

# Making Values Ordinary: How Institutional Values Become School Culture in a Newly Established Muhammadiyah Primary School

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**Abstract.** Educational change scholarship has extensively examined reform in schools with established institutional histories, yet less attention has been given to how newly established schools construct the cultural foundations through which institutional values become recognizable in everyday life. This article examines how institutional values are translated into everyday organizational culture in a newly established Muhammadiyah primary school in Indonesia. Drawing on a qualitative case study at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Sibuluan, North Sumatra, the study uses multi-actor data from semi-structured interviews, field observations, and institutional artifacts involving the principal, teachers, staff, students, and parents. Using reflexive thematic analysis, the study develops making values ordinary as an analytical concept to explain how institutional values move from leadership intention into everyday organizational practice. The findings identify five interrelated translation mechanisms: visible adult modelling, routinized daily practices, professional space for teacher adaptation, relational legitimation with parents and students, and structural embedding through rules, documentation, schedules, and communication systems. The study contributes to educational change scholarship by shifting attention from reforming established school cultures to the formation of cultural foundations in a newly established school. It further reframes transformational leadership as cultural and institutional work through which multiple actors interpret, enact, negotiate, and stabilize organizational values. Educational change becomes culturally embedded when values are not only declared but gradually made ordinary in everyday school life.

**Keywords:** *school culture; institutional values; newly established school; transformational leadership; institutional work*

## INTRODUCTION

Educational change rarely unfolds through top-down policy mandates, rigid structural updates, or formal administrative programmes alone. In real school settings, educational change becomes genuinely meaningful only when abstract institutional values, operational expectations, and systemic purposes are actively translated into everyday professional practices and collaborative relationships. Seminal research on policy implementation by Coburn [1] underscores that teachers do not merely implement directives; rather, they actively mediate reading and educational policies through collective sensemaking within their professional communities. This view is further extended by Spillane et al. [2], who introduce a cognitive framework to demonstrate that implementation is inherently an interpretive process where actors construct local meanings based on their prior knowledge and contextual constraints. Therefore, as Hargreaves and Goodson [3] argue in their longitudinal study of school change, educational reform must not be conceptualized as a linear, mechanical trajectory, but as a deeply social and cultural negotiation that evolves. This perspective demands closer attention to the micropolitical interactions through which leadership strategies and organizational conditions intersect to shape how change is lived and sustained by school actors [4]. Schools are, consequently, vibrant meaning-making organizations where new initiatives are continuously interpreted, adjusted, and woven into the institutional fabric.

Despite the richness of this interpretive turn, much of the international educational change literature remains characterized by a significant asymmetrical focus. A substantial body of educational change scholarship has focused on reform, improvement, and cultural restructuring within schools that already possess established institutional histories and stabilized professional routines [5], [3]. For instance, Datnow [6] provides a 20-year retrospective analysis emphasizing how existing teacher cultures and established professional relationships heavily condition the sustainability of reforms. Similarly, recent longitudinal work by Meyer et al. [7] examines how principal leadership practices explicitly promote collaboration and

organizational adjustment within three pre-existing school improvement initiatives. Consequently, far less academic attention has been devoted to the precarious early lifecycle of newly established schools, where the central organizational challenge is not transforming an inherited or long-standing culture but building a functional culture from the ground up. In historically settled schools, leading change often involves challenging embedded assumptions and redirecting institutional routines. In a brand-new school, however, the cultural work is fundamentally different: shared organizational meanings, stakeholder trust, professional expectations, and institutional identity are not pre-existing traditions to be redirected, but precedents that must be actively co-constructed from a limited institutional history before they can be taken for granted.

To understand the cultural complexity of this process, the inquiry must be situated within the distinctive governance structures of the contemporary Indonesian educational landscape. Following the post-Suharto democratic decentralization, Indonesia implemented sweeping school-based management (SBM) policies, granting local schools extensive institutional autonomy to shape their internal structures, pedagogical priorities, and cultural identities [8]. Under this high-stakes decentralized framework, private schooling networks play a monumental role in public education delivery. Prominent among these is the Muhammadiyah organization. Muhammadiyah is one of Indonesia's major Islamic socio-educational organizations, with a long-standing role in establishing schools across the country. Many private Islamic schools within this landscape seek to offer additional curricular, religious, or character-building features beyond standard primary schooling. Selecting a newly established school within this values-driven, high-stakes network offers a critical analytical window; it allows an in-depth examination of formative culture-building, where initial organizational structures and pedagogical habits are actively negotiated, and precedents are designed to secure local public legitimacy.

The study was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Sibuluan, a newly established Muhammadiyah primary school in North Sumatra, Indonesia. During the fieldwork period, the school was in its early institutional lifecycle and primarily served students in the lower primary grades. Its limited institutional history is a distinctive setting for examining how organizational values, professional expectations, everyday routines, and stakeholder relationships were being constructed during the formative stage of school development. Drawing on the wider literature on school improvement, sustainable educational change depends not only on top-down leadership but also on cultivating organizational trust, teacher collaboration, and structural embedding [6], [7], [9], [10]. These insights are particularly consequential for a nascent institution, where culture is not yet stabilized and must be constructed dynamically through multi-actor interactions in everyday organizational life. Students are also treated as important sensemakers because they experience school values through routines, reminders, and everyday interactions with teachers.

Three specific research questions guide this article. First, how is school culture built as a formative process of educational change in a newly established Indonesian primary school? Second, how do the principal, teachers, school staff, students, and parents collectively make sense of the emerging school culture? Third, How do leadership practices and multi-actor interactions enable institutional values to become visible, enacted, negotiated, and structurally embedded during the formative stage of the school?

By addressing these questions, this article advances three primary contributions to the international scholarship. First, it shifts analytical attention away from educational change in established schools to formative culture-building in the early life of a newly established school. Second, extends the interpretation of transformational leadership by showing how leadership practices interact with distributed cultural and institutional work. Third, it develops the analytical concept of making values ordinary to explain the explicit trajectory through which school values permeate daily life through modelling, routines, professional teacher agency, stakeholder negotiation, and organizational structures, thereby conceptualizing school culture-building as educational change enacted through the institution's everyday life.

## METHODS

### Research design

This study employed a qualitative, single-site case study design to examine the intricate processes through which school culture is constructed as a formative mode of educational change within a newly established Indonesian primary school. A qualitative case study design was theoretically appropriate because the inquiry sought to unpack a highly complex, contextually situated, and socially constructed organizational phenomenon within its real-world boundaries, rather than to measure isolated variables through experimental control [11], [12].

The research was anchored in an interpretivist-constructionist epistemological orientation. This paradigm assumes that organizational reality and institutional meanings are not objective, fixed truths waiting to be discovered, but are continuously generated, negotiated, and stabilized through the interaction, dialogue, shared experiences, and daily social practices of human actors [13]. Consequently, school culture was not

operationalized as a static, pre-existing variable or a mere collection of official rules. Instead, it was analyzed as a dynamic, emerging process actively interpreted and constructed by the principal, teachers, school staff, students, and parents in real time. This orientation directly supports the study's primary objective: understanding how abstract organizational values achieve cultural ordinariness in everyday lifecycle transitions.

### Research context and case selection

The fieldwork was conducted at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Sibuluan, a newly established Muhammadiyah-affiliated private primary school in North Sumatra, Indonesia. During the data collection period, the school was still in its early institutional lifecycle and operated at the lower primary level, serving pioneering early-grade students.

The intentional selection of this specific institution was guided by a purposive sampling strategy centered on the theoretical significance of organizational newness. The school was not selected to represent a typical Indonesian primary school; rather, it served as during an early stage of institutional formation. At this lifecycle stage, the institution lacked any accumulated history, meaning that professional relationships, communication channels, disciplinary routines, and administrative structures were still emerging and had not yet become fully institutionalized. This rare condition offered an exceptional analytical window into how initial micro-actions and leadership behaviors risk hardening into permanent cultural precedents, and how a nascent school simultaneously negotiates internal cultural cohesion and external public trust within a highly competitive, decentralized market.

### Participants and sampling strategy

Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the generated data was information-rich and accurately reflected the multi-actor configuration of the school community. In qualitative inquiry, purposive sampling is highly effective when participants are selected explicitly based on their direct lived experience of the phenomenon and their capacity to provide nuanced, multi-dimensional perspectives [14], [11]. The sample comprised 12 distinct institutional actors, deliberately structured to balance internal operational viewpoints with external stakeholder evaluations. Table 1 outlines the participants' structural characteristics and their relevance to the analytical depth of this case study.

**Table 1. Participant Characteristics and Analytical Relevance.**

| Participant Code | Role         | Number | Relevance to the Study                                                                                           |
|------------------|--------------|--------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| P1               | Principal    | 1      | Investigating strategic value direction, transformational leadership practices, and institutional scaffolding.   |
| T1–T4            | Teachers     | 4      | Examining professional adaptation, pedagogical experimentation, emotional vulnerability, and peer collaboration. |
| ST1              | School Staff | 1      | Unpacking technical administrative routines, scheduling stabilization, and internal data coordination.           |
| PA1–PA3          | Parents      | 3      | Evaluating external public legitimacy, expectation management, and the development of relational trust.          |
| S1–S3            | Students     | 3      | Exploring the embodied experiences of daily behavioral routines, school discipline, and immediate teacher care.  |

### Data generation techniques

To ensure a robust, comprehensive understanding of the case and facilitate qualitative triangulation, data were collected from three distinct sources: semi-structured interviews, intensive field observations, and institutional document analysis [12].

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with all 12 participants. Adult interviews lasted approximately 60–90 minutes, while interviews with early-grade students were shorter and adapted to their developmental level. All interviews were audio-recorded with explicit consent and transcribed verbatim. Interview excerpts presented in English were translated from Indonesian by the research team while preserving participants' intended meanings. Interviews with the early-grade student participants (S1–S3) were carefully modified using age-appropriate, concrete language, focusing exclusively on their lived experiences of daily routines, playground rules, and interactions with teachers.

Field observations were conducted during April 2026, focusing on daily routines, principal-teacher interactions, teacher-student interactions, student discipline, parent communication, teacher coordination, and school activities. Observation was epistemologically vital because this study did not treat school culture solely as rhetorical discourse, but as an enacted reality visible in repeated behavioral rhythms and physical interactions. Concurrently, document analysis was performed on a wide array of institutional artifacts, including the school's official vision-mission text, written behavioral codes, formal meeting minutes, activity reports, teacher professional development schedules, and digital logs from the school's parental WhatsApp

communication channels. These documents were treated as cultural artifacts that illustrated how abstract ideals were structurally captured and tracked over time.

### **Data analysis procedure**

The generated data was processed utilizing reflexive thematic analysis. This qualitative approach was selected because it prioritizes the organic generation of interpretive, latent themes that illuminate complex socio-cultural processes, rejecting mechanical coding frameworks or predetermined statistical frequencies [15].

The analysis was guided by Braun and Clarke's six recursive phases, while embracing the active, interpretive role of the research team in constructing meaning from the data. First, the research team engaged in data familiarization by repeatedly reading the transcripts, field notes, and digital artifacts. Second, initial codes were systematically generated across the entire dataset to capture micro-instances of leadership modeling, teacher anxiety, administrative stabilization, and parental conditional trust. Third, these codes were clustered to construct broader, candidate themes that captured overarching patterns of meaning. Fourth, the candidate themes were recursively checked against the raw extracts and the entire dataset to ensure empirical grounding and coherence. Fifth, the themes were defined, named, and conceptualized under one central, overarching narrative theme: making values ordinary. Sixth, the final analytical report was produced, utilizing sensitizing concepts from transformational leadership and institutional work theories to interpret the empirical findings without forcing the data into mechanical categories.

### **Methodological trustworthiness and reflexivity**

The interpretive validity of this qualitative inquiry was safeguarded through data-source and methodological triangulation [16]. Triangulation was systematically achieved by cross-checking data across three distinct methods (interviews, observations, documents) and five different participant groups, allowing the research team to compare formal leadership intentions with the lived realities of teachers, staff, parents, and students. Thick description was employed throughout the report to provide rich contextual detail on the geographical setting, institutional constraints, and raw participant quotes, thereby ensuring conceptual portability.

Reflexivity was sustained through an ongoing analytic journal in which the research team documented assumptions, background experiences, and interpretive shifts. Because the fieldwork took place within a private educational network and documented several positive practices, the research team consciously avoided a promotional or celebratory tone. Methodological sincerity was achieved by openly reporting organizational frictions, systemic administrative failures, teacher anxieties, and parental skepticism, thereby delivering a highly balanced, credible, and coherent institutional analysis.

### **Ethical considerations**

Ethical principles were maintained throughout the research process. All adult participants provided written informed consent and were informed of the study's purpose, voluntary participation, and right to withdraw. The research site is identified as SD Muhammadiyah Plus Sibuluan, while individual participants were anonymized using alphanumeric codes (e.g., P1, T1–T4, ST1, PA1–PA3, and S1–S3). For student participants, written parental consent and verbal child assent were obtained. Interviews were conducted using age-appropriate language, with particular attention to participants' privacy, comfort, and voluntary participation.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis generated one overarching theme: making values ordinary. This theme captures the process through which institutional values at SD Muhammadiyah Plus Sibuluan moved from formal statements into recognizable patterns of everyday school life. Because the school was still in its formative stage, culture could not be treated as an inherited organizational property. It had to be built through visible conduct, repeated routines, professional negotiation, relational trust, and emerging organizational structures.

Rather than unfolding as a linear movement from vision to implementation, culture-building appeared as a set of interrelated translation processes. Values became meaningful when they could be seen in adult behavior, practiced by young students, adapted by teachers, recognized by parents, and stabilized through administrative arrangements. Five dimensions of this process are presented below: making values visible through adult modeling, turning values into everyday routines, creating professional space for teacher adaptation, building relational legitimacy with parents and students, and embedding values into organizational structures.

### Result-1 (Making values visible through adult modeling)

The first dimension concerned the visibility of values through adult conduct. In a newly established school, formal statements of vision and mission lacked the authority of long-standing tradition. They required enactment. P1 described this work as beginning with small, visible actions that members of the school community could recognize:

“This school is still new. If values are only written in the vision and mission, people may not feel them. That is why we try to begin with visible things: arriving on time, greeting children, speaking properly, and showing that this school is serious about building good habits.”

The significance of this account lies in how ordinary actions were treated as cultural signals. Punctuality, greetings, respectful speech, and attention to children’s habits were not incidental details. They became early forms of organizational communication. In the absence of a settled culture, such actions helped define what seriousness, care, and discipline meant in practice.

Teachers did not interpret the principal’s role only through formal instruction. They observed his conduct as a model for professional behavior. T1 explained:

“We see that the principal not only gives instructions. He usually arrives early, greets the children, and pays attention to cleanliness and discipline. From that, we feel that school culture has to begin with an example, not only with rules.”

For teachers, the principal’s presence helped reduce the ambiguity of working in a new institution. Since established routines were still limited, adult modeling provided a practical reference point. It clarified that school culture was not expected to emerge from rules alone, but from the consistency between what adults said and what they repeatedly did. Field observations reinforced this pattern. The principal was frequently present during morning arrival, student reception, and early school routines. His interactions were brief but symbolically important: greeting children, reminding them to line up, emphasizing cleanliness, and correcting behavior without public humiliation. These micro-practices made the school’s values socially visible before they had become stable traditions.

The visibility of values also shaped parental interpretation. Parents were still evaluating whether the new school could be trusted. PA1 described how trust began through the child’s stories and the school’s communication:

“At first, of course, we were still observing because this is a new school. But my child came home telling stories about how the teachers were kind, how children were greeted and guided, and how school information was shared. From there, we began to feel that this school had a clear direction.”

This parental account reveals how adult modeling traveled beyond the school gate. Children’s descriptions of being greeted and guided provided parents with evidence that the school had a discernible direction. The school’s emerging culture was therefore not only enacted internally but also interpreted externally. Values became credible when different actors could recognize them through everyday encounters.

### Result-2 (Turning values into everyday routines)

The second dimension was the transformation of visible values into repeated routines. In the early life of the school, values such as discipline, politeness, responsibility, and care had to be practiced in concrete ways, especially because the students were in the lower primary grades. P1 emphasized that young children needed repeated habituation rather than abstract explanation alone:

“The children are still young, so values must be habituated. For example, saying greetings, queuing, asking permission, saying thank you, apologizing, and tidying their belongings. If they do this every day, gradually they understand that it is part of how we live in school.”

The phrase “part of how we live in school” is central to understanding the cultural work of routines. Values were not presented as detached moral concepts. They were translated into actions that could be repeated: greeting, queuing, asking permission, thanking, apologizing, and tidying. These practices shaped the everyday grammar through which children learned which kinds of behavior belonged in the school.

Teachers observed that routine formation was gradual and required repeated guidance. T2 described this movement from reminder to familiarity:

“What we feel most strongly is the daily habituation. At first, the children had to be reminded often. But over time, they learned when to line up, when to greet, and when to tidy their learning materials. So, culture is formed slowly through routines.”

The importance of this statement is that culture was not described as a sudden achievement. It was built slowly through repetition. Children initially relied on teacher prompts, but repeated participation helped them

anticipate expectations. In this sense, routines worked as a bridge between external direction and emerging self-regulation.

Student accounts gave further insight into how routines were experienced from within. S1 described how repeated reminders gradually became familiar: “Before, I often forgot to tidy my bag and wait for my turn. Now I am used to it because the teacher reminds us every day. When we enter the classroom, we also greet each other first.”

S1’s use of “now I am used to it” points to the beginning of ordinariness. The behavior had not simply been enforced; it had become more familiar through repeated practice. The value of responsibility was being learned through tidying a bag, waiting for a turn, and greeting others before entering the classroom.

S2 described a similar process:

“In the morning, we line up first and then greet the teacher. Sometimes I forget to wait for my turn, but the teacher reminds me. Now I am starting to get used to it, so I know what I should do.”

This account adds an important nuance: becoming accustomed to routines did not mean that students no longer forgot or needed guidance. Rather, correction remained part of the process. The teacher’s reminder was not experienced as punishment, but as support that helped the child understand what to do. Culture-building, therefore, involved repeated corrections that gradually became predictable and acceptable.

S3 also emphasized the role of daily repetition: “When the teacher reminds us, we know what to do. At first, I forgot, but if we do it every day, we can do it.”

Together, the student accounts show that children were not merely passive recipients of adult-designed routines. They were participants in shaping school culture. Their repeated engagement with greetings, lining up, waiting, tidying, and responding to teacher reminders helped transform values into lived expectations. Through children’s bodies, movements, and speech, values became part of the ordinary rhythm of school life.

Routinization also extended into the school’s organizational communication. ST1 explained how routine information-sharing supported the school’s emerging order:

“Because the school is still new, information must be clear. The WhatsApp group helps us share schedules, activities, and announcements. We are also beginning to habituate meeting notes and activity reports so that work does not depend only on memory.”

This account widens the meaning of routine beyond student behavior. For staff and parents, routines were also about predictability, documentation, and communication. WhatsApp messages, schedules, announcements, meeting notes, and activity reports helped the school create order where no long-established system yet existed. Document analysis supported this finding. The school’s written rules, meeting notes, activity reports, teacher development schedules, photographs of activities, and parent communication records acted as cultural artifacts. They made expectations visible, repeatable, and reviewable. In this way, routines linked the behavioral life of children with the administrative life of the institution.

### **Result-3 (Creating a professional space for teacher adaptation)**

The third dimension concerned the role of teachers as cultural translators. Teachers did not simply implement the principal’s values. They interpreted and adapted them into classroom practices suitable for young learners. This mattered because the school’s culture could not become ordinary unless teachers could turn institutional values into pedagogical experience.

T3 described the need to adapt teaching to the developmental characteristics of lower primary students: “We cannot teach young children only by explaining. They need to play, move, sing, and see examples. The principal gives us space to try those methods, as long as they remain connected to learning objectives and school values.”

This account demonstrates that values entered classroom life through pedagogical translation. Teachers used play, movement, songs, and examples to make values accessible to children. The principal’s role was not to prescribe every method, but to provide a bounded space for experimentation. Teacher agency was therefore supported, but it remained connected to shared learning objectives and school values.

T4 described this balance between freedom and collective guidance: “We are given freedom to develop ways of teaching, but afterwards, we still discuss them. If something is lacking, we evaluate it. So we are not simply left alone; we are guided while learning together.” The phrase “guided while learning together” captures the character of the school’s emerging professional culture. Autonomy was present, but it was not isolation. Teachers could try new practices, yet those practices were brought back into collective discussion. This prevented pedagogical freedom from becoming fragmented and helped establish shared professional expectations. The process, however, was not without emotional difficulty. T2 described the hesitation teachers initially felt when discussing classroom problems: “At first, there was hesitation in talking about

difficulties in class. We were afraid of being seen as incapable. Over time, we became used to it because problems were discussed to find solutions, not to blame anyone.”

This statement reveals the vulnerability involved in building a new professional culture. Teachers had to learn not only how to teach in a new school, but also how to speak honestly about uncertainty. The shift from fear of being judged to willingness to discuss problems was itself a cultural achievement. It suggested that professional openness could develop when evaluation was framed as collective problem-solving rather than personal criticism. Observation data showed that teacher adaptation occurred across formal and informal spaces. Teachers discussed student behavior, classroom routines, preparation for school activities, and adjustments to learning strategies. These conversations helped transform individual experiences into shared organizational knowledge. Through such interactions, teacher agency emerged as one mechanism through which values moved from leadership intention into classroom practice.

#### **Result-4 (Building relational legitimacy with parents and students)**

The fourth dimension concerned the development of relational legitimacy. As a newly established school, School A could not rely primarily on its accumulated reputation. Parents’ trust had to be earned through repeated everyday evidence: children’s experiences, teacher responsiveness, communication practices, and visible organizational seriousness. PA2 described trust as something that developed gradually: “Because this school is new, as parents, we certainly want to know its development. If communication is smooth and our children feel happy, we become calmer. So trust grows from everyday evidence.”

This account highlights the evaluative position of parents in the early life of a school. Trust was not granted once and for all. It grew through ordinary evidence that the school was functioning well: communication was smooth, children felt happy, and parents could see development over time. The school’s legitimacy was therefore relationally produced rather than institutionally claimed. PA3 similarly emphasized the importance of information: “We need clear information. If there are activities, schedule changes, or updates about children’s development, we want to be informed. Through that communication, we can see the seriousness of the school.”

For parents, clear communication was not a minor administrative matter. It was a sign of institutional seriousness. Information about activities, schedule changes, and children’s development helped parents assess whether the school was organized and responsive. Communication thus became a cultural practice through which trust was built. Students also played a role in this legitimacy process. Their experiences at school became evidence that parents used to interpret the school. When students returned home with stories of being greeted, guided, reminded, or cared for, they carried the school’s emerging culture into their families. In this way, students were not only learners of school routines; they were also carriers of the school’s values across the boundary between school and home. The relational character of legitimacy was especially important because the school was still new. In the absence of long-term reputation, parents looked for consistency between what the school promised and what children experienced. The alignment among communication, student well-being, and visible routines laid the foundation for early trust.

#### **Result-5 (Embedding values into organizational structures)**

The fifth dimension concerned embedding values within organizational structures. Values remained fragile when they depended only on the presence of the principal or the initiative of particular teachers. To become more durable, values need to be supported by rules, schedules, task divisions, meeting notes, activity reports, teacher coordination, and communication systems. P1 explicitly recognized this need:

“If everything depends only on the principal, the culture will not be strong. That is why we are starting to create rules, schedules, task divisions, meeting notes, and teacher activities. We hope the values we build can continue even when they are not always directly reminded.”

This statement marks an important shift from personal leadership to organizational embedding. The principal did not understand culture as something sustained only by direct supervision. Instead, culture had to be built into arrangements that could outlast immediate reminders. Rules, schedules, task divisions, and meeting notes helped values become part of how the school worked. ST1 described the unfinished but deliberate nature of this structural work:

“The system is still being organized. Some things were not in order at first, but we improved them through meetings and coordination. Because this is a new school, everything has to develop as it runs, but it still needs to become more orderly.”

This account brings forward an important feature of newly established schools: systems are often built while the institution is already operating. The school did not begin with fully stabilized administrative routines. The order had to be created through ongoing meetings, coordination, and correction. Structural embedding was therefore not a one-time act of design, but a continuing process of organizational learning.

ST1 further explained how documentation helped stabilize work: “Now we are beginning to habituate activity reports, meeting notes, schedules, and task division. It is not perfect yet, but it is more organized. When there are documents, work is easier to see and continue.”

The value of documentation was that it made work visible and transferable. In a new school, practices could easily remain tied to individual memory. Documents helped reduce this dependence by creating an organizational memory. Activity reports, meeting notes, schedules, and task divisions allowed practices to be reviewed, repeated, and continued. Document analysis confirmed the importance of these artifacts. The vision and mission provided value language—written rules defined expected conduct. Schedules are organized for the school day. Meeting notes recorded decisions and evaluations. Activity reports and photographs made practices traceable. WhatsApp communication connected the school to parents and supported coordination. Together, these artifacts helped move values from speech into structure.

### Synthesis: how values became ordinary

Across the five dimensions, the findings show that culture-building in School A was gradual, relational, and structurally mediated. Values did not move directly from vision statements into practice. They became ordinary through a series of translations: adults made them visible, routines made them repeatable, teachers made them pedagogically meaningful, parents made them legitimate through trust, and organizational structures made them more durable. This process also shows that transformational leadership in a newly established school cannot be understood as the work of a single heroic actor. The principal played a central role in articulating direction and modeling values, but the emerging culture became meaningful only when other actors participated in it. Teachers translated values into classroom practices. Students embodied them through repeated routines. Parents evaluated them through children’s experiences and school communication. Staff stabilized them through administrative documentation and coordination. The findings also reveal that formative culture-building involved fragility. Teachers initially hesitated to discuss classroom problems. Students needed repeated reminders before routines became familiar. Parents built trust gradually rather than automatically. Staff had to organize systems while the school was already running. These tensions were not evidence of failure. They were part of the process by which a new school became an institution. The concept of making values ordinary, therefore, captures the central analytical contribution of the findings. Values became culturally meaningful not because they were frequently declared, but because they became increasingly recognizable in ordinary practices: greeting children, lining up, waiting for one’s turn, discussing classroom difficulties, informing parents, writing meeting notes, preparing schedules, and dividing tasks. Through these everyday practices, the school’s values moved from formal intention into lived organizational life. Figure 1 summarizes the making values ordinary model, illustrating how institutional values are translated into everyday school culture through five interrelated mechanisms.

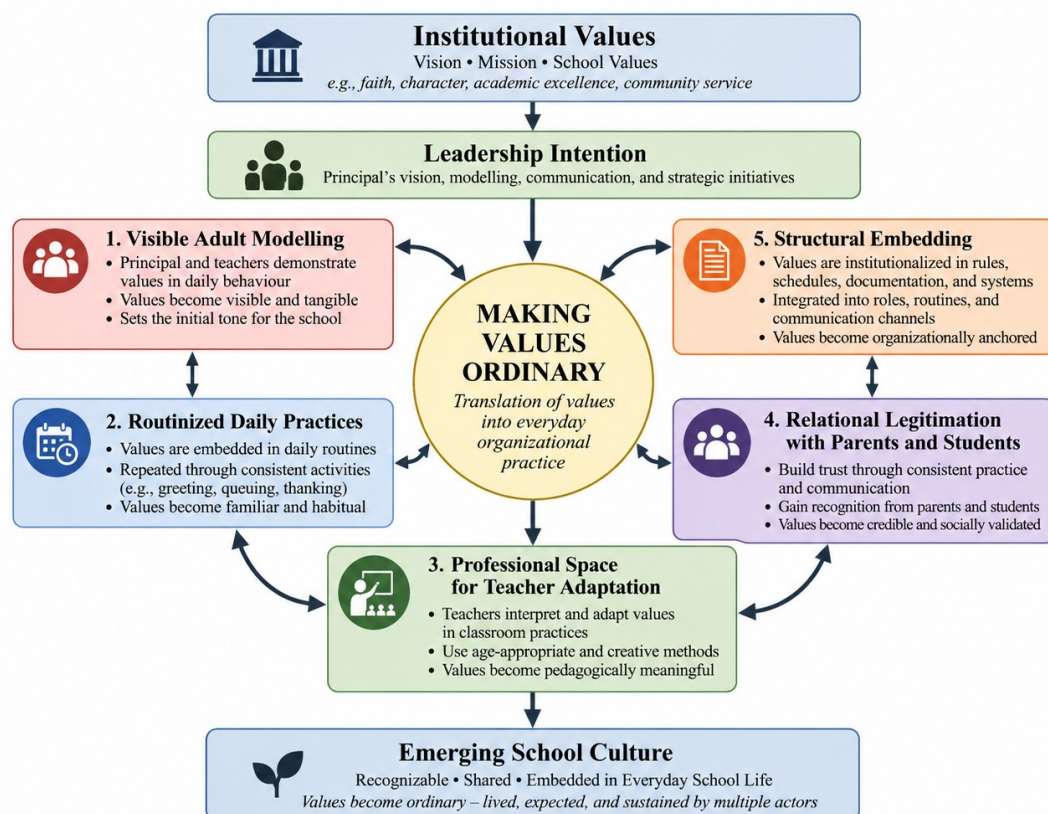


Figure 1. The Making Values Ordinary Model of School Culture Formation

The model illustrates how institutional values are translated into everyday school culture through five interrelated mechanisms: visible adult modelling, routinized daily practices, professional teacher adaptation, relational legitimation, and structural embedding. These mechanisms operate recursively rather than as a strictly linear sequence.

## Discussion

### Culture-building in newly established schools as a formative process of educational change

The empirical evidence generated in this study demonstrates that school culture-building within a newly established institution is not merely a peripheral administrative task or a functional prelude to education. Rather, it represents a distinctive, formative mode of educational change through which an institution fundamentally defines the foundational parameters of legitimate practice, professional responsibility, and institutional identity. These findings challenge dominant tendencies in educational change scholarship that predominantly conceptualize change through the lens of reform, restructuring, or improvement within existing, historically settled organizations [5], [6], [3]. In established schools, the logic of change is inherently disruptive—it requires dismantling, redirecting, or unlearning embedded routines and long-standing cognitive models. In sharp contrast, our findings reveal that in a newly established school, the logic of change is constitutive and foundational. The primary challenge is not the resistance of an inherited culture, but the daunting ambiguity of an empty institutional slate where every initial micro-action risks hardening into permanent cultural precedents. Rather than replacing an old culture, the nascent school is engaged in creating the very cultural grammar that makes future institutional interpretations possible. The findings also show that students were not merely recipients of cultural routines. Through repeated participation in greeting, queuing, tidying, and waiting for their turn, students became active carriers of the school's emerging cultural grammar.

A crucial nuance observed in this study is that formative educational change operates simultaneously as a double movement across macro and micro levels. At the macro level, the school actively sought to build external institutional legitimacy as a new private primary entity within the broader, highly competitive Indonesian educational landscape [8]. At the micro level, this macro-legitimacy was structurally built not through grandiose policy texts, but through minute, repeated everyday encounters: teachers reminding early-grade students to queue, the principal modeling daily punctuality, staff formalizing administrative records, and parents interpreting communication channels as tangible evidence of institutional seriousness. This multi-layered dynamic extends Kovačević et al.'s [17] insight that leadership and culture function as critical mechanisms of educational change. We add a vital qualification: these mechanisms must operate and secure stability before the organizational culture itself becomes hardened into unquestioned tradition.

Furthermore, the formative character of this change process is inherently characterized by structural and relational fragility. This fragility underscores that early culture-building is never a purely technical or linear deployment of administrative routines; it involves intense emotional and relational labor as school actors learn how to trust new expectations and one another [18]. The empirical reality of teachers' initial hesitation to discuss classroom difficulties in collective forums, parents' cautious surveillance of a new actor in the educational market, and students' gradual adjustment to behavioral boundaries indicates that culture-building is a site of constant negotiation and vulnerability. This finding deeply resonates with Tamir and Ganon-Shilon's [19] conceptualization of cracked school cultures during periods of national reform. However, our case offers a distinct theoretical departure: the strain observed here does not stem from a friction between old assumptions and new mandates, but from the systemic friction of birthing a collaborative professional culture out of initial isolation and institutional uncertainty.

### Transformational leadership as cultural and institutional work in a newly established school

By analyzing the leadership dynamics within a nascent educational organization, this article reframes transformational leadership, shifting the discourse away from individualistic, heroic, and trait-based conceptualizations. While classic leadership scholarship frequently treats transformational leadership as a behavioral checklist—tracking individual dimensions such as idealized influence and inspirational motivation [20], [21]—this study suggests that such checklist approaches are analytically blind to the unique contextual constraints of a newly established school. In a brand-new institution, transformational leadership matters not because of the leader's inherent traits, but because it functions as active cultural and institutional work. Leadership is relationally stretched across people, routines, situations, and artifacts rather than being localized solely in the formal authority of the principal [22]. The principal's everyday modeling, collaborative problem-solving conversations, and support for pedagogical experimentation become institutional mechanisms that give concrete meaning to abstract values [23].

This interpretation directly intersects with and expands Leithwood and Jantzi's [24] foundational argument that principals can strategically shape and reform school cultures. We shift the analytical locus from reforming an existing culture to forming the initial cultural architecture from the ground up. To understand this process, the notion of institutional work—defined as purposeful action aimed at creating, maintaining, or disrupting institutions—becomes theoretically indispensable [25]. The principal's leadership in this study was explicitly institutional because it successfully moved values from speech into durable, repeatable organizational arrangements: rules, daily habituation schedules, meeting documentation, and digital parent coordination channels. These practices prevented the school's emerging identity from remaining fragile or entirely dependent on the leader's personal, physical presence.

Crucially, this leadership influence was not exercised through top-down individual control, but was structurally mediated by mobilizing the agency of other institutional actors. This finding supports the core tenets of distributed and teacher leadership scholarship, which posit that successful educational change relies on shifting attention from leadership as a position to leadership as a collective practice [26], [27]. The principal did not replace or suppress the agency of teachers, staff, or parents; instead, his leadership became genuinely transformational by creating the organizational safety and structural conditions that enabled teachers to experiment with early-grade pedagogies, staff to refine administrative systems, and parents to invest relational trust [28]. Therefore, transformational leadership in newly established schools must be conceptualized as a double movement: cultural work that infuses values with daily meaning, and institutional work that anchors those values into repeatable routines. Without cultural work, values remain abstract slogans; without institutional work, they remain fragile personal initiatives.

### **The translation mechanisms of making values ordinary**

The central theoretical contribution of this study is the conceptualization of making values ordinary to explain the complex trajectory through which institutional values move from leadership intention into embedded organizational practice. This concept provides a vital analytical solution to a persistent dilemma identified by Gurley et al. [29], who highlighted that school vision, mission, and value statements often have no practical impact because organizational actors cannot connect them to their everyday work. Similarly, while Daniel et al. [30] view vision statements as important organizational artifacts that express desired futures, our findings reveal their significant empirical limitations. A vision statement cannot generate a culture by itself. Culture only emerges when a vision becomes performable, repeatable, relationally credible, and structurally supported within the institution's ordinary life.

Our study identifies that this trajectory depends on explicit translation bridges that allow abstract values to survive and permeate the ordinary fabric of a newly established school. The five translation mechanisms identified in the findings show that values became ordinary through visibility, repetition, professional adaptation, relational legitimation, and structural embedding. First, values require performative visibility to become socially experienced and trustworthy, confirming Fine's [31] insight that deep school transformation requires leaders to walk the talk actively. Second, routinization via temporal markers transforms values from occasional, top-down reminders into expected, natural conduct, aligning with Burkeland and Jones [32] and Meyer et al. [7] on the importance of embedding desired practices as ordinary, non-negotiable features of school life. Third, the process relies heavily on professional translation by agentic teachers, reinforcing the view that educational change requires a tight alignment between macro-expectations and teachers' agentic, collective learning [33], [34], [35]. Fourth, relational legitimation from external stakeholders establishes public credibility through communicative transparency and positive child experiences [36], [37], [38]. Finally, structural embedding provides durability through organizational artifacts, moving values beyond individual memory or personal initiative into stable opportunities for institutional continuity [39].

Ultimately, the school's distinctive condition of newness functioned simultaneously as a powerful enabler and a severe constraint. Newness created a rare institutional openness, freeing actors from the weight of inherited traditions and allowing early practices to solidify into cultural precedents quickly. Conversely, newness generated acute systemic vulnerability: administrative structures were destabilized, teacher collaboration relied on untested relational trust, and parental commitment remained highly conditional. This paradox constitutes the core theoretical nuance of our study: making values ordinary is never a smooth, automated passage from vision to implementation. It is an intensely negotiated, fragile, and non-linear process through which values achieve cultural ordinariness only when they successfully survive the constant friction of everyday institutional repetition and adjustment.

### **CONCLUSION**

In conclusion, this study demonstrates that school culture-building within a newly established organization is not a secondary administrative exercise, but the primary formative mode of educational change through which a school defines its baseline recognizability, relational order, and social legitimacy.

The empirical findings illustrate that institutional values move from leadership intention into deep organizational practice through a non-linear process of making values ordinary. This cultural ordinariness is structurally secured only when values successfully transition from declarative statements into performative adult modeling, iterated temporal routines, agentic pedagogical translations by teachers, relational legitimation from parents, and structural embedding within organizational artifacts. Ultimately, this article concludes that educational change within a brand-new schools becomes organizationally recognizable when abstract organizational ideals survive the friction of daily implementation and achieve cultural ordinariness in everyday institutional life.

Theoretically, this study advances international educational change scholarship by shifting the dominant analytical focus away from the reform and restructuring of long-standing, historically settled schools toward the formation of new institutional foundations during the early stages of institutional formation. It explicitly reframes transformational leadership as distributed cultural and institutional work rather than an individualistic behavioral style, demonstrating how a leader must create the necessary conditions for multiple actors to interpret, enact, and stabilize values. Furthermore, the concept of making values ordinary developed in this study provides an analytical framework for mapping the translation mechanisms that bridge the gap between school vision statements and everyday organizational practice. In terms of practical application, it signals to school foundations and educational policymakers that supporting new schools requires interventions that extend far beyond physical infrastructure development or enrollment metrics; it demands that leaders and teachers be provided with the temporal and emotional safety required to co-construct a cohesive, resilient professional culture from the ground up.

However, acknowledging the boundaries of this study is essential for contextualizing its insights. This research is built upon a single qualitative case study of a newly established private primary school in Indonesia and does not seek statistical generalization. Instead, its objective is analytical and conceptual portability, serving as an intensive empirical window into unpacking theoretical mechanisms relevant across similar context-driven settings. Additionally, while purposive sampling successfully captured a diverse set of institutional actors, the sample of 12 participants does not represent the entire school community. Most importantly, because data collection occurred within a specific cross-sectional timeframe, this study captures a snapshot of a highly fragile, early formative phase of culture-building. Consequently, it cannot empirically guarantee whether these emerging cultural patterns will successfully endure, mutate, or dissolve over long-term temporal horizons.

Rather than weakening the study, these limitations chart fertile paths for a future research agenda in international educational change. Future inquiries should employ longitudinal qualitative designs to track newly established schools over five to ten years, capturing the precise moments when early cultural precedents either solidify into permanent traditions or fracture under the weight of institutional growth. Comparative studies across diverse institutional typologies—juxtaposing public, private, religious, and secular new schools—would greatly enrich our understanding of which culture-building mechanisms are universally transferable and which are strictly context-dependent. Furthermore, given the rapid hybridization of contemporary schooling, future research must deeply investigate how digital communication architectures and virtual parent-teacher networks actively reshape the boundaries of school culture-building and external legitimacy. Finally, mixed-methods designs could be deployed to empirically test the structural relationships among transformational leadership practices, teacher professional agency, external relational trust, and the quantitative stabilization of school outcomes, deepening our collective understanding of how schools become durable institutions in everyday life.

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