philippine HEIs with the assistance of the Philippine Commission on Higher Education (CHED) are manifesting despite of the challenges that are being confronted impost by the society. Prior to WURI rankings, CHED has been consistently encouraging Philippine HEIs to thrive and excel in their respective niche. These are reflected through some memorandum orders such as CMO No. 55, Series 2016 and CMO No. 46, Series of 2012 which layouts the landscape on how HEIs can be center of excellence in their respective niche. To substantiate, some HEIs undergo accreditation to ensure high standards

are met and being offered to their stakeholders (Japos, 2022). As posited by Kumar et al. (2020), accreditation can really enhance the excellence of HEIs. In pursue of the study, the Framework for Analysing Conceptions of Excellence (FACE) was considered as the guiding conceptual framework based on the study of De Jong et al. (2020). This gave the underpinning principles in analysing the conceptions and perspectives of the teaching personnel, non-teaching personnel, and school leaders of a Private HEI based in Makati City, National Capital Region, Philippines.

In consideration of the threats of the global health crisis, the CoE to some extent has been challenged and questioned due to the different challenges, issues, and concerns that HEIs are encountering and experiencing towards the new norm of offering educational services. With this, the researchers aimed to examine the CoE within the institution to provide insights and action plan that will further harness and strengthen the CoE.

Methods

In pursuit of the study, the researchers considered a descriptive - correlational research design. By doing this, the researchers were able to examine the CoE through a survey approach. Hence, the researchers considered 3 stages to substantiate the objectives of the study.

Stage 1 pertains to developing and validating a research instrument appropriate for the purpose of the study. In this stage, the researchers conducted preliminary activities such as conducting interviews, survey, and literature review to develop the initial draft of the research instrument. Afterward, the researchers observed appropriate steps in developing and validating the research instrument (de Jong et al., 2020; Rahman, et al, 2016). Whereas, the Cronbach Alpha test was used to establish the reliability of the developed instrument. It yields to a coefficient of 0.967 which implies that the instrument is an excellent tool for the study (Gliem and Gliem, 2020). Meanwhile, principal factor analysis was used to validate and reduce the question items to 36 items from 72 items. Furthermore, the researchers consulted experts in the field of education,

educational leadership, measurement, and evaluation prior to the finalization of the research instrument. The final form of the research instrument is comprised of sections designed to capture the demographic profile and 36 items to gauge their perception towards the CoE observed within the institution. It is worth noting that the instrument was digitized in compliance with the health protocol implemented by the institution attuned to the Philippine government health protocol mandates in response to the global health crisis. More importantly, the researchers observed the Philippine Data Privacy Act of 2012.

Stage 2 pertains to the data collection. In this stage, the researchers administered the digitized and floated instrument for 2 - 3 weeks to give ample time for the respondents to complete the survey. It is worth noting that purposive and stratified sampling techniques were considered in this study. The researchers prepared a set of criteria to determine the respondents. Consequently, the sample size is

108 based on the Cochran sampling method considering a 5% margin of error. In addition, the researchers observed that each department and unit of the institution were part of the respondents to ensure a consolidated perspective from the teaching personnel, non-teaching personnel, and school leaders.

Lastly, Stage 3 pertains to the data analysis. In analysing and scrutinizing the collected data, the researchers observed proper protocol and utilization of a licensed IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 30. Afterward, the researchers developed and proposed an action plan based on the salient findings.

Results and Discussion

This study examined the CoE through establishing the demographic profile and perception towards CoE by the respondents. Afterward, an action plan was developed and proposed accordingly to the salient findings of the study.

Table 1. Respondents Demographic Profile (n = 108)

Profile Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
21 - 30 years old	49	45.40
31 - 40 years old	32	29.60
41 - 50 years old	17	15.70
51 - 60 years old	10	9.30
Gender		
Female	54	50.00
Male	52	48.10
Prefer not to answer	2	1.90
Length of Stay with the Institution		
0 - 2 years	54	50.00
3 - 6 years	45	41.70
7 - 9 years	7	6.50
more than 9 years	2	1.90
Educational Background		
Associate/Bachelor's Degree Holder	81	75.00
Master's Degree Holder	25	23.10
Doctorate Degree Holder	2	1.90
Job Function		
Teaching Personnel	25	23.10
Non-Teaching Personnel	71	65.70
School Leaders	12	11.10

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. This gives a context of the respondents considered in the study. Whereas, the respondents were comprised of 45.40% with an age ranging from 21 to 30 years old. In terms of the gender, it shows that 50.00% were female. But it is worth noting that 1.90% preferred not to declare their gender. In regard of the length of stay with the institution, it shows that respondents were connected with the

institution not more than 6 years based on the 50.00% declared that they are connected with the institution not more than 2 years and 41.70% declared that they stayed with the institution not more than 6 years. On one hand, 75.00% of the respondents declared that they have an associate/bachelor degree. Lastly, the 65.70% were non-teaching personnel, 23.10% were teaching personnel, and 11.10% were school leaders.

Table 2. Perception towards the Culture of Excellence by the Respondents (n = 108)

Dimension	Weighted Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Interpretation
Personal	3.33	0.63	Agree
Information	3.26	0.61	Agree
Organizational Features	3.27	0.64	Agree
Accommodations	3.20	0.65	Agree
Work Group	3.36	0.58	Agree
Overall Statistic	3.28	0.62	Agree

Statistical Limits: 4.00 to 3.50 - Strongly Agree; 3.49 to 2.50 - Agree; 2.49 to 1.50 - Disagree; 1.49 to 1.00 - Strongly Disagree

Table 2 shows the summary of the respondents' perception toward the CoE within the institution. It shows that the overall weighted mean of 3.28 with a standard deviation of 0.62 implies that the respondents agree on the presences of the CoE within the institution. Notably, work group dimension seems to be the most valued dimension compared to the other dimension based on the weighted mean. While, accommodations to be the least there is a consistency in regard on the ratings provided by the respondents toward the different dimensions. This suggests that the CoE has founding principles based on the collaborative effort of the institution. This is paramount to the discussion of Rahman, et al. (2016) in regard to the notion of CoE among HEIs. Whereas, integrity and accountability, positive traits, political freedom, rebranding and upholding reputation, and force-order were additional elements that gradually affect the CoE in a HEIs. These were also observed by the researchers within the research locale manifested by the employees.

Despite of this notion the CoE should be a collaborative driven. The researchers noted some of the items that the respondents observed the most. These items pertain on their strong desire to do their best, sense of

accountability, and looking forward to provide innovative services to the stakeholders of the institution. This implies that the respondents have the certain motivation, desire, and passion to observe the CoE within their niche of the institution. Similarly, Khan and Matlay (2009) mentioned that HEIs that have motivated workforce, loyalty, high performance, and innovation among the employees have a strong sense of CoE.

On one hand, the researchers noted some of the items that the respondents least observed in the spirit of the CoE within the institution. These items pertain on the overall compensation and benefit package, availability of improvement plans, and boundaries with personal and professional life. Mintrom and Cheng (2014) mentioned similar context to these findings. Whereas, developing CoE in a HEI entails special relevance of providing professional development training among the employees that falls in the category of improvement plans. Furthermore, Kok and McDonald (2015) mentioned that change management, research and teaching, communication, strategy and shared values, leadership, departmental culture, rewards and staffing have great contribution towards the CoE within a HIE. These findings

suggest that there are certain areas that can be reconsidered to further strengthen and harness the CoE within the institution. To substantiate, the researchers further explored if the

identified profile variables are related to their perception towards the CoE within the institution during the duration of the study.

Table 3. Correlational Analysis ($n = 108$)

Variables	Correlational Coefficient	Sig. Value	Interpretation	Decision to H_0
Age	0.462	0.012	Significant	Reject H_0
Gender	0.041	0.949	Not Significant	Accept H_0
Length of Stay with the Institution	0.310	0.341	Not Significant	Accept H_0
Educational Background	0.550	0.031	Significant	Reject H_0
Job Function	0.160	0.103	Not Significant	Accept H_0

$\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance

Statistical Limits: 0.00 to 0.29 - weak; 0.30 to 0.59 - moderate; and 0.60 to 0.99 – strong

Table 3 shows the summary of the correlational analysis between the profile variables and perception towards the CoE within the research locale. Notably, age ($r = 0.462$, $p = 0.012 < 0.05$) and educational background ($r = 0.550$, $p = 0.031 < 0.05$) yield to statistical relationship towards the perception of the CoE. In addition, both variables have a moderate degree of relationship (Levin & Fox, 2014). On the other hand, gender ($r = 0.041$, $p = 0.949 > 0.05$), length of stay with the institution ($r = 0.310$, $p = 0.341 > 0.05$), and job function ($r = 0.160$, $p = 0.103 > 0.05$) did not show any statistical relationship towards the perception of CoE. With these findings, the researchers noted that the result contradicts the discussion of O' Connor & O'Hagan (2015) in regard to the implication of gender and CoE. In addition, the discussion of loyalty of employees by Khan and Matlay (2009).

Conclusion

This study examined the CoE based on the perspective of the teaching personnel, non-teaching personnel, and school administration from a Philippine Private HEI amidst of the global health issues caused by COVID-19 and other infectious diseases. It is worth noting that the respondents observed the CoE during this pressing time. In addition, age and educational background were statistically related to the respondents' perception toward the CoE within the institution. Based on these salient findings, the developed and proposed action

plan to further harness and cultivate the CoE within the community of the institution includes the following:

1. Revisitation of the Employees Compensation and Benefit Packages to further motivate and assist the employees in thriving excellence in their respective workplace and niche;
2. Employees Engagement Program, a program designed to further deepen the understanding of the employees about the institution's mission, vision, objectives, and core values attuned to the CoE.
3. Appropriate Personal and Professional Training Program, a program designed to further leverage the personal and professional growth of employees. This is consonance to the discussion of Abatayo and Regis (2018) about the CoE in a HEI has features of leadership, instruction, research, and community valuing. In addition as Sunder and Antony (2018) discussed the relevance of the appropriate personal and professional training program based on leadership agenda and organization vision for quality excellence.

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