Exploration leadership that advancing creative collaboration for teachers: A thematic analysis of a case study in a college of fine arts in China

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ABSTRACT

Amidst China's robust push for aesthetic education reform, the emphasis on interdisciplinary and cross-specialty collaboration necessitates alterations to traditional collaboration frameworks, presenting fresh challenges for leadership. While most of today's schools have documented the closely knitted relationship between leadership and teacher collaboration in educational settings, very few attempts have been made to explore what competencies college leaders employ to infuse creative collaboration into the organizational culture and how this creative collaboration affects teachers’ work, especially under the aesthetic education reform in China. This research used qualitative case study and thematic analysis to explore leaders’ competencies to promote creative collaboration in the organizational culture. This case study involved 10 participants from one College of Fine Arts in Henan, China, selected through purposeful sampling. Data were collected through 16 semi-structured interviews and the review of relevant documents. Findings reveal that the college dean employs an integrated leadership approach to foster positive creative collaboration among teachers. Findings were organized into the following themes: (i) Clear and decisive, collaboration-oriented organizational decision-making and guidance mechanisms; (ii) People-centric mindset: Fostering open and honest communication, creating a trusting environment; (iii) Maintenance and practice of integrity and responsibility; and finally (iv) Creating resources supporting and common goals to ignite teachers’ passion for collaborative engagement. Valuable guidance in the leadership model for fostering positive teacher-creative collaboration for leaders in Chinese aesthetic education reform is provided based on these findings.

Introduction

From a global perspective, interdisciplinary and interdepartmental collaboration is becoming a new trend in the development of higher education. This synergy emphasizes the cross-integration of different disciplines, to promote education to adapt to the needs of society (Tian & Jiang, 2022). This synergy can turn discrepancies into resources and enables people to develop new practices in participation and common sharing (Varela et al., 2020). With developments over time, written and unwritten expectations will determine the school members’ vision, mission, ideology, and behavior (Meier, 2012).

Leadership is one of the most critical influencers in creating, transmitting, and maintaining organizational culture, where leadership and culture mutually create a sustainable resource for the organization (Biswas, 2009). Leaders with high leadership qualities and better application of leadership values are beneficial to school organizational culture (Arifin et al., 2018). Notably, school leaders who can evoke educational values of symbolic significance and lead the school members to relate their activities to the educational values and purpose, may introduce new norms and improve culture (Willower, 1984).
Leaders who actively support and participate in collaboration with teachers can influence teachers' professional development (Drosset al., 2019). Good collaboration manifests in the common understanding, communication, and joint decision-making of collaborative team members based on their educational background, which allows new ideas to be integrated into new collective creations (Stockleben et al. 2016). Trust and mutual care have been identified as fundamental aspects of creative collaboration, with relationships of mutual trust affecting team members involved in creative tasks. Through previous research on long-term collaboration, researchers found that members who perceive trust and security will show mutual caring emotions, and this emotion becomes the condition to put forward different viewpoints and understand each other in the group (Eteläpelto & Lahti, 2008).

To support possible collaboration, leaders must create conditions and consider underlying values as fundamental forms of culture to drive members to form beliefs about attitudes, norms, and behavior (Dieterich & Ohlhausen, 2022). Leaders who infuse creative collaboration into the organizational culture are thus vital for fostering a conducive education environment for innovation and sustainable development.

Recognizing this, the Chinese Ministry of Education launched the aesthetic education reform in 2015 (Ministry of Education, 2015; Ministry of Education, 2020a), emphasizing schools should propose the implementation of an aesthetic education plan based on their own actual conditions (Jin & Zhang, 2021; Ministry of Education, 2020a; Ministry of Education, 2020b). In 2020, the Ministry of Education of the Republic of China “Opinions on Comprehensively Strengthening and Improving Aesthetic Education in Schools,” clearly states aesthetic education development direction which cultivates innovative consciousness. In essence, China's ongoing aesthetic education reform emphasizes cultivating innovative talents for the future, it advocates the integration of different disciplines (Jin & Zhang, 2021), which aims to break the boundaries between different art specializations, or art with other disciplines. This concept supports the cultivation of students through interdisciplinary teaching (Beckman et al., 2018). Schools introduce interdisciplinary knowledge into art disciplines and provide diversified learning options, which can accelerate the realization of the goal of cultivating innovative abilities in aesthetic education (Qian, 2020). Despite growing advocacy for enhanced aesthetic education, however, there appears to be reform implementation evidence that aesthetic education is still a weak link in the whole educational cause (Ministry of Education, 2020b). If higher education aims to reverse the current state of aesthetic education and align it with aesthetic education reform objectives, leaders must embed the concept of creative collaboration into the organizational culture.

Exploring the facilitation of creative collaboration among educators, particularly within the Chinese aesthetic education reform, needs a thorough understanding of leadership competencies. The anticipations of school leadership align with transformational leadership (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). Transformational leadership encourages knowledge sharing and accumulates social capital, enabling useful ideas for creative individuals, an effective element to enhance mutual learning, innovative thinking, and creativity ability (Liu, 2017). According to Rafferty and Griffin (2004), this leadership inspires employees to exceed expectations through five subdimension elements: “vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, and personal recognition”.

In China, Confucian value keeps consistently impacts organizational culture. In the three-dimensional model of paternalistic leadership facets of authoritarianism, benevolence, and moral leadership are highlighted (Li et al., 2000). According to Zhang and Faunce (2007), the leader's authoritarianism role as a 'father figure' under paternalistic leadership contributes to developing strong bonds and loyalty among team members, fostering a sense of collective identity. Similarly, Pellegrini and Scandura (2008) note that benevolent leaders can install a sense of security in their subordinates, promoting cooperation and teamwork. Moreover, the culture-building process is a core element of the Confucian philosophy (Chen & Lee, 2008). Chinese leaders attach importance to based primarily on relationism and harmony, trust, and respect (Cheung & Chan, 2005); they need to foster collaboration and effectively manage the divergent interests of stakeholders, thereby mitigating potential conflicts (Gallagher & Rarick, 2001). For Chinese societies, Confucian values “a moral governance full of harmony” (Sun, 2015) is the maintenance of interpersonal relationships, it is compatible with transformational leadership (Hui, 2022).

Despite the recognition of school leaders' influence in leading a positive teacher culture, and how Chinese traditional harmonious values continue to influence leadership and organizations' behavior in contemporary Chinese society. However, there is a relative scarcity of research on how higher education leaders connect these factors to respond to creative collaboration in aesthetic education. Previous studies researched the strategies of Chinese principals in leading a positive learning culture among teachers (Qian et al., 2017), teacher collaboration (Yuan et al., 2018), and principals' role in promoting teacher development in China (Qian & Walker, 2013). Nevertheless, no specific research literature identified the competencies of Chinese college deans in building creative collaboration conditions among teachers, especially within the context of aesthetic education reform. Even in Chinese academic research, the subject remains an under-explored area in higher education research, there is limited understanding of how leaders embedded leadership and Chinese “harmony” values in their organization to foster a positive collaboration culture. Therefore, a deeper exploration of Chinese leadership, particularly university leadership under the aesthetic education reform, remains an important area of research within the context of aesthetic education reform in contemporary Chinese society. To address this gap, this research reports a case study to show what competencies school leaders employ that make teachers want to engage in creative collaboration and the influence of creative collaboration on teachers.

This study has five parts. It begins with an introduction that discusses the background of the research and its objective. It is followed by the discussion of the literature review and introduces the theory framework. The third part presents the research methodology,
which discusses research design, selection and study site, instrumentation and data collection, ethical consideration, and mode of analysis. The fourth part comprises the findings and discussion. Lastly, the fifth part contains the conclusion of the study.

Literature Review

Theoretical Background and Conceptual Framework

Paternalistic Leadership

The three-dimensional model of paternalistic leadership encompasses authoritarianism, benevolence, and moral leadership (Li et al., 2000). Authoritarianism, the first dimension of paternalistic leadership, is characterized by a leadership style emphasizing obedience, respect from subordinates, and decisive direction. This approach is focused on providing clear guidance and making firm decisions (Bass & Bass, 2008). In the context of certain industries, such as manufacturing, authoritarianism can be particularly effective. Cheng et al. (2004) found that in highly structured and process-driven environments, this style promotes efficiency and adherence to standard procedures, thereby enhancing performance. Cultural context plays a significant role in the effectiveness of authoritarianism. Research has shown that a certain level of authoritarianism can enhance organizational efficiency and maintain stability, especially in a high-power distance society like China (Hofstede, 2001; Liu & Hallinger, 2020).

Benevolence, the second dimension of paternalistic leadership, originates from the Confucian virtue Ren. In Confucian philosophy, Ren is considered the greatest virtue and often translated as benevolence, humaneness, or goodness, it underscores the unity between virtue and action. Confucius perceives Ren as the moral consciousness that individuals ought to possess. In his view, attaining Ren requires initial contemplation of one's internal moral order. Moreover, Confucius stressed that virtue is the subject’s inward force; it consciously regulates people’s acquired behavior for good to promote the goodness of the heart to expand into good virtues. Ren also can be interpreted as a deep-seated commitment to treating others with respect and dignity. The theory of Ren offers a reference for an individual's self-perfection and the development of noble character traits. This transformational process, from being a person to embodying a noble personality via Ren, exemplifies the educational ideology of Confucian virtue (Li, 2018).

Moral leadership is the third dimension. A compelling case was provided by a comprehensive review of previous studies to show the importance of ethical leadership in relation to contemporary leadership theories (Bhana & Suknuman, 2022). In Confucian values, it focuses on the leader's morality and integrity and is deeply embedded in the ideal of the Junzi or noble person and guided by virtues such as Li (proper behavior) and Yi (righteousness). Confucius emphasizes that Li is a requirement for moral behavior (Tan, 2015). Yi can be regarded as a standard of behavior as the environment changes, “Yi gives unity to all virtues, and creates more when needed, thus directing what is appropriate for specific situations as an ordering principle which generates specific actions.” (Tan, 2015, p.183). To attain a lasting competitive edge, organizations should prioritize organizational values, and activities that enhance employee communication to enhance organizational trust (Erdal & Budak, 2021).

The three-dimensional of paternalistic leadership provides school leaders insights into leadership practices within the context of aesthetic education reform in China.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders encourage members to move forward around a vision, take responsibility for the development of followers, and empower them to take greater responsibility for realizing plans (Bass & Avolio, 1993). Transformational leaders’ support is built on “vision, inspirational communication, intellectual stimulation, supportive leadership, and personal recognition” (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004, p.329). Vision is a leader's portrayal of a future ideal rooted in organizational values; Inspirational communication entails the leader's capacity to bolster organizational morale through uplifting discourse; Supportive reflects a leader's act to address individual needs within the organization; Intellectual stimulation underscores a leader's enhance members' interest and ability for innovative problem-solving; Personal recognition refers to a leader's practice of providing rewards for the achievement of specific goals (Rafferty & Griffin, 2004). Usually, in a highly satisfying organizational culture, transformational leaders build on assumptions such as members are trustworthy and purposeful, each has a unique contribution, complex issues are dealt with at the lowest level and followers operate to realize their full potential (Bass & Avolio, 1993).

Moreover, a transformational leader engages in dedication to the organization's benefit, displays commitment to achieving superb results, and is cognizant that organizational members are key components in cooperation and partnership (Caldwell et al., 2012). Transformational leadership enhances employee adaptability and motivation, thereby positively mediating workforce performance (Hariadi & Muafi, 2022). They value the development of beneficiaries, the collaboration of members, and the decision—making of partners (Shiva & Suar, 2012). Transformational leadership creates value by changing the culture within a social system organization (Greimela et al, 2023). In the process, a transformational leader influences followers to accomplish an objective by applying their leadership knowledge and skills, and reaches higher motivation levels by changing the external environment (Acar, 2013). Followers appreciate more transformational leaders (Bass & Steidlmeier, 1999).

In this study, transformational leadership is defined as a positive leadership style that raises collaboration awareness, supports collective benefits, and aims for exceptional goals (Bagga et al., 2022). School leaders embracing this style promote cultural change through staff development, power-sharing, and communication about desirable norms and values (Björk & Gurley, 2003).
Empirical Review and Development

The Aesthetic Education Reform Context

Friedrich Schiller suggested aesthetic education using art and beauty as tools establishing an "aesthetic state," where individuals can be educated to become moral and harmonious members of society (Schiller & Snell, 2004). The duty of aesthetic education is to cultivate human character, with aesthetics as the center, to achieve eventual harmony between the sense, rational, moral, and physical world (Saperstein, 2004).

In different parts of the world, aesthetic education is emphasized and implemented in diverse ways. In the United States, aesthetic education is underscored by a focus on "promoting interdisciplinary collaboration." This approach aims to foster students' creativity through the arts. In Germany, aesthetic education is utilized to nurture critical thinking skills. It's closely associated with democratic education, social justice, and the formation of cultural identity (Kertz-Welzel, 2019). Meanwhile, in the United Kingdom, aesthetic education strives to cultivate a robust aesthetic culture. It targets intellectual, personal, social, and emotional development, all while nurturing creative capabilities (Li, et al. 2023). In China, the teachings of Confucius have shaped the goals of aesthetic education. The noble character is considered a vital educational objective, with art serving as both a tool and method for nurturing morality and promoting emotional development (Liang, 2021). These perspectives affirmed the advantages of aesthetic education within educational settings thoroughly, underlining aesthetic education as an indispensable facet of realizing the cultivation of creative thinking and indicating the necessity of promoting interdisciplinary fusion in aesthetic education. Therefore, aesthetic education should be a part of the nurturing education of modern schools.

Creative Collaboration

At the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of collaboration was introduced into the field of education, collaborative teaching gradually became the hotspot of educational reform. In education, the word collaboration describes a relationship or the mode of working together toward education reform (Ayenalem et al., 2022). Forms of collaboration are often associated with professional development, educational leadership, and school improvement (García-Martínez et al., 2021).

Creative collaboration refers to the process of multiple individuals or groups working together to bring their knowledge into group settings to achieve common learning goals (Dailey & Mork, 2017). This concept is envisioned as a process where multiple participants partake in ongoing efforts to foster insights via collective knowledge creation, employing methods that are innovative, applicable, and beneficial (Hod et al., 2018). The synergy created by interdisciplinary collaboration contributes to a larger work by invoking the unique skills and knowledge of all involved (Dailey & Mork, 2017). Collaborative activities in schools take teachers and students as the main body, such as cross-grade collaboration and interdisciplinary collaboration between teachers; or students spontaneously exchange and share activities under the guidance of teachers (Cheng & Wu, 2020). In this context, the collaboration between teachers is generally manifested as setting common goals for students and guiding students' collaborative behavior, which can enhance students' sense of cooperation and establish a harmonious relationship (Bai, 2008). According to Dailey and Mork’s (2017) research, interdisciplinary arts program should encourage collaboration between art and other academic field, which can support research, scholarship, and service, and even improve interdisciplinary productivity.

From the above review, it is apparent that each member of the collaboration is a specific contributor; even though not all contributions are the same, it is meaningful to the results achieved (Netzer & Brady, 2009). However, research that connects with the above kinds of collaboration is not widespread in arts.

Research and Methodology

Design

To gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the practices employed by the Dean of the College of Fine Arts in China, a qualitative case study approach and thematic analysis methods for analyzing qualitative data will be utilized to address the problem effectively. Thematic analysis, as elucidated by Braun & Clarke (2006), Thematic analysis is a process that identifies, examines, and interprets patterns or "themes" within a dataset. It offers a systematic and flexible method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes within the data. Furthermore, when combined with the case study approach, thematic analysis enhances the depth of insights, providing a richer understanding of the Dean's leadership employed to infuse creative collaboration into the organizational culture and the effect of this collaborative culture on teachers’ work.

Selection and Study Site

According to the emphasis of qualitative inquiry for in-depth study, the participants for this study were selected through purposeful sampling. Purposeful sampling focuses on attributes of individuals or situations that are of interest to the researcher and serve the purpose of the study (Palinkas et al., 2015). In this study, purposeful sampling was employed to select key informants based on the following criteria: (1) The study targets public College of Fine Arts in Henan, China that have success implemented creative collaboration programs within the context of aesthetic education reform. (2) The study aims to gather experiential data from individuals at various levels, including 1 dean (who has served for a period of more than 3 years, 1 vice-dean, and 8 teachers (who
have actively participated in the creative collaboration programs). Table 1 provides detailed demographic information of each participant of this College of Fine Arts.

### Table 1: Participants’ demographic information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Post</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Professional Title</th>
<th>Year of Employed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>P1</td>
<td>Dean</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>55-60</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>31 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P2</td>
<td>Vice Dean</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>18 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P3</td>
<td>Innovation Art</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>3 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Studio Head</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P4</td>
<td>Painting TRG Head</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P5</td>
<td>Art Theory Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>50-55</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>20 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P6</td>
<td>Sculpture Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>9 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P7</td>
<td>Art Education</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40-50</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>16 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P8</td>
<td>Animation Teacher</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>8 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P9</td>
<td>Visual Communication</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40-45</td>
<td>Associate Professor</td>
<td>19 Years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Art Teacher</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P10</td>
<td>Comprehensive Arts Teacher</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35-40</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>11 Years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Instrumentation and Data Collection

This study will employ a multi-modal approach to data collection that incorporates interviews, observation, and relevant document examination (teaching and research group report). This triangulation of data sources, as described by Yin (2009), allows for the corroboration of findings across different methods, enhancing the reliability and validity of the study. Interviews for this study will be approximately 45-60 minutes, conducted one-on-one and face-to-face, and will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim into field texts for analysis.

### Ethical Consideration

Permission for the survey and on-campus interviews was granted by the respective administrators, ensuring appropriate consent was in place. Further ensuring ethical conduct, the participation of the dean, vice-dean, and teacher respondents was voluntary, confirmed through signed informed consent before the commencement of the interviews (Emanuel et al., 2000). Participants are assured by researchers that information shared for research purposes will be treated with maximum objectivity.

### Mode of Analysis

In this study, the content collected by recording is a transcription into field text, and the narrative content is placed in the horizontal and vertical tables. All observational details will be systematically recorded using the observation protocol form. These tables can help researchers classify the data to ensure the quality of the content (Laguilles-Villafuerte & De Guzman, 2020a). It contributes to the simplification of data (Laguilles-Villafuerte & De Guzman, 2020b). Through thematic analysis, using a repertory grid for field text, filter out important sentences, and form a meaningful whole called the theme. Finally, the topic is given back to each participant and verified through correspondence and member-checking techniques to ensure the objectivity and accuracy of the collected data evaluation (De Guzman & Arceo, 2019).

### The study

In College N, the creative collaboration program implementation is based on the Teaching and Research Groups (TRG) and innovation art studio. TRGs are primarily tasked with two roles: enhancing the professional growth of educators and elevating the quality of classroom instruction. Within the college of fine arts, TRGs are generally structured based on specific disciplines or areas of expertise, meaning each major has its corresponding TRG. However, to adapt to aesthetic education reform's progression and promote interdisciplinary collaboration, the dean undertakes a comprehensive restructuring of the TRGs. Under this new model, the teachers of each TRG are not only confined to one academic discipline or specialization but are comprised of teachers from diverse fields, such as education, art theory, computer science, or other art-relevant disciplines. This interdisciplinary personnel structure has greatly facilitated the collaboration chance of both research and teaching of the teachers.

The TRGs of College N have not only adjusted in personnel structure but have also reflected creative collaboration in teachers’ work. Each course of TRG has a lead teacher who will clarify the directions and content of the collaboration based on the course objectives; other teachers from different specializations and disciplines collaborate with the lead teacher, co-designing a course to explore how
to integrate aesthetics, creative thinking, moral, and humanistic qualities into the courses. TRGs are also responsible for revising talent development plans, preliminary plans and discussions of talent development plans related to aesthetic education reform usually begin within TRGs. Then, the dean and vice dean, among other multi-level leaders, participate in the approval and provide suggestions. Moreover, at critical decision-making points, the college will invite external experts for consultation to ensure the comprehensiveness and feasibility of the plans. Furthermore, TRGs' teachers share specialized teaching methods and teaching resources.

Innovation art studios are platforms for the implementation of creative collaboration. The innovation art studio is equipped with corresponding specialized equipment and invites experts from various domains to collaborate with teachers in teaching, practices, or lectures. The management and coordination related to the course teaching practice of innovation art studios are planned and executed in the collective discussions of the TRG. This structure enables the studio to be an efficient platform while providing strong support for enhancing teaching research and societal impact.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

This section reports the study’s major findings and answers two main questions:

1. What competencies do school leaders employ to infuse creative collaboration into the organizational culture?
2. How does this creative collaboration affect teachers’ work?

Leadership

In an in-depth study of College N, a synergistic leadership model was revealed that dean employ to infuse creative collaboration into the organizational culture. This model integrates characteristics of paternalistic leadership and transformational leadership.

Clear and Decisive, Collaboration-Oriented Organizational Decision-Making and Guidance Mechanisms

Firstly, dean play a pivotal role as mediators and guides in the decision-making process, providing a clear policy environment and strategic direction for collaborative activities. He disseminates decisions concerning aesthetic education reforms in a top-down manner through collective meetings, emphasizing the imperatives of aesthetic education and creative collaboration. This ensures that organizational goals align with higher-level strategic directives. As shared by the respondent teachers:

"The dean asked us to collaborate, emphasizing it’s a policy requirement. However, during meetings, the dean invites suggestions on the form and manner of collaboration. He especially underscores our regional conditions and resource constraints.” (P7)

Secondly, the dean is not just a key architects of the institutional instruction of collaboration but also driver of aesthetic education reforms. He regards talent cultivation as a fundamental component of the college's long-term development. Periodic consultation and discussion decision-making with heads of TRGs ensures that the actions of administrative and leadership are aligned. As verbalized:

"Work isn’t just about assigning tasks. Leadership also needs to follow up, which is crucial.” (P2)

Thirdly, the dean exhibits high levels of authority and independent thinking on the policy. He is adept at interpreting and implementing policies and exhibits exceptional insights into designing and promoting creative collaboration models. Especially upon receiving guidelines on aesthetic education from higher authorities, dean conducts in-depth analyses tailored to the college's actual conditions and available resources, subsequently outlining comprehensive collaboration goals, norms, and models. These responsible and highly professional behaviors provide faculty with a clear and actionable collaboration way. As shared:

"We have specifically formulated an aesthetic education action plan, clearly defining the behavioral norms for teachers and staff.” (P1)

In organizational behavior management, the dean emphasizes "collective honor" to foster team cohesion and a sense of collective responsibility. Such as the college established a clear and standardized incentive mechanism and performance evaluation system, linking individual development to the college goals to encourage proactive teacher collaboration.

Lastly, in the implementation phase of collaboration-oriented decisions, dean demonstrate a high level of commitment to institutional development goals, collective participation pathways, and team planning. He encourages effective interdisciplinary cooperation among faculty through precise task allocations and guidance mechanisms. In addressing issues such as unequal resource distribution or internal inequities, he employs quick and decisive measures to ensure fairness in resource allocation to maintain organizational stability and the efficiency of collective collaboration. As expressed by respondent dean:

"For our innovation art studios and the revision of our talent cultivation plans, whenever these resources and content constructions involve certain teaching and research groups, those groups take the lead.” (P2)

"When a task is notified by the school, my first step is to determine which teaching and research group the task belongs to.” (P1)

People-Centric Mindset: Fostering Open and Honest Communication, Creating a Trusting Environment
During interviews, dean consistently exhibited concern for the welfare of both teachers and students, encouraging open and sincere expression of opinions and feelings. He views the college as a large family and maintain an open attitude toward the needs of teachers. When teachers share their viewpoints and experience anxiety, dean demonstrate considerable patience and openness. He indicates that teachers are more likely to develop a sense of belonging and actively engage in collaborative activities within an inclusive environment. As verbalized by respondents:

“Not only do I manage the affairs of the college, but I am also a teacher and an artist; I understand the needs and feelings of the teachers.” (P1)

“Teachers need the care and trust from the leadership, so that they can feel a warmth like home within the academy, sense the genuine concern, and only then can they actively collaborate with others and develop trust towards them.” (P2)

Significantly, the dean has an open stance toward diverse viewpoints and aim to foster a healthier and more productive collaborative environment by enhancing transparency in teamwork. Particularly when teachers express divergent opinions about curriculum revisions or collaborative projects. The dean patiently elaborates on the objectives and merits of the team endeavor to allay teachers' concerns. This approach increases the sense of security at both the individual and team levels, as teachers know their choices will be respected. As shared below:

“Sometimes, my subordinates have opposed some of my decisions, but I didn't mind and didn't refute.” (P1)

“As a leader, when he coordinates, he tells teachers that the purpose of aesthetic education reform encompasses three major aspects: knowledge, quality, and skills. This is a comprehensive perspective.” (P2)

Additionally, the dean exhibits a high inclusiveness toward complex issues and conflicts within the team. The dean indicated that he is well aware of the diverse personalities of teachers. He considers potential problems teachers might encounter during collaborations and actively facilitates cooperation among teachers with shared objectives, seeking mutually beneficial solutions. Such a caring approach aims to enhance teachers' professional satisfaction and promote internal harmony within the organization.

During the interviews, dean indicated that he actively applied, planned, and implemented creative collaboration projects within the college. Leaders and administrators are concerned with the operation of innovation labs and actively coordinate resources required by the faculty. They recognize the ethical dilemmas and pressures teachers may face in research and teaching and support them by encouraging faculty to find a balance between these two aspects or supporting them in choosing paths aligned with their professional capabilities. This not only reflects the leadership's attention to faculty needs in research and teaching but also displays his concern for long-term career planning and well-being of the faculty.

**Maintenance and Practice of Integrity and Responsibility**

**Pursuit of Fairness and Responsibility.** Dean endeavors to positively influence teacher collaboration through his actions in upholding and practicing fairness and responsibility. The research reveals that the dean regards responsibility as a "moral contract." On numerous occasions, particularly during college meetings, he emphasized the college's educational responsibility towards students and underscored this responsibility as the foundation for ensuring educational quality and building the organization's reputation. This perspective reveals that, in the eyes of the dean, teachers are not merely implementers of educational activities but also play a role in forming profound connections with students, driven by ethics and a sense of responsibility. As articulated in the following statements:

“When formulating the school's system... we need to consider fostering student innovation, the actual situation of the college, teacher resources, and other practical situations.” (P1)

“For courses with strong practicality, we have already connected with the social industry for pre-job alignment. This alignment not only concerns artistic skills but also professional ethics, professional morality, and professional standards.” (P2)

The dean not only emphasize responsibility through words but also actualize this concept through collective actions with teachers—such as working overtime together and collaboratively solving problems. The dean exhibits a high sense of responsibility, particularly in work relationships and task allocations. He aims to promote harmony within the academic environment. As shared by the respondent:

“Material abundance is also essential, such as teachers being able to receive rewards from competitions.” (P1)

“As a leader, he adheres to such a general direction, trying to make work assignments reasonable.” (P2)

Dean further display a strong sense of duty towards continuous improvement and adaptability to policy changes, reflected in ongoing attention to the college’s long-term sustainability. For example, he fulfills his commitment to educational improvement and sustained development by integrating aesthetic resources to create a conducive environment for creative collaboration among teachers and making timely adjustments in resource allocation. As articulated:

“Our resources and funds are actually very limited, our local economy is not good, and the funding of public schools is limited. When we just started preparing for various art studios and institutes, we lacked many pieces of equipment... When applying for large
equipment or spaces, we need to clearly set expected goals, anticipate the outcomes using these devices, and check whether they fit the actual teaching conditions of our college.” (P1)

Adhering to Fundamental Moral Principles. Dean expressed that excellent educational leaders should possess commendable moral cultivation and elevate team members' overall quality through ethical behavior. He emphasized aesthetic education's paramount importance in enhancing cultural literacy and moral standards. Specifically, he believes that aesthetic education broadens the depth and breadth of education and serves as the vehicle for moral values in interactions with teachers and students. Dean maintains a clear stance among the teaching staff, opposing any form of conflict of interest. This stance demonstrates his high regard for moral cultivation and is closely tied to his recognition of aesthetic education. He believes that the teaching and dissemination of aesthetic education can be realized only in a fair and ethical environment. For issues that arise in the teaching process, dean also adheres to an attitude of moral and humanistic care. Instead of taking punitive measures, he finds solutions jointly with teachers through patient communication and active listening. This approach is not only a reflection of his moral cultivation but also further strengthens the trust teachers have in the college and its leadership.

Researchers also found that the high moral standard exhibited by dean during interactions is not a sporadic phenomenon but is deeply influenced by Chinese traditional culture, especially Confucianism. For instance, dean have repeatedly pointed out in conversations that moral cultivation provides a common ethical and moral foundation for the college and becomes an important driving force pushing the college toward its shared goals. As shared by the respondent dean:

“Our college places great importance on teachers' morality”. (P2)

“I believe that leaders who always remember others' mistakes lack moral integrity.” (P1)

By continuously elevating his own moral cultivation and integrating moral values into aesthetic education reforms and curriculum planning, the dean aims to enhance the overall quality of each member within the organization in terms of morality and professionalism. He unanimously believes that this is the key to the long-term development of the college. As verbalized:

“Leaders should lead by virtue and view everyone with benevolence, creating a harmonious coexistence atmosphere for the college.” (P2)

This series of actions and beliefs showcases the dean profound understanding and enduring commitment in morality and integrity.

Creating resources supporting and common goals to ignite teachers' passion for collaborative engagement.

Conveying a vision consistent with organizational goals and the benefits of teachers. The dean exhibits strong foresight and vision, having clear objectives and long-term strategic plans for the future. These clear objectives and plans focus on igniting creative collaboration among teachers, such as diverse development models in innovation art studios. These goals and strategic plans form the foundational drive for overall development. As shared:

“I also want to cultivate our young teachers into key subject teachers.” (P1)

Fostering enthusiasm for knowledge sharing among teachers. In promoting a culture of collaboration, dean place significant emphasis on the openness of information. Besides encouraging teachers to engage in profound discussions with experts invited by the college, he also highlights the multiple values of collaboration itself. Such strategies aim to foster an environment where teachers can more freely exchange knowledge and gradually cultivate collective practical wisdom. The dean aims to pave the way for teachers' professional growth and knowledge sharing within the organization. As expressed by respondent dean:

“Our college has always encouraged teachers to collaboration, share unreservedly, and share resources.” (P1)

“We always encourage teachers to give more feedback.” (P2)

In the modern educational environment, the quality and enthusiasm of teachers' work are significantly influenced by their sense of identity and value. The dean offers affirmation and support to teachers in their innovative capabilities, professional abilities, and problem-solving skills. This attention seeks to reinforce teachers' self-efficacy. He also commends teachers for these abilities, aiming to elevate teachers' sense of identity and value, thereby promoting mutual progress of teachers and the organization on the path of continuous development. As verbalized by respondents:

"Some of our teachers with rich social practice experience have always had the perseverance to persist in teaching innovation.” (P1)

“Our innovation art studio has received provincial-level honor awards. Our dean highly appreciates the achievements made by the studio team.” (P2)

Providing support in resource allocation and personal development. The leadership activities of the dean also display a high degree of creativity and flexibility. This is reflected in supporting teachers' autonomy in teaching and providing multilayered resource support for interdisciplinary cooperation among teachers, including financial and subsequent resource guarantees. Apart from structural support, like physical infrastructure and resource allocation, dean greatly emphasize teachers' personal and career
development. He is acutely aware of the limited resources within the college. As such, he promotes interdisciplinary training programs to encourage and support teachers' continuous growth and professional development. As shared below:

“We have some dedicated project funds in our school, which are invested in innovative teaching.” (P2)

We purchased a new batch of computers for teachers and students, and set up a new computer lab. Our computers are the latest updated ones... These are the supports from our college for talent innovation training and educational reform. (P1)

Encouraging continuous learning and personal growth with artistic thinking. The research further reveals that dean incorporate artistic and innovative thinking styles in his leadership. This characteristic not only manifests in the comprehensive management strategies and incentive mechanisms he adopts but is also directly reflected in how he embeds artistic creative thinking into the organization's and individual teachers' continuous growth.

Dean’s perspective on educational work goes beyond the traditional realm of teaching. He commonly expresses that education is a process of cultivating comprehensive abilities, aiming to holistically enhance the knowledge level, cultural literacy, and skills of all participants, including themselves, teachers, and students. Hence, the dean highly values and pays attention to emerging trends of the times, especially focusing on applying artistic and creative thinking in exploring interdisciplinary educational methods. More notably, dean generally pays attention to teachers' professional characteristics and strengths, offering career suggestions that align with teachers' professional traits. He encourages teachers to examine their teaching practices from multiple and innovative perspectives and stresses the importance of seeking new, diversified teaching methods and tools, encouraging teachers to explore more possibilities for professional growth. As articulated in the following statements:

“A leader's behavior is related to personal cultivation. I am the dean, and at the same time, an artist... We need to understand some modern new concepts...When I take on leadership roles, it's like I'm creating a work. In this creative process, when I want to break through, I look for innovative points.” (P1)

Impact of creative collaboration on teachers

Enhancement in teaching quality and professional growth

Creative collaboration has substantially advanced the curricular system's broadening and improving teaching structures. Influenced by diverse perspectives, teachers no longer solely focus their instruction on the technical guidance of the art domain. Instead, they have further expanded to encompass education in cultural literacy, moral values, and aesthetic appreciation. This not only enriches the teaching content but also realizes an overall enhancement in teaching quality. as articulated in the following statements:

“We have three interdisciplinary teachers, and their expression of aesthetics varies. One more teacher from a different discipline means one more artistic possibility; or it can be said to enrich students' aesthetic perception.” (P10)

Concurrently, Creative collaboration expands teachers' professional skills and knowledge and offers them a platform to break through their cognitive boundaries, pushing them to overcome self-imposed limitations to explore teaching skills related to other disciplines and embrace cognitive diversity. This exchange and sharing process fosters content, logic, and structure coherence. As articulated:

“I've learned how others teach this course and how they guide students, and the process has become clearer.” (P9)

Furthermore, creative collaboration helped teachers cultivate a mindset of normalized collaboration. They actively pursue integration in course design and implementation, making diverse teaching scenarios an indispensable component of instruction. As expressed by respondent teachers:

“In the process of cultivating students' creativity, we will use cooperative discussions or collaborative research to help students plan group activities.” (P7)

Teachers' professional ethics and sense of responsibility have been enhanced.

Under the environment of creative collaboration, teachers’ values have undergone complex and meaningful transformations. Research confirms that teachers' professional ethics, educational mission, and sense of responsibility have been notably reinforced. Within an interdisciplinary environment, teachers have an intensified realization of their responsibilities in ensuring teaching quality, accuracy, and emotional support for students. Moreover, they perceive themselves as integral team members, become proactive and conscious in pursuing personal growth, and share responsibilities collaboratively. This responsibility and self-improvement consciousness has gradually been internalized as self-motivation, providing sustained collaborative driving force for the collaboration team. As shared below:

“If students enter society and find that what their teachers taught them is not comprehensive or unprofessional, this is not allowed from our teachers' professional ethics and cultivation.” (P9)

“I am an associate professor and the person in charge. I influence other teachers through my professional expertise, encouraging them to assist.” (P3)
Creative collaboration has helped teachers discover their value, significance, and sense of belonging within the educational systems. This increase in professional dignity directly transformed their working attitudes, urging them to make more significant efforts and contributions to their professional growth.

Collaboration based on trust and respect has become a shared value.

The research found that mutual trust and respect among teachers enhance pedagogical practices' efficiency and reduce collaboration's complexities and challenges. When faced with differences or challenges in the collaborative process, teachers typically lean towards solutions based on respect and harmony, minimizing potential conflicts and strengthening team cohesion and shared responsibility. It's worth further emphasizing that these trust-based positive collaborative values make teachers increasingly focus on aiding each other in professional knowledge. As articulated in the following statements:

“Our teachers actively reach out to experts in the arts, maintain sincere communication, and even stay in touch in daily life, fostering this relationship.” (P7)

It's worth noting that when teachers face challenges, sincere collaboration affects the quality of communication between teachers, alleviats work pressure, and markedly improves teaching quality and student satisfaction. As verbalized:

“I would attend other teachers’ classes to learn. I learned from their good teaching philosophies by listening and observing their teaching methods. In this process, we teachers would discuss. When I reach a consensus with some teachers on aesthetic awareness, aesthetic practice, or understanding of personal qualities, it actually enhances our relationship and promotes further communication or collaboration.” (P10)

Reaching a consensus on aesthetic education.

Creative collaboration is also remarkably influential in propelling teachers to acknowledge and practice aesthetic education comprehensively. Teachers increasingly align with the objectives of aesthetic education and are willing to implement them in their teaching practices. Particularly in fostering students' humanities and aesthetic qualities, teachers are inclined to encompass a broader range of interdisciplinary themes and knowledge. Of greater significance, this shift in values has morphed into a collective resonance in team collaboration, it has encouraged proactive collaborations between teachers and other experts or higher education institutions, enriching teaching content. As verbalized:

I have spoken many times both online class and face-to-face class about cultivating students' humanities and aesthetic knowledge and themes, spreading the role and objectives of aesthetic education. (P9)

Mutual Encouragement and Emotional Communication Based on Harmonious Relationships.

Establishing a harmonious, open, mutually supportive, and emotionally connected collaborative culture is key to enhancing the quality of teacher work structure and interpersonal relationships. Such a collaborative environment not only fosters professional assistance and active sharing of teaching resources among teachers but also deepens their interpersonal relationships. As shared by the respondent teachers:

“Sometimes, some teachers might have taught and gained experience from a certain course. When interacting with students, they might encounter more practical problems and would then turn back to discuss with everyone.” (P5)

In addition, harmony serves to enhance mutual understanding within the teacher team. The study indicates that harmonious relationships transform into emotional communication and mutual encouragement among teachers, providing them with an emotionally and psychologically safe space in the workplace. This space fosters a working atmosphere of mutual assistance and support and promotes the establishment of higher levels of trust and collaborative relationships. As shared:

“When I tried to integrate interdisciplinary knowledge into the curriculum and encountered parts I didn't understand, I would call the relevant subject teachers, especially professors and key teachers. They would encourage my questions and were very patient.” (P10)

Collaborative culture fundamentally transforms the attitudes and motivations of teachers towards work, making them more inclined to share professional experiences and resources.

Discussions

Clear and Decisive, Collaboration-Oriented Organizational Decision-Making and Guidance Mechanisms

This study sheds light on the prominent role of authoritarianism in shaping structural conditions of the collaborative culture of college dean in China. In this study, the dean plays a critical leading role in decision-making, he uses authority to ensure consistency between organizational objectives and strategic directions. The dean provided teachers with a guide for creative collaboration by delineating clear aesthetic education policy and collaborative goals. previous research underscores that while authoritarianism can bolster stability and efficiency—particularly within certain cultural or industry landscapes—it's imperative to find the right balance between providing resolute guidance and fostering an environment conducive to autonomy and creativity (Bass & Bass, 2008). Specifically,
in this study, it's evident that the dean's approach is not a simple dictation of mandates. By elucidating the policy backdrop and underscoring the importance of teamwork, he champions more effective implementation and oversight, especially when he seeks staff input on collaborative strategies during meetings. This leadership competency is reflective of Confucian principles, where authority is not only a demonstration of power but also encompasses a profound concern for collective interests (Tu, 1985). As Somech (2006) proposed in the research, appropriate Authoritarianism could establish and harness stability to achieve organizational performance goals.

Leadership behavior isn't static but is significantly influenced by stakeholders' perceived and expressed expectations (Tsui, 1984; Tsui & Ohlott, 1988). As organizational domains become increasingly more complex, leaders require greater cognitive complexity at their level (Hooijberg et al., 1997; Jacobs & Jaques, 1987; Lewis & Jacobs, 1992). Reinforcing the hierarchy can help delineate roles, thus enhancing the effectiveness of team interactions (Yang et al., 2011). This research mirrors these findings, showing how, through structured divisions like TRGs, dean synchronize leadership actions with administrative strategies. Confronted with internal challenges—like the conundrum of equitable resource allocation—the dean and TRG heads exhibit fast response, making decisive decisions to restore organizational equilibrium. His strategy pivots on fair and rational, ensuring the sustainability of collaborations. Essentially, this is not a mere assertion of power but instilling collective values and a sense of responsibility to achieve collective goals. Viewed through the lens of Confucian values, the dean embodies the notion that authoritarianism can be an instrumental leadership tactic, especially in the dynamic landscape of aesthetic education reforms in Chinese college. This is particularly salient in scenarios demanding lucid direction and swift decision-making.

**People-Centric Mindset: Fostering Open and Honest Communication, Creating a Trusting Environment.**

The role of benevolent leadership in fostering a positive organizational environment has garnered significant attention. Wu et al. (2012) in their study highlighted that benevolent leaders contribute to increased job satisfaction, commitment, and trust among subordinates, which can foster a positive organizational environment. Entrenched in the Confucian virtue of benevolence, for a leader, this virtue emphasizes leaders' obligation to show kindness, care, and concern toward their subordinates. Delving into this research, it's evident that leaders interweave Confucian benevolence behavior into his management approach. The dean expresses a high level of inclusive mindset towards diverse opinions and choices. Notably, the benevolent traits of the dean are not just limited to day-to-day interactions with teachers but also extend to the broader organizational spectrum. Specifically, dean is not just concerned about the short-term success of a project or organization. He emphasizes individual teachers' long-term well-being and professional development, thereby shaping a sustainable and mutually beneficial cooperative culture.

This benevolence is further exemplified as dean zealously advocates for transparent, heartfelt communication, creating an ambiance of mutual trust and wholeheartedly investing in the well-being of both teachers and students. As Pellegrini and Scandura (2008) mentioned, such leadership behavior promotes mutual trust among team members. Employees who feel safe are more likely to share ideas, voice opinions, and engage in constructive conflict, all of which are essential for creativity and collaboration (Edmondson, 1999; Nembhard & Edmondson, 2006).

Moreover, benevolent leaders are directly linked to improved job satisfaction, increased commitment to the institution, and a heightened level of trust in leadership (Wu et al., 2012), which, in turn, can positively impact teachers' willingness to collaborate and contribute to the creative process (Hakanen et al., 2006).

Such positive influence is palpably evident within college. Empirical study reveals dean's benevolence helps reduce internal team friction and conflicts, enhancing the team's innovative problem-solving abilities. More so, the dean' benevolent leadership enhances educators' professional contentment and promotes internal harmony within the organization. Even helps teachers with differing viewpoints find a creative collaboration equilibrium point.

**Maintenance and Practice of Integrity and Responsibility.**

In contemporary leadership theories, leader morality and integrity refer to moral leadership in which leaders' ethical and selfless conduct and commitment to leading by personal example (Treviño et al., 2000). It emphasizes transparency, fairness, and responsibility and promotes open communication and cooperation among team members, thus fostering a collaborative culture (Dirks & Ferrin, 2002). This study reveals dean' adherence to and practice of the principles of integrity and responsibility, in particular, illuminates his endeavor in moral cultivation to foster a collaborative culture.

Previous research suggests that moral leadership can enhance trust, which subsequently fosters open communication and cooperation among teachers (Treviño et al., 2003) and gain the trust and respect of his followers. This commitment to moral tenets is pivotal in shaping organizational culture and enhancing performance, emphasizing ethical conduct and virtuous leadership (Brown & Treviño, 2006; Mayer et al., 2012). In the context of educational leadership, moral leadership can shape the ethical climate of the institution, influencing teachers' attitudes and behaviors toward collaboration (Starratt, 2004). This research reveals that the dean perceives responsibility as a social and moral contract; he elevates employees' sense of moral duty and bolster their commitment to the organization through practical actions, such as ensuring equitable task distribution and supporting problem-solving.

Within Confucian philosophy, there’s an intrinsic alignment between the pursuit of beauty, individual morality, and societal responsibility. “Beauty” in Confucian philosophy embodies a facet of moral cultivation. This study further demonstrates dean’
influence by Confucian moral philosophy, emphasizing aesthetic education is a pivotal instrument for promoting moral values and social responsibilities and elevating teachers' moral qualities. Furthermore, Confucian values posit “virtue” as a continuous behavior, advocating achieving higher moral standards via relentless moral study and self-refinement (Ivanhoe, 2002). This study corroborates that dean integrate moral considerations into administrative decisions. He encourages himself and his employees to attain higher moral and professional levels through continuous moral study and the advancement of personal moral cultivation.

From this study, the dimension of morality and integrity in moral leadership that dean demonstrates is rooted in Confucian values.

Creating resources supporting and common goals to ignite teachers' passion for collaborative engagement.

This study revealed transformative leadership employed by dean to cultivate a collaborative culture at the college of fine arts in China. This finding introduces a novel understanding of leadership skills specific to the Chinese aesthetic education reform context.

Burns posited that transformational leadership reshapes followers' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors into higher-level motivations for even higher levels of achievement and performance (Hauserman & Stick, 2013; Wang & Fu, 2023). Effective organizations require transformational leaders to understand their culture and revise shared norms, assumptions, and values to build strategy culture alliances for their organization and followers (Bass & Avolio, 1993). The findings of this research indicate that through foresight and a clear vision, dean have successfully delineated and conveyed goals consistent with the interests of both the organization and the teachers. This alignment has been instrumental in fostering innovation and deepening collaboration among teachers. Transformational leadership creates value by changing the culture within a social system organization (Greimela et al., 2023). Rather than being mired in ephemeral goals, the dean exhibits an aptitude for forward-thinking on creative collaboration strategic endeavors.

Moreover, a key insight from the study is dean have essentially fostered an open, shared, and diverse academic environment for teachers by highlighting the significance of open information in fostering collective intelligence and encouraging in-depth dialogues between teachers and experts. This environment fortifies educators' professional growth and fuels their zeal for knowledge-sharing, effectively prompting collective intelligence.

Transformational leaders create these processes by identifying and maximizing an existing need or demand of a potential follower, building school culture, and making professional educators experience a sense of empowerment (Hauserman & Stick, 2013). The competencies employed by dean to bolster teachers' self-efficacy through personalized support and acknowledgment. Specifically, dean positively received feedback from teachers regarding innovation, expertise, and problem-solving capabilities. He provides multifaceted resources in response, strengthening the educators' professional identities and underscoring their integral value to the college.

The study also identifies the way dean infuse transformational thinking into his leadership approaches. He employs artistic thinking to encourage continuous learning and personal growth among the organizational teachers. This trait is manifested on the one hand through his pronounced focus on embracing broader educational paradigms, fostering interdisciplinary engagements inside and outside the college, and introducing innovative perspectives in his management tactics, and on the other, by using artistic innovation thinking as a pivotal tool to navigate complex organizational challenges. Such traits highlight the dean’s commitment to enhancing teachers’ interest in, and awareness of creative collaboration teaching and practice, intellectual stimulation increasing his ability to think about interdisciplinary collaboration in new ways within the college.

Conclusions

In this study, the dean's leadership style discernably exhibited an integrated leadership approach. This model melds authoritarianism for unambiguous direction, benevolence and morality to cultivate trust and cohesion, and transformational qualities to enhance interdisciplinary collaboration. This confluence offers clear leadership that delineates the strategic competencies a college dean utilizes to embed creative collaboration within the organizational culture.

Authoritarianism ensures clarity in organizational objectives and norms for collaboration. This aligns with the Confucian value that authoritarianism entails a profound commitment to collective interests. Using authoritarianism to provide a clear direction for the organization and establish a standard basis for collaboration offers a collective developmental path for creative collaboration in aesthetic education reform. Moreover, the benevolence, morality, and integrity displayed by the dean foster a harmonious, stable, and mutually trusting environment within the organization. The inclusive attitude, sense of responsibility, and high reverence for morality manifested by the dean in their daily management elevate the teachers' teaching responsibility and professional moral values. This value system resonates with the Confucian philosophy of pursuing individual morality and societal responsibilities. Furthermore, the transformational leadership characteristics displayed by the dean infuse continuous creative collaboration within the college with vitality. Through a clear and visionary outlook, the dean ensures the alignment of shared interests between teachers and the organization. Moreover, he integrates artistic thinking into their daily management, encouraging open communication, innovative thinking, and continuous learning, further reinforcing the organization's innovative capabilities and collaborative consciousness.

A comprehensive investigation into the impact of creative collaboration on teachers' work offers researchers an all-encompassing perspective. The study vividly demonstrates the positive role of the collaborative culture in enhancing the quality of teaching practices, fostering the professional growth of teachers, and strengthening their collaborative abilities. Specifically, the
interdisciplinary collaboration encouraged within this collaborative culture promotes a diverse collaborative mode in teachers’ teaching practices and brings teachers’ awareness of the importance of creative collaboration. Additionally, the collaborative culture markedly improves teachers’ professional ethics and sense of responsibility, embedding trust and respect as shared values and central ethical principles for collaboration, leading to the wide acceptance and adoption of interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers. On the interpersonal level, harmonious and sincere relationships have become the bedrock for team collaboration. Teachers establish enduring and stable collaborative bonds through mutual encouragement and emotional exchanges.

In summary, while pushing for aesthetic education reform, the dean of college of fine arts exhibits an integrative and diverse leadership strategy. His approach goes beyond merely achieving aesthetic education goals and higher efficiency; he prioritizes collective interests, cultivation of values, and innovation incentives. This provides researchers with a new perspective in understanding the collaborative culture of college against the backdrop of China’s aesthetic education reform, showcasing how dean leverage effective leadership to foster a successful collaborative culture and achieve organizational objectives.

The initial theory hypothesis that the dean’s integrative leadership approach significantly fosters a positive collaboration culture was substantiated through the gathered data. This study especially noticed that integrative paternalistic leadership and transformational leadership could enhance and develop creative collaboration among teachers.

This research ventures to elucidate the dynamics between leadership style and organizational culture in the context of aesthetic educational reform, thereby contributing a nuanced understanding of how authoritarianism and transformational leadership can coexist and synergize to foster a healthy collaborative environment within an institution. The findings and theoretical frameworks may be extrapolated to other universities of those deans who are planning to promote creative collaboration, providing a versatile lens through which to examine leadership and collaboration in varied educational settings. However, the study has posed certain limitations. Firstly, potential bias in participant selection may limit the universality of the findings, warranting caution in extrapolating these results to wider contexts. Furthermore, considering the study’s geographical and cultural specificity, the findings may not directly transpose to different colleges or provinces, making generalizability a challenge. Future investigations might extend the scope by examining colleges of fine arts across diverse geographical locations, thereby offering a broader view of leadership and collaboration dynamics.

The findings may wield substantial implications for leadership within colleges of fine arts, suggesting that an integrative leadership approach, which combines authoritarianism, benevolent, morality, and transformation, can pave the way for fostering a collaborative culture that fosters creative collaboration among teachers. Therefore, leadership strategies that encourage leaders to integrate a blend of competencies could be paramount in promoting a cohesive creative collaboration environment.

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