

# Organizational Trust and Defensive Work Practices in Selected Cities in National Capital Region towards Governance Strategic Framework

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## ABSTRACT

Public organizations operate within complex institutional environments where formal structures alone cannot guarantee effectiveness. Relational dynamics, particularly organizational trust, play a decisive role in shaping employee behavior, collaboration, and responsiveness which will affect effective public service delivery. This study investigated the interplay between organizational trust and defensive work practices in selected Local Government Units in Metro Manila. Anchored on Mayer, Davis, and Schoorman's Integrative Model of Organizational Trust and Morrison and Milliken's Organizational Silence Theory, this study examined trust through the dimensions of ability, benevolence, and integrity. While defensive behaviors were analyzed in terms of communication avoidance, risk avoidance, information withholding, and

compliance-based practices. A sequential mixed-methods design was employed, combining a survey data of 387 respondents with qualitative insights from semi-structured interviews. The findings revealed that employees demonstrated a high level of organizational trust, indicating that they generally perceived their leaders and organizations as competent, benevolent, and acting with integrity. This implies that organizational trust serves as a foundational condition that promotes confidence in leadership, facilitates cooperation, and supports the implementation of strategic management initiatives. However, the persistence of defensive work practices at a moderate level indicates that trust alone does not completely eliminate self-protective workplace behaviors. Employees continued to exhibit communication avoidance, selective information sharing, risk-averse decision-making, and compliance driven actions. Reflecting the influence of organizational uncertainties, perceived consequences of speaking up, and the need to protect themselves from potential interpersonal or institutional risks. The qualitative findings further demonstrated that while trust encouraged transparency, collaboration, and active participation in organizational processes, gaps in psychological safety, leadership consistency, and participatory decision-making contributed to the continuation of defensive behaviors that constrained innovation, open communication, and organizational learning. Hence, it is suggested that effective strategic management extends beyond fostering trust and requires governance systems that institutionalize transparency, psychological safety, employee empowerment, and inclusive decision-making. These conditions enable organizations to transform trust into proactive employee engagement while minimizing defensive work practices that may hinder strategic effectiveness and organizational performance.

**Keywords:** *Organizational Trust, Defensive Workplace Behavior, Strategic Governance,*

## INTRODUCTION

Public organizations operate within complex institutional and organizational environments where formal rules, hierarchical authority, and administrative procedures shape the behavior of public officials and employees (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Scott, 2020). In government institutions, organizational effectiveness is not determined solely by formal structures or strategic plans but also by the quality of relationships that exist within the workplace. Among these relational factors, organizational trust plays a critical role in shaping how employees interpret policies, interact with leadership, and respond to managerial directives. Trust influences the willingness of employees to cooperate, share information, and align their actions with organizational goals, particularly in bureaucratic settings where coordination across units and levels of authority is required (Levi & Stoker, 1998).

Within the discipline of Public Administration, trust has long been recognized as a fundamental mechanism that facilitates cooperation, reduces uncertainty, and enhances organizational performance (Rousseau et al., 1998; Kim, 2005). Public sector organizations depend heavily on collective action, administrative coordination, and institutional compliance. In such contexts, trust functions as an informal governance mechanism that complements formal structures and procedures. When employees perceive that leaders and institutions act fairly, transparently, and consistently, they are more likely to demonstrate commitment to organizational objectives and actively participate in strategic initiatives (O'Neill, 2002). Conversely, the absence of trust often produces cautious or protective behaviors among employees, particularly in environments characterized by rigid hierarchies, ambiguous accountability systems, or perceived political interference (Argyris, 1990). Under these conditions, employees may prioritize self-protection rather than innovation, collaboration, or proactive engagement with organizational goals. One observable consequence of low-trust organizational environments is the emergence of defensive work practices. Defensive work practices refer to behavioral strategies adopted by employees to minimize personal risk, avoid blame, or protect themselves from potential administrative sanctions. These practices may manifest through excessive adherence to procedural rules, reluctance to take initiative, withholding of information, or avoidance of decision-making responsibilities (Sennett, 1998). Defensive behaviors tend to slow decision-making processes, discourage innovation, and weaken the implementation of organizational strategies, ultimately limiting the capacity of public organizations to achieve their intended objectives.

The issue becomes particularly significant in the context of strategic management within the public sector. Strategic management involves the formulation and implementation of long-term goals, policies, and administrative actions intended to improve organizational performance and public service delivery. Unlike private sector organizations where strategic authority is often concentrated among executive leadership, strategic initiatives in government institutions require extensive collaboration across departments, compliance with formal procedures, and coordination with multiple stakeholders. As a result, the successful implementation of strategic management initiatives is closely linked to internal organizational dynamics, particularly the level of trust that exists among employees and between staff and leadership. When trust is present, employees are more likely to support organizational reforms, contrite to strategic planning processes, and engage constructively in institutional change. However, when trust is weak or absent, defensive behaviors may emerge, creating resistance to change and reinforcing bureaucratic inertia.

These dynamics are particularly relevant within local government institutions, where administrative functions are closely tied to public accountability, political leadership, and service delivery responsibilities. In metropolitan governance environments such as Metro Manila, city governments operate under conditions of administrative complexity, high service demands, and continuous policy pressures. Urban local government units are responsible for managing a wide range of functions including infrastructure development, disaster risk management, social welfare programs, urban planning, regulatory enforcement, etc. Addressing these challenges requires not only effective policy frameworks but also internal organizational environments that support coordination, trust, and cooperation among employees.

The importance of trust and accountable governance is also reflected in the global development agenda, particularly in United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 16: *Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions*. SDG 16

emphasizes the need to build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels of governance. Achieving this objective requires not only the establishment of transparent policies and legal frameworks but also the cultivation of organizational cultures that foster trust, integrity, and cooperation among public servants. Within government institutions, the presence of organizational trust can strengthen administrative accountability and support the effective implementation of public policies. Conversely, environments characterized by mistrust and defensive work practices may weaken institutional capacity and hinder progress toward building strong and responsive public institutions.

Local government workplaces therefore provide a critical setting for examining how organizational trust shapes employee behavior within bureaucratic institutions. Personnel within city governments frequently operate under institutional pressures such as political transitions, resource constraints, regulatory oversight, and interdepartmental coordination demands. These factors can influence employees' perceptions of leadership reliability, fairness in institutional procedures, and stability in organizational objectives. When employees perceive inconsistencies in leadership decisions, limited transparency, or unstable organizational priorities, trust within the workplace may decline. In such situations, employees may adopt defensive work practices as a means of coping with uncertainty or protecting themselves from potential administrative or political risks.

Despite the increasing recognition of trust as a significant determinant of organizational effectiveness, empirical studies examining how institutional and organizational conditions shape trust within local government workplaces remain limited, particularly in the Philippine administrative context. Much of the existing literature on strategic management in public organizations focuses primarily on formal policy processes, institutional reforms, or performance measurement systems (Hoglund et al., 2018). Comparatively less attention has been given to the internal relational dynamics that influence how employees respond to strategic directives. Moreover, the connection between organizational trust and defensive work practices remains underexplored, even though these behaviors can significantly affect the implementation of policies and administrative reforms. In response to these gaps, this study examines how institutional and organizational conditions influence the development of trust within local government workplaces and how such trust, or the absence of it, shapes employees' defensive work practices toward strategic management.

## Literature Review

### *Evolving Perspective on Governance*

Governance has long been a central concept in public administration, but its theoretical framing has evolved in ways that directly shape organizational trust, internal climates, and public service delivery. Classical governance theories were anchored in Weber's (1947) bureaucratic model, which emphasized hierarchy, rational-legal authority, and rule-bound decision making (Blau, 1956; Landel, 2022). Wilson's (1887) politics-administration dichotomy reinforced this orientation by privileging technical efficiency and administrative neutrality (Waldo, 1948; Shaw, 2025). While these frameworks provided predictability and control, they institutionalized impersonal authority structures that limited discretion and suppressed upward communication (Crozier, 1964; Kaufman, 1977; Olsen, 2017). Compliance became the primary indicator of effectiveness, producing organizational climates characterized by formality and risk aversion. Under such conditions, trust was procedural rather than relational, located in systems and rules rather than cooperative relationships (Goodsell, 1983; Lipsky, 1980; Van de Walle & Roberts, 2018; Brodtkin, 2015). The rise of New Public Management (NPM) in the late twentieth century sought to correct bureaucratic inefficiencies by introducing performance measurement, competition, and managerial autonomy (Hood, 1991; Hughes, 2012; Gill, 2023). While NPM reframed governance around results and efficiency, it simultaneously intensified surveillance, audit pressures, and output controls (Power, 2016; Van Thiel & Leeuw, 2019). Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011) argue that these reforms often replaced hierarchical distrust with contractual distrust, shifting organizational climates toward performance anxiety and target compliance (Castelo & Gomes, 2024). Applied to public organizations, this implies that governance arrangements shape not only rules and incentives but also how employees interpret risk, authority, and accountability (Moynihan, 2006; Moynihan, Wright, & Pandey, 2015; Vigoda-Gadot & Meiri, 2008; Six & Verhoest, 2017). These developments shift the analytical focus from governance structures and inter-

organizational coordination to the internal relational conditions through which authority, discretion, and accountability are enacted in everyday organizational life.

### ***Organizational Trust as a Relational Condition***

Organizational trust is not just a psychological attitude or managerial outcome but also a governing relational condition that structures how authority, accountability, and discretion are enacted within public organizations. Empirical research confirms that organizational trust is central to internal climate and service performance. Hasche (2021) shows that trust reduces monitoring costs and supports organizational learning, while Gustafsson et al. (2020) demonstrate that inclusive leadership can preserve trust during periods of disruption. Ayça (2023) further found that employees who perceive authentic leaders as genuinely concerned for their welfare develop higher levels of trust in both their supervisors and their organizations. The study also demonstrated that trust strengthens employees' job performance, indicating that supportive leadership behaviors reinforce both interpersonal relationships and organizational effectiveness. In the Philippine LGU context, Cayton and Ocampo (2025) found that servant and ethical leadership significantly influence organizational trust, while Calapre et al. (2024) observed that trust and organizational commitment are mutually reinforcing. Conversely, Nitafan (2020) documents patterns of silence and burnout among LGU employees, illustrating how low-trust climates foster withdrawal and defensive behavior that undermine responsiveness (Dirks & Ferrin, 2001; Mayer, Davis & Schoorman, 1995; Tzafrir, 2005).

The influence of organizational trust is likewise reflected in how employees respond to organizational authority, accountability, and discretion. Tyler (2006) argued that employees' compliance with organizational rules depends largely on the perceived legitimacy and fairness of authority. Organizational trust operates as the relational mechanism through which governance arrangements shape organizational climate and employee behavior. Where trust is present, public servants are more likely to exercise discretion, share knowledge, and engage in problem-solving; where trust is weak, behavior shifts toward risk avoidance and defensive compliance. Governance effectiveness, therefore, is mediated not only by formal structures or performance systems but by the extent to which trust enables cooperation, responsiveness, and accountable action within public organizations.

### ***Defensive Work Practices in Public Organizations***

Defensive behaviors are found to be typical actions aimed at minimizing embarrassment and threat to position. These behaviors particularly can be observed due to their dependency in procedures and rules (Yang, Secchi & Homberg, 2025). Defensive behavior in the workplace often arises in order to protect the individual self at the expense of another, this may include withholding of services, avoiding supervision, and avoiding leadership driven or change driven conflict, due to strict compliance with organizational policies and rules (Whittaker & Havard, 2015).

Moynihan and Pandey (2017), argues that individual performance, compliance and auditability unintentionally reinforce defensive workplace practices, particularly when metrics are used for disciplinary measures rather than developmental, which are highly practiced in public organizations. This is when accountability is experienced due to strict surveillance rather than to train and develop employees, which tends to narrow individual discretion and avoid actions that could render as failure.

### ***Governance and Trust in Philippine Context***

In the Philippines, confidence in governmental institutions remains a debated issue. Brillantes and Fernandez (2011) assert that institutional changes alone cannot restore governance legitimacy without tackling leadership integrity and trust. Recent studies back this up: Regalado and Sun (2024) found that media exposure and institutional performance affect public trust in legal entities such as courts and police, emphasizing the relational facet of government. Meanwhile, the Philippine governance system experiences broader debate on its capacity and institutional credibility, this emphasizes that trust emerges when institutions demonstrate reliability, responsiveness and procedural fairness in every phase of its processes (World Bank, 2017).

Trust further renders being dependent on political leadership and communication in governance. Studies note that strong government authority generates short term trust through decisive action and symbolic governance,

but sustained trust in government requires institutionalized accountability and rule-based governance. In the Philippines, personalization of power often replaces institutional trust due to communication and political leadership rendering trust and loyalty to leaders rather than the institution itself (Thompson, 2023).

Public service delivery on Philippine governance, especially in health, social protection and disaster response shapes trust which is influenced by frontline interactions with officials and employees. Clear communication and timely services influence trust perception and sometimes shape broader attitudes (Bautista and Villanueva, 2021). Furthermore, perception of systemic failures and faultiest undermine confidence in government institutions, even when improved (Heywood & Rose, 2019), it argues that systemic failures become institutionalized and constituents including employees develop conditional trust, engaging only in government and political functions only when necessary and often defensively. This underscores that several factors generate trust within Philippine government institutions and not solely based on political power and authority that shapes political and social behavior of the constituents and employees alike (Capuno, 2020).

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The study employed a Sequential Mixed Method Design which gathers quantitative and qualitative methods by different phases of data collection. The study will initially gather quantitative data through survey questionnaires to measure the level of organizational trust and prevalence of defensive work practices among employees. The quantitative aspect of the study utilized a descriptive and correlational research design, conducted in the first phase of data gathering which aims to describe and analyze the current conditions of the workplace practices within the local governments and their organizational trust, leading to a strategic management. This method will be used to further describe the patterns, trends within the selected organizations.

Following the Quantitative phase, the qualitative aspect of the study on the other hand uses an exploratory research design to be conducted for the second phase of data collection to further explore findings that support the quantitative findings.

The study used Phenomenology which focuses on the understanding of lived experiences and perceptions which are appropriate in exploring trust and workplace practices within local governments. It will be gathered through a semi-structured interview, to obtain data which contains their experiences and perspectives regarding organizational trust and defensive workplace practices within the LGU's that may lead to formulation of strategic management. By integrating both methods in different phases, the study will provide a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon with measurable trends and patterns for a richer and detailed gathering of the experiences of the informants and the extent of this phenomenon.

### **Research Locale**

The research study was conducted within the selected Local Government Units of Metro Manila, including Makati City, Pasay City and Quezon City.

### **Participants and Sampling Technique**

Proportionate stratified random sampling is utilized to subgroup the total respondents in each Local Government Units to ensure proportionate representation of the key informants. A Slovin's Formula is initially used to calculate the total number of respondents involved in the study before stratifying within each selected Local Government Unit. By applying Slovin's formula, the researcher obtained the overall sample size of 387 across the selected LGU's. After the determination of the total sample size through Slovin's Formula, the study utilized a proportionate stratified random sampling method to select the respondents per Local Government Unit. In this method, the population is divided into relevant subgroups per selected cities in Metro Manila, specifically Pasay, Makati, and Quezon City. The proportionately allocated sample sizes were 245 for Quezon City, 86 for Makati City and 56 for Pasay City. This allocation is appropriate based on the total population of regular employees of each selected LGU's to ensure proper representation. For the qualitative aspect of the study, top management employees are sought furthermore, data saturation is also used to ensure that the findings are

credible and meaningful. This allows the gathering of nuanced and subjective data that cannot be captured through quantitative surveys.

### **Research Instrument and Techniques**

The study used Organizational Trust Scale (OTS) (Scott, 1981), an adopted and modified scale to gather numerical data supporting the answers given in the interviews, this in turn strengthen the argument of the study. The study will also use the Organizational Climate Perception Scale for Public Service (OCPS-PS) and also modified to align with the objectives of the study and reflect behaviors associated with defensive work practices in public organizational settings. The scales are used in the questionnaires to rate the following categories using fixed responses in a 4- point Likert scale ordered as 1 - Strongly Disagree, 2 - Disagree, 3 - Agree, 4 - Strongly Agree. The adoption of 4-point scale emphasizes on the elimination of neutral and bias tendencies and enables the respondents to commit in a stance that reflects their true knowledge and experience whether defensive work practices exist and a lack of organizational trust within the public sector.

Meanwhile, a Semi-Structured Interview is used to delve deeper into the defensive work practices and trust in Local Government Units. The qualitative component of the study allowed the researcher to understand the factors leading to perceived defensive practices in the organization. This will allow and encourage the participants to share detailed narratives of the employee's experiences. This will ensure that the personal opinions of the key informants are accommodated. This will also enable the researcher to support the quantitative findings and conduct a triangulation of collected data to present more robust and credible findings.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Before the data gathering, letters and permissions to conduct within the employees of identified LGU's are submitted to avoid hampering the organizations' operation. Furthermore, this is to ensure that the data gathering will produce meaningful results as well as to determine the number of respondents of the study.

Formulation of qualitative questionnaires to be used in the interviews will be made and validated through pilot testing and reliability tests. Informed consent will also be made and disseminated in the preliminary assessment as well as in the initial qualitative data gathering ensuring that the respondents are made aware of the purpose, risks and their right to withdraw from the study. After determining the respondents, main data gathering will proceed and interviews will be conducted using the utilized instruments. The adopted scales will be disseminated prior to the conduct of the interviews. The data obtained are kept confidential and used strictly only for the study. Statistical and narrative analysis are conducted after data gathering to assess and analyze the responses of the respondents.

### **Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics is used for statistical treatment of quantitative data. It will be used to provide a clear and systematic summary of the characteristics of the employees in the selected local government agencies, and the patterns reflected in their responses in the qualitative interviews. By examining the scores of the behaviors of the employee through numerical data, the researcher can assess whether the defensive tendencies in the workplace are widespread or limited.

A Simple Linear Regression analysis is a statistical technique used for assessing the relationship between variables. It analyzed the indicator's relationship to each indicator to each dependent variable. In this study, it is employed to assess whether each independent variable's relationship to multiple independent variables and is suited to explain which trust related indicators highly affect the defensive workplace practices.

Finally, Narrative Analysis is used for the qualitative data to analyze the responses and their implications about organizational trust or distrust and its factors from the gathered data in the interviews. This will also provide a clear representation of the given answers to understand whether the factors and variables lead to defensive workplace practices in the organization. Narrative analysis looks into the respondents' narratives and statements to delve why these experiences exist within the organization.

## Ethical Consideration

The study recognize the importance of the ethical guidelines and principles in conducting a study involving human participants, the researcher adheres to the guidelines and rules through disseminating informed consent forms, detailed orientation about the study, objectives and roles of the respondents in the study which are provided within the consent forms to be submitted before participating, ensuring that the respondents are aware of the purpose of the study and its risks ensuring the voluntary participation of the respondents. The respondents are also made aware of the risks of participating in the study. The identified and sensitive information that may be given during the collection of data will be kept strictly confidential and will only be used and accessible to the researcher which will be used solely for the conduction of the study. The participants were also informed about their right to refuse and to withdraw from the study at any time without any repercussions. Furthermore, the research involves a comprehensive data collection, storage, management and disposal procedures. The obtained data will be stored, accessible only to the researcher and to be used for the study and will be stored in the duration to which the study is being conducted, and will be destroyed through permanent deletion of files, identifiable information and other data including audio recordings and used questionnaires, ensuring recovery is impossible. Finally, the researchers strictly adhered to the guidelines set within the Data Privacy Act of 2012 for the conduct of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Demographic Profile of the Respondents for Each Local Government Unit

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of Respondents in Terms of Age.*

| Age Group | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------|-----------|------------|
| 21-30     | 75        | 19.38%     |
| 31-40     | 165       | 42.64%     |
| 41-50     | 139       | 35.92%     |
| 51-60     | 8         | 2.06%      |
| >60       | 0         | 0%         |
| OVERALL   | 387       | 100%       |

Legend: *f*= frequency; % = percentage of the total respondents (N = 387).

The findings showed that the demographics of the respondents in terms of age are concentrated to young and middle aged employees with 21-30 years of age having 75 individuals representing 19.38%, the 31-40 years of age having the highest number of employees participated in the study with 165 individuals which contributed largely to the entirety of the study representing 42.64% of the total sample size, implicating that most of the local government employees within the selected cities are middle aged. The second highest number of individuals aged 41-50 with 139 individuals representing 35.92% of the total number of respondents. Meanwhile, a small number of individuals aged 51-60 were included representing 2.06% of the total number of respondents. This allows the study to have a more nuanced perspective from a varied age group.

Table 2. *Demographic Profile of Respondents in Terms of Lgu Locale*

| Local Government Unit | Number of Respondents | Percentage |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|------------|
| Makati City           | 86                    | 63.3%      |
| Quezon City           | 245                   | 22.2%      |
| Pasay City            | 56                    | 13.5%      |
| OVERALL               | 387                   | 100%       |

Legend: *f*= frequency; % = percentage of the total respondents (N = 387).

The findings showed the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of locality of work. The Quezon City LGU, having the most population among the selected cities, selected a total number of 245 individuals which represented 63.3% of the total number of the respondents. Makati City LGU came second with 86 employees representing 22.2% of the total number of respondents. Meanwhile Pasay City having the lowest population among the selected cities allocated the least with 56 employees representing 14.5% of the total number of the respondents.

### **The Perceived Level of Organizational Trust Among Employees in Selected Local Government Units in Metro Manila in Terms of: Ability; Benevolence; and Integrity**

Table 3. *The Perceived Level of Organizational Trust Among Employees in Selected Local Government Units in Metro Manila in Terms of Ability.*

| Ability                                                                                                    | Mean        | Interpretation | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------------|
| 1. My immediate supervisor demonstrates the competence needed to effectively manage work responsibilities. | 3.44        | Agree          | 0.60           |
| 2. My immediate supervisor is capable of making sound decisions regarding work-related matters.            | 3.46        | Agree          | 0.58           |
| 3. Members of my workgroup poses the skills necessary to perform their duties effectively.                 | 3.40        | Agree          | 0.57           |
| 4. Management in this organization demonstrates the capability to lead and manage operations effectively.  | 3.41        | Agree          | 0.61           |
| 5. I can rely on my supervisors' expertise when I encounter difficulties in my job.                        | 3.39        | Agree          | 0.57           |
| <b>OVERALL</b>                                                                                             | <b>3.42</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>0.49</b>    |

Legend: 3.51- 4.00=Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.50=Agree, 1.54 - 2.50=Disagree, 1.00 - 1.50=Strongly Disagree

Table 3 presents the perceived level of organizational trust among employees in selected Local Government Units in Metro Manila in terms of Ability. The overall mean score of 3.42, verbally interpreted as Agree, indicates that employees generally perceive a high level of competence and capability among supervisors, workgroup members, and management. This finding shows that employees generally trust the knowledge, skills, and decision-making capabilities of organizational leaders and colleagues, reinforcing the competence-based dimension of organizational trust. This finding is consistent with Suriaga (2023), who emphasized that effective leadership, characterized with integrity, competence, and participatory governance fosters higher levels of trust among employees within Philippine local government units. Such perceptions indicate that employees view their leaders as capable of performing their responsibilities effectively, thereby strengthening confidence in organizational processes and promoting a positive organizational climate. The highest mean (3.46, Agree) was observed in the supervisor's ability to make sound decisions, followed closely by the demonstration of competence in managing work responsibilities ( $M = 3.44$ ) and management's capability to lead effectively ( $M = 3.41$ ). Schneider (1975) argued that employees' shared perceptions of organizational practices shape workplace behavior and organizational effectiveness. When employees consistently perceive leaders as capable, they are more likely to cooperate, communicate openly, and support organizational objectives. Likewise, employees agree that their workgroup members possess the necessary skills ( $M = 3.40$ ) and that supervisors' expertise can be relied upon during difficulties ( $M = 3.39$ ). These consistently high mean values suggest that employees have strong confidence in the abilities of both leadership and peers, indicating a solid foundation of trust based on competence within the organization. This suggests that public organizations cannot rely solely on formal rules, bureaucratic procedures, and accountability mechanisms to achieve organizational effectiveness. Rather, governance outcomes increasingly depend on the relational conditions existing within organizations. Hasche (2021) argued that organizational trust

reduces monitoring costs while promoting organizational learning, allowing public organizations to operate more efficiently without excessive reliance on rigid supervision. When employees perceive leaders and colleagues as capable, they become more willing to cooperate, share information, rely on supervisory decisions, and exercise professional discretion.

The standard deviation values indicate the level of consistency in employees' perceptions of organizational ability. The overall standard deviation of 0.49 suggests relatively consistent responses, meaning employees share similar views regarding the competence of supervisors, colleagues, and management. This differs from the findings of Park (2012) who found that organizational trust among employees varied considerably across public organizations perceptions of managerial competence and leadership practices, and governance environments. Unlike organizations experiencing leadership uncertainty or inconsistent managerial capability, the participating LGU's in this study appears to have established a stronger employee confidence in the competence of supervisors and management. Among the indicators, the highest variability was observed in management's ability to lead and manage operations ( $SD = 0.61$ ) and supervisors' competence ( $SD = 0.60$ ), indicating slight differences in employees' experiences or perceptions of leadership effectiveness. This variation also carries important organizational implications. Although employees generally express confidence in leadership, differences in perception suggest that managerial competence may not be uniformly across departments or organizational levels. This aligns with the findings of Brillantes and Fernandez (2011), who argued that governance reforms alone cannot sustain organizational trust unless leadership quality is consistently demonstrated throughout public institutions. Meanwhile, the lowest standard deviation values ( $SD = 0.57$ ) were recorded in employees' perceptions of their workgroup's skills and reliance on supervisors' expertise, suggesting a stronger consensus in these areas. The consistent yet slightly varied responses overall imply that while employees largely agree on the competence of individuals in the organization, some differences in perception exist, particularly regarding leadership performance at higher levels. This suggest that while competence-based trust is generally strong, LGU's may further strengthen trust by ensuring more consistent leadership development, managerial capability, and participatory governance practices across all organizational levels.

Table 4. *The Perceived Level of Organizational Trust Among Employees In Selected Local Government Units in Metro Manila in Terms of Benevolence.*

| Benevolence                                                                                          | Mean        | Interpretation | Standard Deviation |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. My immediate supervisor treats employees with concern and understanding.                          | 3.44        | Agree          | 0.61               |
| 2. Members of my workgroup are willing to help each other accomplish tasks.                          | 3.41        | Agree          | 0.61               |
| 3. My co-workers and supervisor are supportive when employees experience difficulties at work.       | 3.35        | Agree          | 0.61               |
| 4. Management considers the welfare of employees when making decisions.                              | 3.31        | Agree          | 0.59               |
| 5. I feel comfortable discussing work-related problems with my immediate co-workers and supervisors. | 3.30        | Agree          | 0.69               |
| <b>OVERALL</b>                                                                                       | <b>3.36</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>0.51</b>        |

Legend: 3.51- 4.00=Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.50=Agree, 1.54 - 2.50=Disagree, 1.00 - 1.50=Strongly Disagree

Table 4 presents the perceived level of organizational trust among employees in selected Local Government Units in Metro Manila in terms of Benevolence. The overall mean score of 3.36, verbally interpreted as Agree, indicates that employees generally perceive a high level of care, support, and concern for their well-being within the organization. This finding suggests that employees believe supervisors, colleagues, and management genuinely consider their welfare and are willing to provide assistance when needed, reinforcing the

interpersonal dimension of organizational trust. This is consistent with the findings of Cayton and Ocampo (2025), who emphasized that servant leadership and ethical leadership foster higher organizational trust because leaders who demonstrate concern for employees' welfare strengthen positive workplace relationships and employee confidence in management. Similarly, Calapre et al. (2024) found that supportive relationships between supervisors and employees significantly enhance organizational trust and commitment among employees in Philippine local government units. Likewise, Ayca (2023) reported that employees who perceive their supervisors as supportive and genuinely concerned for their welfare exhibit higher levels of trust in both their supervisors and organizations resulting in improved job performance. Such perceptions indicate that employees experience supportive leadership and collaborative relationships, thereby promoting a positive organizational climate characterized by mutual respect, cooperation, and stronger interpersonal trust. The highest mean (3.44, Agree) was observed in the extent to which supervisors treat employees with concern and understanding, followed by the willingness of workgroup members to help each other accomplish tasks ( $M = 3.41$ ) and the support provided when employees experience difficulties ( $M = 3.35$ ). These findings indicate that supportive supervisory practices and cooperative peer relationships are consistently experienced by employees across participating LGU's. Gustafsson et al. (2020) similarly emphasized that leaders who consistently demonstrate empathy, openness, and concern for employees preserve organizational trust, particularly during periods of organizational uncertainty and change. Likewise, Gill et al. (2024) found that employees develop stronger trust intentions when they perceive both competence and genuine care from their supervisors, while Gajda (2024) reported that supportive interpersonal relationships encourage greater knowledge sharing and collaboration within organizations. Employees likewise agreed that they feel comfortable discussing work-related problems with supervisors and co-workers ( $M = 3.30$ ) and perceive that management considers employee welfare in decision-making ( $M = 3.31$ ). These consistently favorable ratings suggest that employees experience a supportive and collaborative work environment, reinforcing trust through positive interpersonal relationships and concern for employee welfare. This further supports the findings of Calapre et al, who concluded that organizational trust strengthens employees' commitment within Philippine LGU's through supportive relationships between supervisors and employees. Beyond fostering positive workplace relationships, these findings imply that benevolence serves as an important organizational resource that enhances cooperation, employee engagement, and collective responsibility. In local government organizations, where effective public service delivery depends on teamwork and interdepartmental coordination, supportive leadership encourages employees to willingly assist colleagues, exchange knowledge, and contribute beyond their formal job responsibilities. As emphasized by Beshi and Kaur (2022), good governance practices strengthen trust by fostering supportive relationships between management and employees, ultimately improving organizational effectiveness and the quality of public service. Whitener, Brodt, Kosgaard, and Werner (1998) argued that when managers fail to consistently demonstrate concern for employees' interest, organizational trust declines because employees become less likely to perceive management as supportive or trustworthy. Similarly, Dirks and Ferrin (2001) concluded that employees who perceive limited supervisory support exhibit lower levels of organizational trust, commitment, and willingness to cooperate. These findings suggests that benevolence is not uniformly experienced across public organizations and largely depends on leadership. Compared with organizations characterized by inconsistent managerial support, the participating LGUs appear to foster stronger supportive relationships that reinforce employees' confidence in supervisors and colleagues. It implies that benevolence should not be viewed as a static organizational characteristic but rather as a leadership practice that requires continuous reinforcement through employee-centered management, effective communication, and supportive supervisory behaviors. Without consistent demonstrations of concern and fairness, employees' trust may gradually diminish despite the presence of formal organizational policies promoting employee welfare.

The standard deviation values reflect the degree of consistency in employees' perceptions of benevolence within the organization. The overall standard deviation of 0.51 indicates relatively consistent responses, suggesting that employees generally share similar views regarding the supportive nature of their supervisors, peers, and management. The highest variability was observed in the comfort of discussing work-related problems ( $SD = 0.69$ ), indicating that some employees may still feel less comfortable sharing concerns despite the generally positive perception. This variation carries important organizational implications since employees may recognize

supervisors as caring while still feeling reluctant to express concerns due to differences in communication practices, supervisory styles, organizational hierarchy, or fear of negative evaluation. Other items, such as supervisors' concern ( $SD = 0.61$ ), co-worker support ( $SD = 0.61$ ), and willingness to help ( $SD = 0.61$ ), show moderate consistency in responses. The lowest variability was found in management's consideration of employee welfare ( $SD = 0.59$ ), suggesting a stronger consensus in this aspect. The relatively lower variability further indicates that supportive organizational practices are embedded within the broader organizational culture rather than being confined to particular offices or workgroups. Such consistency contributes to stronger employee morale, greater collaboration, and enhanced organizational stability because employees develop shared expectations regarding supportive leadership and cooperative workplace relationships. Overall, the results indicate that while perceptions of benevolence are largely aligned, slight differences exist in employees' comfort levels in openly communicating work-related issues.

Table 5. *The Perceived Level of Organizational Trust Among Employees in Selected Local Government Units in Metro Manila in Terms of Integrity.*

| Integrity                                                                                                      | Mean        | Interpretation | Standard Deviation |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. People in this organization can depend on one another to do what is right.                                  | 3.36        | Agree          | 0.62               |
| 2. Employees in this organization generally performs their job in a trustworthy manner.                        | 3.36        | Agree          | 0.59               |
| 3. My immediate supervisor treats employees fairly and consistently.                                           | 3.34        | Agree          | 0.67               |
| 4. Management takes responsibility for their decisions and is transparent about how they impact the workforce. | 3.33        | Agree          | 0.62               |
| 5. Management follows through on the commitments they make such as rewards, promotions and wage raise.         | 3.32        | Agree          | 0.72               |
| <b>OVERALL</b>                                                                                                 | <b>3.31</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>0.43</b>        |

Legend: 3.51- 4.00=Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.50=Agree, 1.54 - 2.50=Disagree, 1.00 - 1.50=Strongly Disagree

Table 5 presents the perceived level of organizational trust among employees in selected Local Government Units in Metro Manila in terms of Integrity. The overall mean score of 3.31, verbally interpreted as Agree, indicates that employees generally perceive a high level of honesty, fairness, and reliability within the organization. This finding suggests that employees believe supervisors, colleagues, and management consistently adhere to ethical standards, fulfill their responsibilities, and uphold fairness in organizational practices. The findings are consistent with Suriaga (2023), who emphasized that integrity, accountability, and ethical leadership are fundamental in cultivating organizational trust within Philippine local government units. Similarly, Cayton and Ocampo (2025) found that ethical leadership significantly strengthens employees' organizational trust because leaders who consistently demonstrate fairness, transparency, and accountability foster greater confidence in management and organizational decision-making. Likewise, Calapre et al. (2024) reported that organizational trust and employee commitment are strengthened when employees perceive fairness and integrity in leadership practices. These findings indicate that employees view integrity as an essential characteristic of organizational leadership, thereby reinforcing confidence in organizational processes and promoting a positive organizational climate.

The highest mean (3.36, Agree) was observed in both employees performing their jobs in a trustworthy manner and the belief that people in the organization can depend on one another to do what is right, suggesting strong trust in peer integrity. This is followed by fairness and consistency in supervisors ( $M = 3.34$ ) and management's transparency and accountability in decision-making ( $M = 3.33$ ). These findings suggest that integrity extends beyond individual behavior and is reflected in the broader organizational culture through fair leadership practices and ethical decision-making. Brillantes and Fernandez (2011) argued that good governance

within public institutions requires transparency, accountability, and ethical leadership to sustain employees' confidence in government organizations. Similarly, Beshi and Kaur (2020) found that transparent governance practices strengthen organizational trust by promoting fairness, accountability, and employee confidence in institutional processes. Furthermore, Dirks and Ferrin (2001) concluded that employees are more willing to cooperate, commit to organizational goals, and accept managerial decisions when leaders consistently demonstrate integrity and fairness. The present findings therefore imply that integrity-based trust strengthens organizational cohesion by encouraging employees to rely on one another, cooperate effectively, and maintain confidence in organizational leadership. Within local government units, such trust is particularly important because public service delivery requires ethical decision-making, accountability, and consistent adherence to public service values. Meanwhile, the lowest mean (3.22, Agree) was recorded in management's ability to follow through on commitments such as rewards and promotions, indicating slightly less confidence in this area. Overall, the findings suggest that integrity is positively perceived in the organization, with trust grounded in fairness, accountability, and dependable behavior among employees and leadership. This observation contrasts with the findings of Whitener, Brodt, Korsgaard, and Werner (1998), who argued that employees develop stronger organizational trust when managers consistently demonstrate trustworthy behaviors by honoring commitments and acting fairly across organizational situations. Likewise, Park (2012) found that organizational trust within public organizations is highly dependent on employees' perceptions of leadership credibility and consistency in managerial actions. These contrasting findings suggest that while employees generally perceive management as ethical, inconsistencies in fulfilling organizational commitments may weaken confidence if left unaddressed. Consequently, integrity should not merely be reflected in organizational policies but must also be demonstrated through consistent managerial actions that reinforce employees' confidence in leadership decisions.

The standard deviation values reflect the consistency of employee perceptions regarding integrity. The overall standard deviation of 0.43 indicates that responses are relatively consistent, suggesting a shared perception among employees about integrity in the organization. The highest variability was observed in management's consistency in fulfilling commitments ( $SD = 0.72$ ) and supervisors' fairness ( $SD = 0.67$ ), indicating that employees may have differing experiences regarding these areas. This suggests that leadership behavior may gradually erode employees' confidence in management, even when organizational integrity is generally perceived as positive. Meanwhile, lower standard deviations were found in employees' trustworthy performance ( $SD = 0.59$ ) and management transparency and dependability among employees ( $SD = 0.62$ ), suggesting greater agreement on these aspects. Overall, while employees generally share similar views regarding integrity, slight variations exist, particularly in perceptions of management follow-through and fairness, indicating areas that may require further strengthening. These findings imply that integrity-based trust is well established across the participating LGUs, particularly among employees and in day-to-day organizational interactions. Nevertheless, strengthening consistency in managerial follow-through, equitable personnel decisions, and transparent implementation of organizational commitments would further reinforce employees' confidence in leadership. Sustaining integrity through consistent leadership behavior, transparent governance, and fair organizational practices will not only preserve organizational trust but also strengthen employee commitment, organizational legitimacy, and the overall effectiveness of public service delivery.

### **The Level of Perceived Defensive Work Practices Among Employees in Terms Of: Communication Avoidance, Risk Avoidance, Information Withholding and Compliance-Based Behavior.**

Table 6. *The Level of Perceived Defensive Work Practices Among Employees in Terms of Communication Avoidance.*

| Communication Avoidance                                                                                             | Mean | Interpretation | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. I feel confident that sharing work-related problems will be met with constructive support rather than criticism. | 3.20 | Agree          | 0.67               |
| 2. I avoid questioning decisions made by management.                                                                | 2.92 | Agree          | 0.78               |

|                                                                                                           |      |          |      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|----------|------|
| 3. I tend to agree with the majority opinion during meetings even when they have a different perspective. | 2.86 | Agree    | 0.73 |
| 4. I prefer to resolve errors quietly on my own rather than reporting them to the appropriate channels.   | 2.71 | Agree    | 0.86 |
| 5. I hesitate to express my opinions during discussions with supervisors.                                 | 2.48 | Disagree | 0.77 |
| OVERALL                                                                                                   | 2.83 | Agree    | 0.45 |

Legend: 3.51- 4.00=Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.50=Agree, 1.54 - 2.50=Disagree, 1.00 - 1.50=Strongly Disagree

Table 6 presents the level of perceived defensive work practices among employees in terms of Communication Avoidance. The overall mean of 2.83, verbally interpreted as Agree, indicates that employees generally exhibit a moderate level of communication avoidance in the workplace. This suggests that although employees are willing to communicate under certain circumstances, they continue to exercise caution when engaging in interactions that may expose them to interpersonal or organizational risks. Such findings reflect the characteristics of organizational silence, wherein employees selectively withhold opinions or concerns to avoid possible negative consequences rather than remaining completely silent (Morrison & Milliken, 2000).

The highest mean score (3.20, Agree) was recorded in the statement about feeling confident that sharing work-related problems will be met with constructive support, suggesting that employees perceive some degree of psychological safety when raising concerns. This finding indicates that employees generally believe supervisors are receptive to work-related concerns, which may encourage problem-solving and facilitate collaborative communication. This observation supports the findings of Edmondson (1999), who argued that psychological safety encourages employees to speak up, admit mistakes, and seek assistance without fear of embarrassment or punishment. Similarly, Detert and Burris (2007) found that supportive leadership significantly increases employee voice behaviors by fostering trust and openness between supervisors and subordinates. Despite this positive perception, several indicators still reflect defensive tendencies, such as avoiding questioning management decisions ( $M = 2.92$ ), agreeing with the majority despite differing views ( $M = 2.86$ ), and preferring to resolve errors independently rather than reporting them ( $M = 2.71$ ), all interpreted as Agree. These behaviors suggest that employees strategically regulate their communication, particularly when expressing disagreement or reporting mistakes may threaten workplace relationships or create uncertainty regarding managerial reactions. Such findings align with Pinder and Harlos (2001), who explained that employees often remain silent as a defensive mechanism to avoid retaliation, damaged relationships, or negative career consequences. Likewise, Brinsfield (2013) emphasized that defensive silence frequently occurs when employees believe that speaking up provides limited benefits but carries substantial personal risks.

Interestingly, the statement regarding hesitating to express opinions to supervisors obtained the lowest mean (2.48, Disagree), indicating that employees are relatively more comfortable voicing their opinions upward. Overall, while openness in communication exists, defensive behaviors remain evident in decision-related and group interaction contexts. This finding partially contradicts the broader organizational silence literature, which commonly identifies upward communication as one of the most restricted forms of employee voice (Morrison, 2014). The result may suggest that while employees feel comfortable communicating routine opinions directly to supervisors, they remain reluctant when communication involves criticism, disagreement with management decisions, or disclosure of mistakes. Therefore, employee voice appears to be conditional rather than unrestricted, reflecting selective openness depending on the perceived level of interpersonal or organizational risk.

The standard deviation values reflect the consistency of employee responses regarding communication avoidance. The overall standard deviation of 0.45 indicates that responses are relatively homogeneous, suggesting a shared perception among employees about their communication behaviors. Among the indicators, the highest variability was observed in the preference to resolve errors independently ( $SD = 0.86$ ), implying differing employee tendencies—some prefer transparency while others avoid formal reporting channels. Moderate

variability is also seen in items such as avoiding questioning management ( $SD = 0.78$ ) and hesitation in expressing opinions to supervisors ( $SD = 0.77$ ), indicating some differences in comfort levels across respondents. Meanwhile, the lowest standard deviation (0.67) was recorded in the perception of receiving constructive support when sharing problems, suggesting consistent agreement on this aspect. Overall, although employees generally align in their perceptions, notable variation exists in how they handle errors and engage in upward or critical communication. The findings also suggest important managerial implications. Organizations should strengthen mechanisms that encourage constructive dissent, normalize respectful disagreement, and establish non-punitive systems for reporting mistakes. Leadership development programs emphasizing participative decision-making, open feedback, and transparent communication may reduce employees' perceived risks associated with speaking up. Such initiatives are consistent with New Public Management, which emphasizes organizational effectiveness, accountability, and continuous performance improvement through responsive management practices. By cultivating a culture where questioning decisions and reporting concerns are viewed as opportunities for organizational learning rather than sources of conflict, organizations can reduce communication avoidance and promote more proactive employee participation.

*Table 7. The Level of Perceived Defensive Work Practices Among Employees in Terms of Risk Avoidance.*

| Risk Avoidance                                                                                       | Mean        | Interpretation | Standard Deviation |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. I prefer to follow existing procedures rather than try new approaches.                            | 2.91        | Agree          | 0.68               |
| 2. I frequently defer minor decisions to supervisors to avoid the personal risk of making a mistake. | 2.64        | Agree          | 0.89               |
| 3. I avoid taking work related initiative when outcomes are uncertain.                               | 2.60        | Agree          | 0.82               |
| 4. I avoid responsibilities that could lead to blame if problems occur.                              | 2.49        | Agree          | 0.87               |
| 5. I decline additional responsibilities or new tasks if I am inexperienced with it.                 | 2.24        | Disagree       | 0.84               |
| <b>OVERALL</b>                                                                                       | <b>2.58</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>0.62</b>        |

Legend: 3.51- 4.00=Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.50=Agree, 1.54 - 2.50=Disagree, 1.00 - 1.50=Strongly Disagree

Table 7 presents the level of perceived defensive work practices among employees in terms of Risk Avoidance. The overall mean score of 2.58, verbally interpreted as Agree, indicates that employees moderately exhibit risk-avoidant behaviors in the workplace. This finding suggests that employees generally prefer decisions and work behaviors that minimize uncertainty and reduce the likelihood of negative consequences rather than pursuing innovative or uncertain approaches. Such behavior reflects a common characteristic of public organizations where accountability pressures, procedural requirements, and hierarchical structures encourage employees to prioritize compliance over experimentation (Moynihan & Pandey, 2017). The highest mean (2.91, Agree) was observed in the preference to follow existing procedures rather than try new approaches, suggesting that employees tend to rely on established methods to minimize uncertainty. This finding supports Yang, Secchi, and Homberg (2025), who argued that defensive behaviors in public organizations frequently manifest through strict adherence to procedures because employees perceive compliance as the safest strategy for avoiding criticism or administrative sanctions. Likewise, Schaffer, Hirsch, and Nitzl (2022) found that employees with lower risk propensity are more likely to choose familiar and less uncertain alternatives, particularly in highly accountable organizational environments. Similarly, employees show tendencies to avoid taking initiative when outcomes are uncertain ( $M = 2.60$ ) and to defer minor decisions to supervisors ( $M = 2.64$ ), both interpreted as Agree, reflecting a cautious approach to work-related responsibilities. These findings indicate a tendency to transfer decision-making responsibility upward whenever uncertainty exists, thereby reducing personal accountability for unfavorable outcomes. This observation aligns with Argyris (1990), who explained that defensive routines emerge

when employees seek to protect themselves from embarrassment, criticism, or failure. Similarly, Edmondson (1999) argued that employees are less likely to take interpersonal or professional risks when psychological safety is limited, causing them to avoid initiative and rely more heavily on managerial guidance. However, the items related to avoiding responsibilities that could lead to blame ( $M = 2.49$ ) and declining additional responsibilities due to inexperience ( $M = 2.24$ ) were interpreted as Disagree, indicating that employees are less likely to completely withdraw from responsibilities. These findings suggest that while employees demonstrate caution in decision-making, they do not completely avoid accountability or refuse additional work assignments. This partially contradicts Moynihan and Pandey (2017), who suggested that performance-based accountability systems may encourage employees to avoid responsibilities associated with potential failure. Instead, the present findings imply that employees remain willing to accept responsibilities but prefer performing them within structured procedures and clearly defined organizational expectations.

The standard deviation values indicate the degree of variability in employee responses regarding risk avoidance behaviors. The overall standard deviation of 0.62 suggests a moderate level of consistency in responses, indicating that employees generally share similar perceptions, although some differences exist. The highest variability was observed in deferring minor decisions to supervisors ( $SD = 0.89$ ) and avoiding responsibilities that could lead to blame ( $SD = 0.87$ ), implying that employees differ in how they handle responsibility and decision-making risks. Likewise, declining additional responsibilities due to inexperience ( $SD = 0.84$ ) and avoiding initiative under uncertainty ( $SD = 0.82$ ) also showed relatively high variability, indicating mixed attitudes toward risk-taking and confidence in task execution. In contrast, the lowest standard deviation (0.68) was found in the preference for following existing procedures, suggesting a more consistent agreement among employees on relying on established processes.

These findings imply that employees are not inherently resistant to responsibility but instead manage uncertainty by relying on organizational procedures and supervisory guidance. Such behaviors may enhance consistency and reduce operational errors; however, they may also constrain innovation, initiative, and adaptive decision-making when organizations face complex or rapidly changing situations. This finding supports New Public Management, where accountability systems improve organizational control but may unintentionally encourage risk-averse behaviors when compliance becomes more highly valued than innovation (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Therefore, organizations should strengthen psychological safety, encourage responsible risk-taking, and provide greater decision-making autonomy while maintaining appropriate accountability mechanisms. Such strategies can help reduce unnecessary defensive work practices while preserving organizational effectiveness and responsible governance.

*Table 8. The Level of Perceived Defensive Work Practices Among Employees in Terms of Information Withholding.*

| Information Withholding                                                               | Mean        | Interpretation | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. I selectively share information depending on how it might affect the organization. | 3.04        | Agree          | 0.69               |
| 2. I am cautious about sharing information that might expose mistakes.                | 3.00        | Agree          | 0.76               |
| 3. I avoid reporting problems if they believe it could create conflict.               | 2.78        | Agree          | 0.82               |
| 4. I delay sharing information until it is specifically requested.                    | 2.51        | Agree          | 0.82               |
| 5. I sometimes withhold important information to avoid possible criticism.            | 2.45        | Disagree       | 0.85               |
| <b>OVERALL</b>                                                                        | <b>2.76</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>0.54</b>        |

Legend: 3.51- 4.00=Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.50=Agree, 1.54 - 2.50=Disagree, 1.00 - 1.50=Strongly Disagree

Table 8 presents the level of perceived defensive work practices among employees in terms of Information Withholding. The overall mean score of 2.76, verbally interpreted as Agree, indicates that employees moderately exhibit information withholding behaviors in the workplace. This finding suggests that while employees generally share work-related information, they become more selective when the information could expose mistakes, create interpersonal conflict, or have organizational consequences. Such behavior reflects defensive communication practices in which employees strategically regulate information to minimize perceived personal or organizational risks rather than intentionally obstruct organizational performance. The highest mean (3.04, Agree) was observed in selectively sharing information depending on how it might affect the organization, followed closely by being cautious about sharing information that may expose mistakes ( $M = 3.00$ , Agree). These results suggest that employees are generally mindful and strategic in sharing information, particularly when potential risks or consequences are involved. This observation supports Connelly et al. (2012), who conceptualized knowledge hiding as the intentional attempt to withhold or conceal requested information, often motivated by concerns about interpersonal relationships, self-protection, or organizational consequences. Similarly, Černe et al. (2014) found that employees are more likely to withhold knowledge when they perceive competitive or threatening workplace environments, whereas supportive organizational climates encourage knowledge sharing. Additionally, avoiding reporting problems due to possible conflict ( $M = 2.78$ , Agree) and delaying the sharing of information until it is requested ( $M = 2.51$ , Agree) further indicate tendencies toward controlled disclosure. Pinder and Harlos (2001), argued that employee silence often functions as a defensive strategy intended to avoid interpersonal conflict or potential negative consequences. Likewise, Morrison and Milliken (2000) emphasized that organizational cultures characterized by centralized authority and fear of negative repercussions encourage employees to selectively withhold information rather than openly communicate concerns. However, withholding important information specifically to avoid criticism obtained the lowest mean ( $M = 2.45$ , Disagree), suggesting that employees are less likely to intentionally conceal critical information purely out of fear of criticism. This finding partially contradicts Connelly et al. (2012), who suggested that defensive motives frequently contribute to intentional knowledge hiding. Instead, the present findings imply that employees' information withholding behaviors are more situational than malicious, reflecting careful judgment regarding organizational sensitivity rather than deliberate attempts to obstruct communication. Overall, the findings imply that while employees engage in selective communication, it is more driven by situational considerations rather than purely defensive intentions.

The standard deviation values indicate the degree of consistency in employee responses regarding information withholding practices. The overall standard deviation of 0.54 suggests relatively consistent responses among employees, reflecting a shared perception of moderate information withholding behaviors. The highest variability was observed in withholding information to avoid criticism ( $SD = 0.85$ ) and both avoiding reporting problems due to conflict and delaying information sharing ( $SD = 0.82$ ), indicating that employees differ in how they handle sensitive or potentially risky communication situations. Moderate variability was also seen in being cautious about sharing information that may expose mistakes ( $SD = 0.76$ ). In contrast, the lowest standard deviation (0.69) was found in selectively sharing information based on organizational impact, suggesting a stronger consensus among employees in this practice.

These findings imply that employees generally practice selective rather than absolute information withholding. Employees appear willing to communicate information when necessary but remain cautious when disclosure may create conflict or expose errors. Such behaviors may protect organizational relationships in the short term; however, they may also reduce organizational learning, transparency, and timely problem resolution if important information is delayed or filtered. These findings reinforce the importance of cultivating organizational trust and psychological safety so that employees perceive information sharing as contributing to organizational improvement rather than exposing them to personal or professional risks.

**Table 9. *The Level of Perceived Defensive Work Practices Among Employees in Terms of Compliance-Based Behavior.***

| Compliance-based Behavior                                                                                   | Mean        | Interpretation | Standard Deviation |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------------|
| 1. I comply with instructions mainly to avoid negative consequences.                                        | 3.18        | Agree          | 0.67               |
| 2. I prioritize obedience to authority over expressing personal concerns.                                   | 3.13        | Agree          | 0.60               |
| 3. I tend to follow the procedures even when it is hard to implement.                                       | 3.13        | Agree          | 0.62               |
| 4. I strictly follow orders even when there are alternatives.                                               | 2.95        | Agree          | 0.61               |
| 5. I do the minimum requirement for my job to easily finish tasks without applying the standard procedures. | 2.06        | Disagree       | 0.88               |
| <b>OVERALL</b>                                                                                              | <b>2.89</b> | <b>Agree</b>   | <b>0.43</b>        |

Legend: 3.51- 4.00=Strongly Agree, 2.51 - 3.50=Agree, 1.54 - 2.50=Disagree, 1.00 - 1.50=Strongly Disagree

Table 9 presents the level of perceived defensive work practices among employees in terms of Compliance-based Behavior. The overall mean score of 2.89, verbally interpreted as Agree, indicates that employees moderately demonstrate compliance-driven behaviors in the workplace. This finding suggests that employees generally prioritize adherence to organizational rules, established procedures, and supervisory directives, reflecting a workplace culture where compliance serves as a strategy for maintaining organizational stability and minimizing potential risks. Such behavior is commonly observed in public organizations, where accountability systems and bureaucratic structures emphasize consistency, procedural correctness, and adherence to formal authority (Weber, 1947; Hood, 1991). The highest mean was observed in complying with instructions mainly to avoid negative consequences ( $M = 3.18$ , Agree), followed by prioritizing obedience to authority over expressing personal concerns and following procedures even when they are difficult to implement (both  $M = 3.13$ , Agree). These findings suggest that employees tend to adhere to authority and established procedures, often influenced by the desire to avoid negative outcomes. This observation supports Tyler (2006), who argued that employees are more likely to comply with organizational rules when they perceive authority as legitimate, although compliance may also be motivated by concern over potential negative consequences. Similarly, Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003) noted that public employees frequently balance professional judgment with institutional expectations, often choosing procedural compliance when organizational accountability and oversight are emphasized. Additionally, strictly following orders even when alternatives exist ( $M = 2.95$ , Agree) reinforces a pattern of conformity within the organization. This finding is consistent with Argyris (1990), who explained that defensive routines become institutionalized when organizations reward conformity and discourage questioning of established practices. Likewise, Moynihan and Pandey (2017) argued that performance-oriented accountability systems often reinforce procedural compliance because employees seek to minimize uncertainty and demonstrate adherence to organizational expectations. However, the statement regarding doing only the minimum job requirements without applying standard procedures obtained the lowest mean ( $M = 2.06$ , Disagree), indicating that employees generally do not reduce their effort or disregard proper procedures. Overall, the results imply that while employees show strong compliance with authority and established rules, this behavior is not associated with reduced job performance or minimal effort. This finding partially contradicts Lipsky (1980), who argued that public employees may adopt coping mechanisms such as limiting effort or simplifying tasks when confronted with excessive workloads, resource constraints, or organizational pressures. Instead, the present findings suggest that employees remain committed to fulfilling their responsibilities while maintaining compliance with organizational rules and procedures.

The standard deviation values show the consistency of employee responses regarding compliance-based behavior. The overall standard deviation of 0.43 indicates a high level of agreement among employees, suggesting that perceptions of compliance behavior are relatively uniform. The highest variability was found in the statement about doing the minimum job requirements ( $SD = 0.88$ ), indicating differing views among employees—some may

occasionally adopt minimal effort strategies while others strongly disagree with this behavior. In contrast, lower standard deviations were observed in prioritizing obedience over personal concerns ( $SD = 0.60$ ) and strictly following orders ( $SD = 0.61$ ), reflecting consistent agreement on these compliance-related practices. Similarly, following procedures even when difficult ( $SD = 0.62$ ) and complying to avoid negative consequences ( $SD = 0.67$ ) also demonstrate relatively low variability. Overall, these findings imply that employees generally comply with organizational rules and authority as part of their professional responsibilities rather than merely as a defensive strategy. While strong procedural compliance contributes to consistency, accountability, and administrative stability, excessive reliance on obedience may discourage employee initiative, critical thinking, and organizational innovation. This finding supports the principles of New Public Management, where accountability and performance systems promote organizational control but may also encourage procedural conformity when compliance becomes more highly valued than adaptive decision-making (Hood, 1991; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011). Consequently, organizations should promote balanced governance by maintaining accountability while encouraging employees to exercise professional judgment, participate in decision-making, and provide constructive feedback without fear of negative consequences.

### **Public Employees Interpret and Experience Organizational Trust and Defensive Work Practices in Their Daily Administrative Work.**

Trust was conceptualized by employees as an extension of moral identity rather than a behavior confined to the workplace. They consistently linked trust with integrity, ethical conduct, personal consistency, and faithfulness, framing trustworthiness as an enduring personal characteristic that transcends organizational boundaries (Bass & Riggio, 2006). References to Republic Act No. 6713 further illustrate how public servants anchor their understanding of trust in ethical expectations, where integrity functions not only as a professional competency but as a normative standard guiding both public and private conduct. Through this lens, trust becomes a mechanism for establishing moral credibility, enabling colleagues and the public to rely on an employee's judgment, discretion, and commitment to service (Calapre et al., 2024). In effect, organizational trust is socially constructed through the visible alignment of personal values with professional actions, reinforcing the idea that ethical consistency is indispensable for cultivating confidence among peers, supervisors, and citizens. Trust was described as a coordinating force that makes workloads more manageable and organizational processes more efficient. Employees emphasized that trust provides the foundation for delegation, collaboration, and confidence in colleagues' competence (Calo et al., 2024). Beyond fostering harmonious relationships, it reduces organizational transaction costs by minimizing the need for excessive monitoring, verification, and supervisory control. Trusted employees are more likely to be assigned critical tasks, exercise greater autonomy, and contribute meaningfully to collaborative problem-solving, positioning trust as an informal governance mechanism that complements formal structures (Selznick, 1949). In this way, efficient work processes depend not only on technical expertise but also on relational confidence, which enables employees to coordinate efforts effectively (Beshi & Kaur, 2022). These findings indicate that organizations with higher levels of trust achieve greater operational efficiency, as interpersonal confidence reduces uncertainty and encourages reciprocal cooperation among members.

Trust was also understood as extending beyond internal organizational relationships to encompass the government's bond with its citizens. Employees emphasized that public trust legitimizes governmental authority and shapes perceptions of service quality (Suriaga, 2023). They recognized that transparency, accountability, and ethical conduct directly influence citizens' willingness to place confidence in public institutions. Narratives revealed that organizational trust is not simply a managerial concern but an institutional asset that underpins democratic legitimacy. From this perspective, trust functions as a reciprocal social contract between government and the communities it serves. Maintaining such trust requires public organizations to consistently demonstrate fairness, transparency, and integrity, as failures in these areas risk eroding institutional credibility and diminishing citizens' confidence in government performance (Borins, 2021).

Trust was identified as a critical condition for leadership and organizational governance, particularly in decision-making processes. Employees described how trust facilitates delegated authority, participative leadership, mutual confidence, and organizational flexibility. Leaders who rely on the competence and judgment of their staff are less inclined to micromanage and more likely to empower employees to exercise discretion in achieving organizational objectives (Capuno, 2020). At the same time, employees' willingness to support decisions depends largely on their confidence in the integrity and competence of their leaders. These reciprocal dynamic positions are trusted as a governance mechanism that enhances decision quality by fostering shared responsibility, open communication, and collective accountability. Rather than concentrating authority within rigid hierarchical structures, trust redistributes decision-making capacity across organizational members, strengthening adaptive leadership and improving responsiveness to complex public sector challenges (Schillemans, 2016).

These findings indicate that organizational trust functions simultaneously as an ethical, relational, operational, and institutional resource. These interconnected dimensions demonstrate that organizational trust is not merely an interpersonal outcome but a strategic organizational capability that enables public institutions to uphold ethical governance, enhance administrative effectiveness, and sustain institutional legitimacy. It demonstrates that the public experience organizational trust not merely as interpersonal confidence but as a fundamental organizational mechanism that informs ethical behavior, guides workplace relationships, supports administrative decision-making, and reinforces their commitment to public service. Therefore, cultivating organizational trust requires more than fostering positive interpersonal relationships, it necessitates embedding ethical values, transparent leadership, and collaborative organizational practices into the culture and governance of public institutions.

Defensive behaviors were initially understood as organizationally driven rather than purely self-serving. Under the framework of Organizational Protection, employees described adopting defensive practices to safeguard the reputation, credibility, and legitimacy of government institutions against criticism and public scrutiny (Yang, Secchi, & Homberg, 2025). Given the heightened demands for transparency and accountability in public agencies, employees often act cautiously to avoid disclosures that might compromise institutional credibility (Pinder & Harlos, 2001). This protective stance, however, also reflects concerns about preserving professional reputation and avoiding blame for administrative errors or unfavorable outcomes. Defensive workplace practices, therefore, are shaped by the institutional realities of public service, where employees continually balance the responsibility of maintaining organizational integrity with the need to minimize both personal and organizational risks (Yang, Secchi, & Homberg, 2025).

Employees distinguished between constructive monitoring and defensive surveillance, emphasizing that oversight is legitimate when it supports performance improvement, identifies operational concerns, and fosters organizational learning (Whitener et al., 1998). Effective monitoring was linked to continuous feedback, greater awareness of work processes, and opportunities for professional growth, rather than punishment or fault-finding. This distinction shows that employees do not inherently resist oversight; instead, they interpret it according to its perceived intent. When framed as developmental, monitoring promotes accountability, learning, and performance enhancement. Conversely, when perceived as punitive, it generates anxiety, encourages concealment of mistakes, and triggers defensive reactions. These insights highlight that managerial intent plays a decisive role in shaping whether organizational oversight is experienced as supportive governance or as a potential threat.

Defensiveness was found to reshape how employees relate to responsibility and organizational transparency. Fear of criticism, blame, and negative evaluation discourages individuals from acknowledging mistakes, accepting accountability, or openly discussing work-related concerns (Tummers & Knies, 2016). Instead of engaging in collective problem-solving, employees often deflect blame, withhold information, or disengage to protect themselves from sanctions. These behaviors weaken a culture of accountability by shifting attention away from organizational improvement and toward self-preservation (Argyris, 1990). As a result, accountability becomes reactive rather than proactive, limiting opportunities for learning and continuous development. This finding implies that accountability in public organizations depends not only on formal policies and regulatory

frameworks but also on psychological conditions that enable employees to admit errors without fear of disproportionate repercussions.

Defensiveness was shown to have consequences that extend beyond individual behavior, shaping the broader functioning of public organizations. Employees noted that defensive responses disrupt information exchange, delay decision-making, weaken coordination across units, and reduce overall responsiveness. Anticipating criticism or harboring distrust, they often become reluctant to report emerging issues, seek assistance, or contribute ideas during decision-making processes (Moynihan and Pandey, 2017). As a result, leaders receive incomplete information, decisions are postponed or made from narrow perspectives, and inefficiencies become embedded in administrative routines. These patterns reveal that defensive workplace practices generate cumulative organizational effects, where individual acts of self-protection gradually evolve into systemic barriers to collaboration, innovation, and effective governance (Connelly et al., 2012).

In sum, although defensive behaviors may initially emerge as attempts to protect the organization or minimize individual risk, they inadvertently weaken transparency, inhibit organizational learning, and constrain effective administrative functioning. This indicates that reducing defensiveness within public organizations requires cultivating an organizational culture characterized by trust, psychological safety, developmental leadership, and shared accountability. Under such conditions, employees are more likely to perceive challenges as opportunities for collective problem-solving rather than requiring self-protective responses.

### **Workplace Behaviors Related to Trust and Defensiveness That Influence Communication, Collaboration and Decision-Making Within the Organization.**

Communication emerged as the central mechanism through which organizational trust is built and sustained. Employees emphasized that regular dialogue, openness, transparency, and reciprocal information sharing foster confidence in one another's competence, intentions, and reliability. Trust, they explained, does not arise solely from formal structures or hierarchical authority but is gradually cultivated through ongoing interpersonal exchanges marked by honesty, responsiveness, and mutual understanding. By clarifying expectations, resolving misunderstandings, and strengthening professional relationships, effective communication reduces uncertainty and reinforces collaboration.

Communication was also interpreted as an operational resource that strengthens organizational coordination and administrative performance. Employees consistently linked effective communication with smoother workflows, timely coordination, clearer delegation of responsibilities, and more efficient achievement of objectives (Bautista and Villanueva, 2021). Open channels of dialogue were seen as minimizing ambiguity, preventing duplication of tasks, and enabling organizational units to synchronize their activities more effectively. Beyond routine operations, communication provided opportunities for knowledge exchange, clarification of procedural expectations, and coordination of complex administrative tasks. In this sense, communication functions not merely as an interpersonal activity but as a core organizational capability that supports productivity, responsiveness, and service delivery. These insights indicate that administrative efficiency in public organizations is substantially shaped by the quality of communication networks in place.

The interaction between trust and defensiveness demonstrates that communication serves as both an indicator and a determinant of organizational climate. Where trust characterizes workplace relationships, communication becomes open, reciprocal, and solution-oriented, enabling employees to exchange information freely, coordinate organizational activities effectively, and resolve problems collaboratively (Detert and Burris, 2007). Conversely, where defensiveness predominates, communication becomes increasingly restricted, fragmented, and risk-averse, reducing employees' willingness to contribute knowledge and participate in organizational dialogue (Morrison, 2014). This reciprocal relationship suggests that communication is shaped not only by organizational policies but also by employees' perceptions of psychological safety, interpersonal respect, and managerial support.

In general, the findings indicate that communication constitutes the central relational infrastructure through which organizational trust is established, maintained, and translated into effective administrative practice.

At the same time, communication represents one of the first organizational processes to deteriorate when defensive workplace behaviors become prevalent. The findings therefore imply that strengthening organizational communication requires more than improving formal communication systems or increasing information dissemination. Rather, public organizations must cultivate a workplace environment characterized by trust, openness, and psychological safety, where employees perceive communication as an opportunity for collaboration and shared problem-solving rather than a potential source of criticism or organizational risk. Such an environment enables communication to function as a strategic organizational capability that supports transparency, strengthens interpersonal trust, and enhances the overall effectiveness of public administration.

Trust was regarded as the essential condition for effective teamwork and organizational coordination. Employees emphasized that it promotes cooperation, strengthens interpersonal confidence, and enables them to perform responsibilities with greater efficiency and autonomy. Mutual trust was seen as facilitating delegation, encouraging the exchange of knowledge and expertise, and reducing hesitation when coordinating tasks (Van der Meer and Zmerli, 2017). It also created an environment where employees willingly support one another in achieving shared objectives, recognizing that organizational success depends on collective rather than individual performance. In this sense, trust functions as a coordinating mechanism that minimizes relational uncertainty and reinforces interdependence, allowing organizational units to operate cohesively despite the complexity of administrative responsibilities.

Beyond improving operational coordination, participants associated trust with the continuity of organizational knowledge and institutional sustainability. They emphasized the importance of mentoring colleagues, transferring technical expertise, and preparing future employees to assume organizational responsibilities instead of withholding knowledge for personal advantage (Svitlychna and Pavlyk, 2025). This perspective suggests that trust extends beyond present workplace relationships to encompass a long-term commitment to organizational continuity. Collaboration therefore becomes an expression of shared stewardship, wherein employees recognize that preserving institutional knowledge and supporting colleagues contribute directly to organizational resilience and the sustained delivery of public services (Hamann and Schiemann, 2021). Defensive workplace behaviors were observed to progressively weaken collaborative relationships. Employees described how distrust leads leaders to concentrate responsibilities among a small circle of trusted staff while intensifying supervision over those perceived as less reliable. Accounts revealed patterns of unequal delegation, micromanagement, favoritism, blame shifting, and reluctance to cooperate with colleagues (Maynard-Moody and Musheno, 2003). Rather than reinforcing accountability, these defensive responses create organizational conditions where employees hesitate to participate, disengage from collective responsibilities, and focus increasingly on protecting themselves from criticism or failure. Over time, such dynamics erode collaboration and undermine the cooperative foundation necessary for effective organizational functioning.

Participants further explained that defensive behaviors produce consequences that extend beyond individual working relationships. When employees avoid collaboration, refuse to share knowledge, or attribute failures to other units, organizational divisions become increasingly fragmented. This fragmentation weakens coordination across departments, disrupts program implementation, and diminishes employees' sense of collective responsibility for organizational outcomes (Khoshnal, 2021). The resulting workplace environment becomes characterized by reduced trust, diminished cooperation, and declining morale, thereby limiting the organization's capacity to respond effectively to administrative challenges. These findings indicate that defensiveness transforms collaboration from a mutually beneficial organizational process into a selective and conditional interaction governed by suspicion and self-protection rather than shared commitment (Morrison and Milliken, 2000).

The findings also reveal an important reciprocal relationship between trust and collaboration. Trust encourages employees to invest in collaborative relationships because they perceive cooperation as beneficial to both individual and organizational success (Beshur and Kaur, 2020). In contrast, defensiveness interrupts this reciprocal process by replacing confidence with uncertainty and openness with caution. As employees become increasingly reluctant to rely on one another, collaborative efforts become transactional rather than relational, reducing opportunities for innovation, collective problem-solving, and organizational learning (Edmonson, 1999).

Consequently, collaboration ceases to function as a source of organizational strength and instead becomes constrained by interpersonal and structural barriers created by distrust.

These findings demonstrate that collaboration within public organizations is fundamentally a relational rather than merely procedural phenomenon. Effective collaboration is sustained by trust that enables employees to coordinate work, exchange knowledge, mentor colleagues, and pursue shared organizational goals with confidence. Conversely, defensive workplace behaviors undermine these collaborative processes by fostering micromanagement, unequal participation, blame avoidance, and organizational fragmentation. The findings therefore suggest that strengthening collaboration requires public organizations to cultivate an organizational culture grounded in mutual trust, equitable leadership, shared accountability, and psychological safety. Under these conditions, collaboration becomes more than coordinated work; it becomes a strategic organizational capability that enhances institutional resilience, supports effective governance, and enables public organizations to achieve collective administrative objectives.

Trust was regarded as a prerequisite for effective organizational decision-making (Thompson, 2023). Employees emphasized that it enables leaders to delegate responsibilities with confidence while encouraging staff to take initiative in accomplishing assigned tasks. Decisions were seen as more efficiently implemented when colleagues shared confidence in one another's competence and collectively supported organizational goals. Trusted employees required less supervision, demonstrated greater autonomy, and assumed responsibility for their work, contributing actively to problem-solving efforts (World Bank, 2017). In this way, trust functions as an informal governance mechanism that complements formal authority by empowering employees to act independently while remaining aligned with institutional objectives.

Participants likewise emphasized that trust strengthens consensus-building during organizational decision-making. Although differing perspectives naturally arise during administrative deliberations, respondents acknowledged that once collective agreement is reached, organizational members are more willing to support and implement decisions when mutual trust exists among colleagues and leaders (Callapre et al., 2024). This illustrates that trust extends beyond interpersonal confidence to reinforce organizational cohesion, allowing employees to prioritize institutional objectives over individual preferences. Consequently, trust promotes not only effective decision formulation but also the successful execution of organizational decisions through shared commitment and collective accountability.

Defensive workplace behaviors were found to substantially constrain organizational decision-making. Employees described how distrust, excessive caution, and reluctance to rely on colleagues contribute to delayed decisions, unresolved workloads, operational backlogs, and diminished responsiveness (Whittaker and Havard, 2015). Leaders who lack confidence in their staff often postpone decisions, repeatedly verify information, or concentrate responsibilities among a small circle of trusted individuals. Likewise, employees who perceive limited trust within the organization become hesitant to seek assistance, involve others in problem-solving, or communicate emerging concerns (Artinger, Artinger and Gigirenzer, 2019). Collectively, these behaviors slow administrative processes and increase the likelihood that issues remain unresolved until they escalate into more complex challenges.

Beyond delaying organizational decisions, participants highlighted the cumulative consequences of defensiveness on institutional development. Defensive behaviors discourage employees from exercising initiative because they anticipate criticism, exclusion, or diminished opportunities to demonstrate their competence (Tyler, 2006). Respondents noted that employees who are consistently denied meaningful responsibilities due to distrust are less likely to develop professionally, resulting in reduced confidence, diminished motivation, and limited organizational learning (Gajda, 2024). Consequently, defensiveness not only impedes immediate decision-making but also restricts the organization's capacity to cultivate future leaders, strengthen employee capabilities, and sustain long-term organizational effectiveness. These findings suggest that defensive workplace practices gradually transform decision-making into a risk-averse process characterized by hesitation, dependence on a few trusted individuals, and diminished organizational adaptability. The findings further demonstrate that trust and defensiveness influence decision-making through contrasting organizational dynamics. Trust encourages distributed leadership, empowers employees to contribute their expertise, and enables decisions to be implemented

efficiently through cooperation and shared responsibility. Defensiveness, by contrast, centralizes authority, reinforces excessive control, and limits employee participation due to concerns about competence, accountability, or potential failure. This divergence illustrates that organizational decision-making is not merely the product of managerial authority but is significantly shaped by the quality of interpersonal relationships and the organizational climate in which administrative decisions are made.

These findings indicate that effective decision-making within public organizations depends upon cultivating organizational trust while minimizing defensive workplace behaviors. Trust creates an environment where leaders confidently delegate authority, employees willingly exercise initiative, and organizational members collectively support administrative decisions. Conversely, defensive behaviors generate uncertainty, operational delays, and excessive dependence on hierarchical control, ultimately constraining organizational responsiveness and innovation. The findings therefore suggest that strengthening decision-making requires public organizations to develop leadership practices that promote trust, empower employees, encourage shared accountability, and establish psychologically safe environments where informed risk-taking and collaborative decision-making are viewed as essential components of effective public governance.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are drawn:

1. The findings indicate that the respondents were primarily composed of young and middle-aged local government employees, with the majority belonging to the middle-aged group and only a small proportion representing older employees. This distribution provided perspectives from different age groups while reflecting the workforce composition of the selected local government units. In terms of locality of work, most respondents came from Quezon City, followed by Makati City, while Pasay City contributed the smallest share of participants, reflecting the proportional distribution of respondents across the selected study sites.

2. The employees showed a high level of organizational trust across ability, benevolence, and integrity of the management, supervisors and colleagues, which enhanced cooperation and effective governance, as well as reinforcing employee welfare and strong support for positive workplace relationships. These results suggest that organizational trust is well-established within the selected institutions and is further strengthened by trust.

3. The employees showed that they have moderate levels of defensive work practices across communication avoidance, risk avoidance, information withholding and compliance-based behavior. The respondents generally agreed that while defensive practices hinder efficient and effective governance, these are measures perceived to protect the institution, and self-preservation of an individual against further scrutiny without attempting to deter accountability and responsibility.

4. The informants perceived trust to encompass a wide variety of concepts such as ethics, integrity and morality extending beyond the workplace setting which reflect and play a key role in ethical governance, efficient decision-making and government efficiency reinforced by trust. Meanwhile, defensive behaviors are viewed as protective and preservation measures to protect the institution and individual self from scrutiny while still recognizing the value of accountability and oversight. However, these behaviors also contributed to weakened transparency and accountability, disrupted collaboration, innovation and decision-making.

5. The findings showed that trust is an essential driver of communication, collaboration, and decision-making for effective organizational functioning. Communication builds trust through transparency, coordination and information sharing amplifies collaboration and decision-making. Meanwhile, defensive workplace practices hinder efficient and smooth flow of communication, collaboration and delays decision-making, leading to reduced autonomy, increasing control and supervision, and inefficiencies.

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