

EXPLORING THE ROLE OF INFORMAL ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE ON SERVICE DELIVERY: CASE OF A LOCAL AUTHORITY IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract. Informal culture, frequently characterised by unwritten rules, social norms and interpersonal relationships, plays a critical role in shaping employee behaviour and organisational effectiveness. The present study set out to explore the role of informal organisational culture on service delivery at a selected local authority in Zimbabwe. The present qualitative research utilised a case study design, with in-depth interviews being used to collect data from 30 conveniently selected participants. The study's findings indicated that informal organisational culture has a positive and negative effect on service delivery in local authorities. Positive informal interactions among employees lead to improved co-operation and responsiveness to community needs. They also foster a sense of camaraderie and teamwork, enhance open communication channels, and boost employee morale. Conversely, negative informal cultural practices such as cliques, exclusion, favouritism, resistance to change, and misalignment between informal culture and formal organisational goals can hinder performance and the delivery of quality services. The study concludes that an understanding of, and ability to leverage, informal organisational culture is essential for improving service delivery in local authorities. Consequently, managers must endeavour to foster a conducive informal environment that is congruent with the formal organisational culture and objectives. This study makes a significant contribution to the broader discourse on organisational culture and service delivery, particularly in the context of developing regions, where formal structures may be less effective when operating in isolation.

Keywords: informal organisational culture, service delivery, city, local authority.

JEL Classification: M14, H76

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, organisational culture has had a significant impact on service delivery within local authorities (Ayalew, 2024). It shapes the attitudes, behaviours and values of employees, affecting how they interact with citizens and deliver services. The role of organisational culture in public service delivery has been widely studied globally, particularly in the context of New Public Management reforms that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s (Karini, 2024). Adopted by many Western countries, these reforms emphasise efficiency, accountability, and customer-oriented service delivery. Nevertheless, even within well-established governance systems, the impact of informal organisational cultures on public sector performance

has been demonstrated. In developed countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia, it has been shown that informal networks within public organisations can both support and hinder service delivery (Adams & Hakonarson, 2024).

In developing countries, the effect of informal organisational culture is often more pronounced due to weaker formal institutions and governance frameworks (Omoru et al., 2025). In some parts of Asia and Latin America, for example, informal practices such as patronage, bribery and favouritism are deeply embedded in public service delivery systems, resulting in inefficiencies and unequal access to services. Across Sub-Saharan Africa, local authorities face many

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challenges when it comes to providing their citizens with quality services. Many countries in the region have decentralised governance structures with the aim of bringing decision-making closer to communities and improving service provision (Rugeyamu & Msendo, 2025). However, despite decentralisation efforts, many local governments in Africa still struggle with issues such as corruption, mismanagement of resources, political interference and limited capacity. The informal organisational culture in Africa plays a significant role in shaping the performance of local authorities. In many cases, informal networks, patronage systems and unspoken norms influence the delivery of services. Studies from countries such as Kenya, South Africa, Nigeria and Uganda have shown that informal practices such as favouritism and nepotism often take precedence over formal structures, resulting in inefficiencies and poor service outcomes (Obicci, 2025; Bester, 2024; Oko-Joseph, 2024; Sharapova, 2024).

For instance, in South Africa, local municipalities have been confronted with service delivery protests, largely attributable to pervasive perceptions of corruption and inefficiency, frequently stemming from informal cultural dynamics within local councils. A similar situation has been observed in Nigeria, where informal power structures and clientelism have been shown to subvert formal governance frameworks, leading to inconsistent and inequitable service delivery. In the case of Zimbabwe, these regional patterns are evident. Local authorities have encountered difficulties in the delivery of services, attributable to a combination of economic challenges, political uncertainty, and entrenched informal cultural practices (Mutambisi & Chavunduka, 2024). Obicci (2025) posits that a paucity of transparency and the presence of informal power hierarchies have frequently impeded endeavours to enhance municipal services. The deterioration in the quality of municipal services in numerous urban areas of Zimbabwe has given rise to a need for an investigation into the underlying causes of this substandard performance. Whilst economic and political factors are frequently emphasised, it is imperative to investigate the impact of internal organisational cultures, particularly informal ones, on the capacity of local authorities to deliver services. It is imperative to comprehend these informal dynamics to formulate interventions that address structural issues and simultaneously modify organisational behaviour, thereby enhancing public service outcomes.

The present study focuses on exploring the role of informal organisational culture in delivering services within a selected local authority in Zimbabwe. The objective of this study is to elucidate the impact of informal practices on the efficiency, accountability, and responsiveness of public

service delivery, thereby contributing to a more profound understanding of the challenges faced by local governments and identifying pathways for improvement.

2. Theoretical and Conceptual Background

As posited by Wu (2021), the concept of informal organisational culture pertains to the social dynamics and interpersonal relationships that exist beyond the confines of formal organisational cultures. These dynamics have the potential to either facilitate or impede organisational effectiveness. It refers to the unwritten rules, norms and values that shape the behaviour and interactions of employees within an organisation. A recent scholarly definition by Ayalew (2024) states that service delivery is the systematic provision of public services that meet citizens' needs and expectations, ensuring accountability and responsiveness. This definition emphasises the importance of aligning service delivery with the needs of the community and maintaining transparency in operations.

A local authority is defined as a governmental organisation or body that is responsible for the provision of public services and facilities at a local level, in order to meet the specific needs of the community it serves. Nyikadzino (2024) offers a definition of a local authority as a legal constituted organisation that operates within a defined geographical area, empowered to make decisions and implement policies that affect the local population. This definition underscores the autonomy and authority that local governments possess in managing local affairs. A city is defined as a large and permanent human settlement characterised by significant population density, infrastructure development and economic activities. Dong et al. (2024) posit a widely accepted definition of the city as a complex social and physical entity that serves as a centre for economic activity, governance and cultural exchange, exhibiting a high level of population concentration and diverse functions. This definition underscores the multifaceted nature of cities as nexuses of interaction and advancement.

The present study is founded upon the theoretical underpinnings of organisational culture theory (Schein's Model) and systems theory. Edgar Schein's model of organisational culture was first postulated in the 1980s, in which he outlines three levels of organisational culture: artefacts (visible aspects), these are the easily observable aspects of a culture, such as dress code, office layout, language used, and company rituals; espoused values (stated norms), these are the stated beliefs and principles that an organisation claims to uphold, often reflected in mission statements and company policies and underlying assumptions

(deeply embedded beliefs), these are the deeply ingrained, often unconscious beliefs and values that guide behaviour and decision-making within an organisation (Porkka, 2016). The present theory assists in the analysis of the manner in which informal culture affects the processes of decision-making, the behaviour of employees, and the outcomes of service delivery. Schein's model assists managers in comprehending the notion that culture encompasses not only observable elements, but also the underlying beliefs and assumptions that facilitate behaviour (Owens & Steinhoff, 1989). By analysing the different levels of culture, local authorities can identify where interventions are required to align behaviours with stated values and underlying assumptions. It is imperative for effective managers to recognise the multifaceted layers of organisational culture and proactively engage in the process of shaping the underlying assumptions to achieve the desired organisational outcomes.

By analysing the different levels of culture, local authorities can identify where interventions are required to align behaviours with stated values and underlying assumptions. It is imperative for effective managers to recognise the multifaceted layers of organisational culture and proactively engage in the process of shaping the underlying assumptions to achieve the desired organisational outcomes. Using this theory, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of how informal organisational culture influences service delivery within a Zimbabwean local authority. This paves the way for targeted interventions to improve service quality and citizen satisfaction.

3. Drivers of Informal Organisational Culture

The causes of an informal organisational culture within local authorities in Zimbabwe are rooted in various factors that influence workplace dynamics and service delivery. These factors include historical legacies, such as past governance practices that fostered environments of distrust and exclusivity. Leadership styles, resource constraints and political interference can also lead to cliques forming, whereby certain groups gain undue influence over decision-making processes. The behaviour and approach of leaders can have a significant impact on organisational culture. Those who lack a clear vision or fail to engage employees may inadvertently encourage practices that do not align with official objectives (Quinn et al., 2024). An effective leadership-driven positive organisational culture can improve service delivery by fostering employee engagement, innovation and responsiveness to citizens' needs (Kisi, 2024).

Long-standing traditions and established ways of doing things can give rise to informal norms that persist over time, even if they are counterproductive.

Zimbabwe's local government system, like many others, has evolved through various periods of political and economic change, each of which has left its mark on the organisational culture (Marumahoko, 2023). A history of corruption and mismanagement can create a culture in which such behaviours are tolerated, or even considered acceptable. This further undermines service delivery (Okoye et al., 2024).

Limited resources can cause employees to develop informal coping mechanisms that may become entrenched in organisational culture. Insufficient financial resources can result in employees not being paid on time, which can lead to a loss of motivation, absenteeism, inefficiency, or corruption (Kurofiji, 2024). Inadequate human resources, such as a shortage of skilled workers, may result in the informal delegation of duties to unqualified personnel, which can lead to poor service quality (Olala, 2023). Furthermore, slow decision-making can lead to bureaucratic bottlenecks, where employees may develop informal shortcuts that do not always align with official policies. This can force citizens to offer bribes to receive services on time, as such practices become normalised within the informal culture.

External political pressures can disrupt formal processes, causing employees to rely on informal networks to navigate the complexities introduced by such interference. Politics has been blamed for poor service delivery in Zimbabwe. There is a tendency to use politics as a scapegoat for anything that goes wrong in Zimbabwe (Dube, 2024). Past research has failed to prove or disprove this claim. However, the current political climate has led to local authorities failing to provide adequate services to the local community in Zimbabwe.

4. Effects of Informal Organisational Culture on Service Delivery in Local Authorities

The impact of informal organisational culture on service delivery within local authorities in Zimbabwe is significant and multifaceted. In local authorities in Zimbabwe, where resources may be limited and demand for services is high, the impact of informal networks is even more pronounced. When certain groups form exclusive alliances, collaboration can decrease and overall productivity can suffer. Consequently, the effectiveness of service delivery is compromised, which ultimately affects the communities that rely on these local authorities for essential services.

A prevalent "know-it-all" attitude can lead to minimal engagement with stakeholders, resulting in services that may not align with community needs. Rijal (2023) argues that robust public service planning processes involving citizens and stakeholders are key to ensuring that services are responsive to their needs.

In informal cultures, responsibility is often unclear. Without clear roles and expectations, employees may feel less accountable for their actions, which can lead to poor service delivery (Matyana & Sibiyi, 2025). A lack of clearly defined roles and expectations can result in inefficiencies and a failure to respond to community needs. Without a clear accountability framework, addressing citizen complaints becomes challenging. When residents report issues, there may be no designated person to handle these complaints effectively. This can result in unresolved problems, causing frustration within the community and creating the perception that the local authorities are unresponsive.

Informal cultures can foster resistance to new policies or changes in procedures. Employees may be reluctant to deviate from traditional working methods, which can hinder innovation and the implementation of best practices in service delivery (Deger, 2025). This can prevent local authorities from improving their services or adapting to the evolving needs of the community. In environments where informal networks dominate, nepotism and cronyism can flourish. This can result in resources and opportunities being allocated based on personal relationships rather than merit, which ultimately compromises the quality of services provided to the public. Chatiza et al. (2021) emphasised that this inequity can lead to resentment among staff, reducing their willingness to collaborate and share knowledge.

Fostering informal relationships among employees improves coordination and efficiency in service delivery, as well as strengthening teamwork. Employees can share information quickly, bypassing bureaucratic delays. These strong interpersonal bonds can lead to better communication and trust within teams. When team members feel comfortable with each other, they are more likely to share ideas, collaborate on projects, and support each other in achieving common goals (Gerull, 2025). Compared to rigid bureaucratic procedures, informal communication channels enable quicker problem solving. This can be beneficial in emergencies, when a quick response is necessary. Informal cultures often bypass the rigid hierarchies and formal procedures that can impede decision-making. With fewer layers of approval required, employees can make decisions more quickly, enabling local authorities to respond promptly to community needs and emerging issues (Jones et al., 2021). Furthermore, experienced employees mentor newer staff members through informal learning, thereby improving overall competence. Best practices can spread quickly through informal discussions and knowledge sharing, as this environment encourages team members to learn from one another, facilitating the exchange of valuable insights (Ahsan, 2025).

This peer support system can accelerate skills development, as employees receive practical advice and guidance in real time (Zamiri & Esmaeili, 2024). This type of mentorship fosters a culture of continuous learning, which is vital for adapting to the ever-changing needs of citizens. Studies have also shown that employees can suggest creative solutions without fear of excessive red tape. Local authorities can adapt more easily to community needs through flexible decision-making. Informal cultures tend to foster a relaxed atmosphere in which employees feel comfortable sharing their ideas without fear of criticism (Rossignoli et al., 2024; Kahura, 2023). This openness fosters creativity, enabling staff to suggest innovative solutions to the challenges faced by local authorities. Encouraging employees to think outside the box can lead to the development of new services or improvements to existing ones.

5. Management of Informal Organisational Culture on Service Delivery in Local Authorities

To harness the benefits and mitigate the drawbacks of informal organisational cultures, local authorities can implement strategies such as leadership development, performance management systems, training and development, and policy reforms. Ahsan (2025) argues that cultivating leaders who embody the desired values and behaviours can have a positive influence on the broader organisational culture. Effective leadership development can enhance leaders' communication skills, encouraging open dialogue and strengthening informal networks among employees (Zainab et al., 2022). Effective leadership development involves employees in decision-making processes, thereby empowering them (Vu, 2020). This empowerment fosters a sense of ownership and commitment, thereby enhancing the informal organisational culture and improving service delivery. Studies have also shown that performance management systems (PMS), which encompass various processes and practices aimed at improving organisational performance, can mitigate the negative effects of an informal organisational culture (Siraj & Hagen, 2023).

In the context of local authorities in Zimbabwe, these systems can play a pivotal role in managing informal organisational culture through goal alignment and continuous feedback. According to Nkala and Chiware (2022), PMS helps to align individual performance goals with the organisation's broader objectives. This alignment encourages employees to work together towards shared goals, thereby reinforcing a culture of teamwork and common purpose. Furthermore, implementing a PMS that emphasises continuous feedback enables real-time communication between leaders and employees (Idrus, 2025). This feedback

loop can address informal cultural dynamics and ensure that employees feel heard and valued.

Continuous professional development can provide employees with the skills required to adapt to formal processes, thereby reducing the need for informal workarounds. Like many public sector organisations, local authorities in Zimbabwe can be plagued by informal cultures that undermine efficiency and accountability (Obicci, 2025). These can include nepotism, cronyism, corruption, a lack of transparency and a resistance to change. In an informal setting, local authorities can develop training programmes that respond more effectively to the specific needs of their employees (Ahsan, 2025). By engaging with staff to identify skill gaps and areas for improvement, authorities can design targeted training initiatives that address the challenges directly. This tailored approach maximises the effectiveness of training efforts.

A study in Zimbabwe shows that policy reforms can be a crucial management strategy for addressing informal organisational cultures that hinder service delivery in local authorities. This requires a focus on transparency, accountability, and citizen participation (Marumahoko, 2023). Cairney and Toomey (2024) posit that regularly reviewing and updating policies to reflect current realities can ensure that formal structures remain practical and relevant, thereby diminishing the space for informal cultures to thrive. Local authorities often face dynamic challenges that require adaptability. According to Singh (2024), policy reforms that acknowledge and leverage the strengths of informal culture can facilitate quicker responses to changing needs, ultimately enhancing service delivery.

6. Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology was employed to study the impact of organisational culture on service delivery within local authorities. A case study design was employed, involving an in-depth investigation of a specific case to gain rich, detailed insights. According to Islam and Aldaihani (2022), qualitative research addresses questions concerning "how" and "why", and enables researchers to understand context, phenomena and experiences, which cannot easily be quantified to understand phenomena, contexts, objects and experiences. The study population included all employees of the selected local authority. This population comprised permanent and part-time workers, totalling 100 individuals. The population comprised people of different ages ranging from 18 to 65 years, diverse gender identities, and people from different cultural backgrounds. The population had a significant representation of vulnerable populations such as women and those living with disabilities. The population of the study comprised

senior management, residents' association members and workers' representatives. A combination of purposive and convenience sampling techniques was employed to select the categories of stakeholders: senior management, residents' association members and workers' representatives. Thirty participants (18 females and 12 males, including five senior managers, 15 residents' association members and 10 workers' representatives) took part in the study.

The decision to employ the convenience sampling method is predicated on Simkus' (2022) assertion that this technique involves the selection of participants on the basis of their availability and accessibility to the researcher. This technique involves the selection of participants based on their availability to the researcher, as opposed to the random selection of participants from a larger community (Stratton, 2021). The two techniques ensured that the researchers would easily recruit participants to replace those who would not be available during the period of conducting interviews. Moreover, the amalgamation of these two techniques ensured that data was collected from participants who were both relevant and knowledgeable, and who had full comprehension of the informal organisational culture.

In-depth, face-to-face interviews were used to collect data from the participants. The majority of participants were interviewed individually at their workplaces, while three opted to be interviewed elsewhere. Each interview session lasted between 45 and 55 minutes. The interviews covered biographical data and the workers' perceptions of the state of service delivery and the informal organisational cultures prevailing in the local council. All participants gave individual consent. The interactive nature of the interviews enabled in-depth and precise examination of the issues, thereby ensuring a comprehensive investigation of the influence of organisational culture on service delivery in local authorities. Furthermore, Dawadi et al. (2021) posit that the utilisation of interviews facilitates researchers in the capture of behaviour and reaction depicted data. The solicited data was analysed using a thematic approach. Themes and sub-themes were identified and developed during the data collection and analysis stages. These themes and sub-themes were then described, and some verbatim quotations made by the participants were recorded and coded. Using the thematic data analysis technique is consistent with previous studies (Nyanga & Zirima, 2020; Nyanga et al., 2021), which successfully analysed related studies using this approach. Thematic data analysis was favoured because it is simple and easy to interpret and comprehend. Furthermore, this approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to organise and interpret data systematically and efficiently. In line with Peel's (2020) views, the data were grouped and coded according to themes and sub-themes.

Selected verbatim quotations from participants were also presented. The thematic data analysis approach also allowed the researchers to adapt the themes and sub-themes as new ones emerged.

7. Results and Discussion

7.1 Impact of Informal Organisational Culture on Service Delivery

Participants noted that informal interactions among employees fostered a sense of camaraderie and teamwork. One participant stated: *"When we work together informally, it feels like we are a family, and this helps us serve the community better."* Participant 3 also remarked the following: *"Informal culture fosters the spirit of team work among members of staff. Interactions outside the organisation make workers resolve some work-related conflicts among themselves and between them and management."* The study's findings revealed that teamwork and collaboration highlight the importance of social bonds among employees. When staff feel connected and supported, they are more likely to engage in co-operative behaviours that improve service delivery. These findings align with those of Sukmawati et al. (2024) and Bourgault & Gorforth (2021), who suggest that strong interpersonal relationships within organisations can lead to improved performance and job satisfaction. This sense of camaraderie can foster a more cohesive work environment, encouraging individuals to support each other and ultimately improving the quality of service provided to the community.

Participants also indicated that informal culture facilitate open communication channels, allowing for quicker problem-solving. A participant expressed: *"In our informal meetings, we can speak freely, and this leads to faster decisions that benefit our service delivery."* Participants also indicated that informal culture facilitate open communication channels, allowing for quicker problem-solving. Another participant reiterated: *"In our informal meetings, we can speak freely, and this leads to faster decisions that benefit our service delivery. Our managers are people we can talk to; they are approachable whether work or personal problems. Our management also involve us when making decisions that concerns us for example, salaries and benefits."*

The study also found that improved communication highlights the importance of informal settings in encouraging dialogue. Such settings, such as casual meetups or social gatherings, often create a relaxed atmosphere. This encourages participants to express their thoughts and feelings more freely, resulting in more authentic and candid conversations. The results of this study align with the findings of Rossignoli et al. (2024) and Kahura (2023), who discovered that informal meetings facilitate a more relaxed

exchange of ideas, leading to innovative solutions and quicker decision-making processes. This is particularly important in local authorities, where responsiveness to community needs is paramount. Open communication can break down hierarchical barriers, enabling all employees to contribute to discussions about service improvements (Jones et al., 2021). The results found that a positive informal culture significantly boosted employee morale and motivation. One participant expressed: *"When the atmosphere is friendly and supportive, I feel motivated to go the extra mile for our clients. We are encouraged to work as a team. This helps in case one of us fails to come to work it means works will still continue. It also helps us to finish our tasks as per schedule. For general workers like refuse collectors, health personnel and engineering workers, team work is just essential when working on our different projects."*

The study also found that informal culture had a positive impact on employee morale within a local authority. High morale often translates into higher productivity and better service delivery. These results align with those of Kwarteng et al. (2024), who argued that employees are more likely to go above and beyond in their roles when they feel valued and motivated. These results suggest that local authorities should actively foster positive informal cultures to enhance overall employee engagement and satisfaction. Further research by Nguyen & Ha (2023), Bella (2023) and Radu (2023) has shown that positive informal interactions among employees can significantly boost morale and job satisfaction, making them more likely to go the extra mile in their roles.

Conversely, the participants highlighted the challenges posed by negative informal practices such as cliques, exclusion, favouritism, resistance to change, and a lack of alignment between the informal organisational culture and its formal goals. The results indicated that, in local authorities, cliques and exclusion can create divisions that hinder effective service delivery. When certain groups form exclusive networks, it can lead to a lack of co-operation among staff. One participant observed: *"Cliques within local authorities can lead to a culture of exclusion, where vital information is not shared, ultimately affecting the quality of services provided to the community."* The study also revealed the darker side of informal organisational structures, particularly the emergence of cliques and exclusion. It was established that one of the major negative effects of an informal organisational structure is the formation of cliques, which can create an environment where certain groups dominate interactions and decision-making processes. This can result in a lack of collaboration and communication among staff, ultimately hindering service delivery. The results are consistent with those of Elston and Bel (2023), who argue that when employees feel excluded, their motivation and engagement decrease.

This can result in lower productivity and a decline in the quality of services provided to the community. Recent studies by Horak and Suseno (2023) and Elston and Bel (2023) emphasise that such cultures can foster a toxic work environment where only a select few have access to information and resources, thereby further marginalising others.

Participants demonstrated that favouritism and inequity can result in substantial disparities in the delivery of services within local authorities. When employees perceive that decisions are based on personal relationships rather than merit, it can lead to dissatisfaction and disengagement. A notable quote states: *"Favouritism in local authorities' breeds inequity, resulting in some employees receiving preferential treatment, which can compromise the fairness and effectiveness of service delivery."* In the same vein, participant 5 expressed the following: *"Councillors are the ones that bring people to be hired for menial jobs, it's now taking long to have bushes around residential areas cleared. Most of the hired are their relatives and when they are working on the roads or cleaning an area, they start to make preparations for their food and start work later. This has become a norm and can result in not archiving our targets because they are difficult to control. There is a lot of political interference in city councils."*

The study also showed that favouritism and inequity within local authorities can severely damage staff morale and trust. A sense of injustice is created when decisions regarding promotions, project assignments or resource allocation are based on personal relationships rather than merit. The results align with those of Chatiza et al. (2021), who emphasised that this inequity can lead to resentment among staff, reducing their willingness to collaborate and share knowledge. Recent reviews suggest that this culture affects not only employee satisfaction, but also the overall effectiveness of service delivery, as talented individuals may feel undervalued and disengaged.

The results showed that resistance to change can be especially harmful in local authorities, where adopting new policies or technologies is crucial for enhancing service delivery. Employees who resist change can hinder progress and innovation. A powerful quote reflects this sentiment: *"In local authorities, resistance to change can create a culture of stagnation, where outdated practices persist, ultimately leading to a decline in service quality and responsiveness to community needs."* Participant 7 expressed: *"In response to resistance to change the local authority find it difficult to introduce a biometric clock-in system since workers were used to informal shift-swapping and there is also a tendency of coming to work late and also early dismissal."*

The study also revealed that resistance to change is another significant barrier within local authorities. This is often due to a fear of the unknown or a lack

of trust in leadership. The results are consistent with those of Deger (2025), who posits that resistance to new policies, technologies or processes by employees can stall progress and innovation if they feel that their informal networks and relationships are threatened. This can impede organisational progress and service improvement. Recent scholarly work by Ham (2022) highlights that this resistance can be exacerbated by negative existing cultures, such as cliques and favouritism, which create an environment where change is viewed with scepticism. This reluctance can result in outdated practices continuing for longer than necessary, which ultimately affects the quality and efficiency of the services provided to the public.

The findings emphasized the need for informal culture to align with formal organisational objectives. A participant noted: *"If our informal culture supports the goals of the organization, we can achieve much more in our service delivery."* Similarly, participant 3 indicated: *"Some municipal workers engage in drinking to cope with the psychological strain of handling human waste and grave digging because of inadequate resources and lack of personal protective equipment. If unchecked, such behaviour may temporarily increase worker confidence in handling tough tasks which will lead to proper service delivery to the residents."*

The study also revealed that an alignment between informal culture and formal organisational objectives is critical for local authorities. These findings are consistent with those of Kennedy et al. (2025), who found that informal practices can significantly enhance service delivery by supporting the organisation's overarching goals. This finding suggests that leaders within local authorities should be mindful of the informal culture that develops, actively working to ensure that it complements formal policies and objectives. It also suggests that councils should review their by-laws to effectively regulate the informal culture and consider the needs of their employees when delivering services to citizens.

7.2 Strategies for Managing Informal Organisational Cultures on Service Delivery in Local Authorities

The results indicated that local authorities should establish clear organisational values and expectations to guide informal interactions and behaviours. Defining roles clearly can help to mitigate the ambiguity that often fuels informal practices. A participant shared: *"Having well defined job descriptions made it easier for everyone to understand their responsibilities, reducing the reliance on informal networks."* Another participant had this to say: *"At this organisation we have set rules and regulations that are followed by every section and unit when carrying out our day-to-day business. The culture we have is to follow the clear organogram*

that guide us on the reporting hierarchy. Our employees know where to report to and we have respect of our superiors. For everything that takes place here we have procedures to follow that are well communicated to the employees."

The study found that setting clear expectations can empower employees to take ownership of their roles and responsibilities. This clarity enables employees to align their actions with the organisation's mission and goals, resulting in more cohesive teamwork and improved service outcomes. The results align with those of Igbal et al. (2024), who argue that employees are more likely to engage in behaviours that reflect the values underpinning their work when they understand those values. Such behaviours include collaboration, accountability, and responsiveness to citizens' needs.

The results showed that managers should encourage open communication and feedback loops to help identify and address potential issues within informal networks. Open and transparent communication is essential for managing informal cultures. One of the participants said: *"When we started having regular updates and open forums, it helped break down the barriers that informal groups had created."* Participant 10 was not satisfied by efforts managers were making to encourage open communication and had this to say: *"The problem is that, us the workers who are on the ground of providing the services, we are not consulted on how to do it. We just do as we are told to do by our supervisors. The orders just come from above and we do not have a chance to also go to the meetings to give them our views of what's on the ground and what should be done first and how it can be done at a lower cost. I can say there is very little involvement of workers where service delivery is concerned."* The study revealed that encouraging open communication and establishing feedback loops is a vital strategy for managing informal organisational culture within local authorities. This approach has been demonstrated to assist in the identification and resolution of potential issues within informal networks. Furthermore, it has been shown to promote a more transparent and collaborative work environment, which in turn has a positive effect on service delivery. The findings are consistent with the conclusions posited by Foster (2021), who hypothesises that when individuals feel comfortable sharing their thoughts and concerns, it allows for the identification of issues that may arise within informal networks, such as cliques or miscommunication. This proactive approach enables managers to address these challenges before they escalate, thereby ensuring that informal interactions remain constructive and aligned with the organisation's goals.

Participants demonstrated that fostering inclusivity can facilitate the integration of diverse perspectives

and mitigate the predominance of informal cliques. As one participant stated: *"Creating an environment where everyone feels valued has diminished the influence of informal groups. We now collaborate more effectively."* The study also found that promoting inclusivity can offset the detrimental impact of informal cliques that may emerge within the organisation. When individuals from diverse backgrounds feel valued and included, they are more likely to contribute their unique insights and ideas. These findings are consistent with those of Frisk and Bannister (2022), who acknowledge that diversity of thought can enhance problem-solving and decision-making processes, ultimately leading to better service delivery outcomes.

The results indicated that local authorities should implement training programmes to equip staff with the skills needed to navigate formal structures. A participant remarked: *"The workshops we attended helped us appreciate the importance of formal processes and we started applying what we learned in our daily tasks."* Participant 6 said: *"Our training equips staff with the skills to handle inquiries effectively and improve overall customer satisfaction."* The study also revealed that implementing training programmes is a strategic approach to managing informal organisational culture within local authorities, particularly with regard to equipping employees with the skills necessary to navigate formal structures effectively. A key feature of these programmes is that they help employees to understand the formal organisational structures and processes that govern their work. The results support Ahsan's (2025) assertion that providing clarity on roles, responsibilities, and procedural training can empower employees to operate more effectively within established frameworks. This understanding is crucial for ensuring that informal interactions align with formal expectations, thereby reducing confusion and enhancing efficiency.

Participants indicated that managers should recognise formal achievements by acknowledging and rewarding employees who adhere to formal processes, in order to reinforce positive behaviours. Participant 4 indicated that *"When our team's efforts to follow the established protocols were celebrated, it encouraged others to do the same."* The study also showed that acknowledging formal achievements can help bridge the gap between formal and informal cultures. This sends a clear message that, while informal interactions are valuable, they should complement, rather than undermine, formal structures (Hällström et al., 2025). This alignment is particularly important in local authorities, where adherence to formal processes can have a significant impact on the outcomes of service delivery. When employees understand that their contributions to these processes are valued, they are more likely to engage in behaviours that support the organisation's goals.

8. Conclusions

The study concluded that the existing informal cultures within local authorities in Zimbabwe have both positive and negative effects, leading to inadequate service delivery. These cultures have been shown to encourage practices that include inefficiency, corruption, and inadequate service delivery, thereby impeding the capacity of local authorities to fulfil their responsibilities in an effective manner. Consequently, residents are expressing discontent with the services provided by their respective local governments. The study also concluded that local authorities should adopt various strategies for managing informal organisational cultures, such as establishing clear organisational values, encouraging open communication and feedback loops, promoting

inclusivity, implementing training programmes to help staff navigate formal structures, and recognising formal achievements to reinforce positive behaviours and lead to effective service delivery.

Author Contributions:

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