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Assessing Local Government Engineers' Understanding of Legal and Regulatory Frameworks in Philippine Building and Permit Processes

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Abstract- ***The study assessed the level of legal and regulatory compliance in building- and permit-related procurement and project implementation among engineers and technical personnel in key offices of LGU Cabanatuan City, Philippines, using a descriptive quantitative design and a structured Likert-scale survey of 30 respondents. Results showed generally high compliance in knowledge of laws, internal controls, and procurement capability enhancement, but only moderate compliance in transparency, conflict of interest management, monitoring, and continuous improvement, indicating a predominantly procedural and inward-focused compliance culture. At the same time, challenges were found to be systemic and highly challenging in documentation quality, personnel workload, training, internal systems, feedback mechanisms, and conflict management, while support services and some aspects of process timeliness were rated as challenging, revealing substantial operational and integrity constraints that undermine effective implementation despite high legal awareness. Correlation analysis indicated only a few significant relationships between compliance dimensions and challenges specifically, internal controls with personnel workload, procurement capability enhancement with internal systems, conflict of interest management with training, and monitoring with process timelines suggesting that institutional arrangements and systems, rather than legal knowledge alone, are most closely linked to day-to-day difficulties. The study concludes that enhancing legal and regulatory compliance in LGU Cabanatuan City requires prioritizing improvements in digital and integrated systems, documentation management, staffing and workload balancing, structured and technically focused training, strengthened conflict-of-interest safeguards, and robust monitoring, feedback, and continuous-improvement mechanisms that translate audit and field insights into sustained process reforms.***

Keywords: Legal Compliance, Building Permit Processes, Local Government Unit, Transparency, Cabanatuan City

I. INTRODUCTION

Legal and regulatory compliance is essential in the Philippine building and permit system, directly impacting service delivery, infrastructure development, and transparency in local government operations. While Republic Act No. 9184 and its Revised Implementing Rules and Regulations (IRR) guide public procurement, local government engineers play a pivotal role in ensuring that building and permitting procedures adhere to complex legal frameworks. Recent changes in agency protocols, internal controls, and sectoral memo circulars highlight the increasing emphasis on compliance, documentation quality, and accountability within engineering divisions. Despite these strengthened regulations, persistent challenges like incomplete documentation, gaps in legal knowledge, and difficult audits continue to affect project timeliness and integrity.

Within the Local Government Unit (LGU) of Cabanatuan City, the Office of the City Building Official, City Engineering Office, City Planning Development Office and the City Environment & Natural Resources Office plays a critical role in ensuring that infrastructure projects and building permit processes are compliant with relevant legal frameworks and local ordinances. Procurement and project management activities in this office are directly tied to the city's mission of providing efficient public services and facilitating local development. However, engineering and procurement personnel continue to face enduring obstacles, including incomplete or inconsistent documentation, high workloads, and gaps in their understanding of procurement laws and internal policies. This study investigates the current understanding of local government engineers regarding these frameworks,

aiming to identify knowledge gaps and compliance issues affecting building and permit processes, as well as recommend strategies for improving legal reliability and service outcomes in local government engineering practice.

Specifically, this study sought answers to the following:

1. How may the legal compliance in building and permit–related procurement and project implementation in LGU Cabanatuan City be described in terms of:

1.1 Knowledge of Laws
1.2 Internal Controls
1.3 Transparency
1.4 Procurement Capability Enhancement
1.5 Conflict of Interest Management
1.6 Monitoring
1.7 Continuous Improvement

2. How may the challenges affecting legal compliance in building and permit–related procurement and project implementation be described in terms of:

2.1 Documentation Quality;
2.2 Personnel Workload;
2.3 Training;
2.4 Internal Systems;
2.5 Process Timeliness;
2.6 Feedback Mechanisms;
2.7 Support Services;
2.8 Conflict Management

3. Is there a significant relationship between the level of legal compliance and the challenges encountered in building and permit–related procurement and project implementation in LGU Cabanatuan City?

4. What recommendations may be proposed to enhance legal and regulatory compliance in building and permit processes in the concerned offices of LGU Cabanatuan City based on the results of the study?

II. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive quantitative research design to evaluate the level of legal and regulatory understanding, compliance practices, and challenges encountered by local government engineers and permitting staff in Cabanatuan City's building and permit processes. The research focused on the City Engineering Office, Office of the City Building Official, City Planning and Development Office, and City Environment and Natural Resources Office, units directly involved in infrastructure regulation and permitting

Population and Sampling

The target population comprised engineers, technical staff, building officials, and administrative personnel engaged in processing building permits and infrastructure projects within the LGU. When the eligible number of staff was 20 or fewer, total enumeration was utilized; otherwise, purposive sampling identified personnel who had active experience in building permit and project review activities during the last 12 months to ensure relevant and recent data.

Research Instrument

A structured, self-administered questionnaire served as the primary data collection tool. The survey was segmented to cover: Profile of respondents (office/position, years of experience, roles in permit processing). Knowledge of relevant national and local laws, ordinances, implementing rules, and internal procedures. Compliance practices covering documentation, transparency, and control mechanisms in permit processing and infrastructure projects. Perceived challenges, such as documentation quality, staffing workload, training access, system support, and audit responsiveness. Items in the questionnaire were rated using a 5-point Likert scale for both compliance (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree) and challenges (Not a Challenge to Highly Challenging). The instrument's validity was confirmed by subject matter expert review, and reliability was established using Cronbach's alpha, aiming for a coefficient of at least

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0.70. Necessary revisions were conducted for unclear or unreliable items.

The questionnaire's design is vetted by public procurement experts through review and is pilot-tested among 5–8 procurement staff outside the division for clarity and reliability. Validity is reinforced by expert review, and reliability is ensured with Cronbach's alpha analysis, seeking a coefficient of at least 0.70. Items failing reliability or clarity are revised or dropped.

Data Collection

Prior to survey deployment, written consent was obtained from management and coordination with participating offices. Questionnaires were distributed in both print and online formats, emphasizing anonymity and voluntary participation. Pilot testing with engineers or administrative staff outside Cabanatuan City ensured clarity and reliability before full rollout.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were applied to summarize respondent profiles and responses to compliance and challenge items. A composite Compliance Index interpreted overall legal and regulatory preparedness, with cross-tabulation and inferential tests (e.g., chi-square, t-test) used where assumptions were met to determine relationships between compliance levels and perceived challenges. Findings provided the basis for practical recommendations to improve compliance, knowledge, and process efficiency in the local building and permit system.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

.1. Legal Compliance in Building- and Permit-Related Procurement and Projects

Table 1 Knowledge of Laws

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
1. I am familiar with the key provisions of the National Building Code and its IRR.	3.87	Highly Compliant
2. I understand the relevant sections of RA 9184 and its IRR that affect building- and permit-related procurement and projects.	3.63	Highly Compliant
3. I am aware of local ordinances and resolutions in Cabanatuan City that govern building permits and related clearances.	3.73	Highly Compliant
4. I regularly update myself on new memoranda, circulars, or guidelines related to building, environmental, and safety regulations.	3.83	Highly Compliant
5. I can explain the basic legal and regulatory requirements of the permitting process to applicants or colleagues when needed.	3.63	Highly Compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.74	Highly Compliant

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Compliant; 2.50-3.25 – Moderately Compliant; 1.75-2.49 – Compliant; 1.00-1.74 – Non-Compliant

The overall weighted mean of 3.74 ("Highly Compliant") shows that, on average, personnel feel very confident in their understanding of core legal and regulatory frameworks governing building permits, construction standards, and procurement processes. This implies that the risk of non-compliance arising purely from ignorance of the law is low, and that the office is well-positioned to enforce requirements on safety, structural integrity, and due process in permitting, as mandated by PD 1096 and its IRR. It also aligns with RA 9184's requirement that procurement practitioners handling infrastructure projects understand the applicable procurement rules and technical regulations.

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The highest weighted mean is 3.87 for Item 1 (“I am familiar with the key provisions of the National Building Code and its IRR”), rated “Highly Compliant” This suggests that staff perceive themselves as particularly knowledgeable about the National Building Code, which governs design, siting, construction, occupancy, safety, sanitation, and permitting for public and private buildings. The implication is positive for regulatory enforcement: building officials and related personnel are likely able to apply minimum standards on structural safety, fire protection, sanitation, and occupancy requirements in their day-to-day work, reducing risks to life, property, and public welfare, as explicitly intended by PD 1096. Items 2 and 5 both have means of 3.63 (“Highly Compliant”): understanding RA 9184 sections that affect building- and permit-related procurement (Item 2), and the ability to explain basic legal/regulatory requirements to applicants or colleagues (Item 5). These results show that personnel recognize how procurement rules intersect with building-permit processes for government projects and feel capable of translating legal requirements into understandable guidance. The implication is that government infrastructure and building-related procurements are more likely to be compliant with RA 9184, and that frontliners can effectively manage client expectations, thereby reducing confusion and disputes.

Table 2 Internal Controls

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
1. Our office has clear written procedures for each step of the building permit and project review process.	3.3	Highly Compliant
2. Approval and signatory workflows are well-defined and consistently followed.	3.5	Highly Compliant
3. Checklists or control tools are used to verify compliance before a permit is issued or a project is implemented.	3.4	Highly Compliant
4. Non-compliance with internal procedures is documented and addressed by management.	3.47	Highly Compliant
5. Internal controls are periodically reviewed and improved based on audit findings or identified gaps.	3.47	Highly Compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.43	Highly Compliant

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Compliant; 2.50-3.25 – Moderately Compliant; 1.75-2.49 – Compliant; 1.00-1.74 – Non-Compliant

The overall weighted mean of 3.43 ("Highly Compliant") reflects that internal control mechanisms are institutionalized across the building-permit and project-review cycle, from documented procedures through approval, verification, documentation of non-compliance, and periodic improvement. This implies that the office has established systematic safeguards to ensure that permits and projects meet legal, technical, and safety standards before approval, reducing risks of errors, irregularities, or non-compliance with the National Building Code, local ordinances, and RA 9184 procurement rules.

The highest weighted mean is 3.50 for Item 2 ("Approval and signatory workflows are well-defined and consistently followed"), rated "Highly Compliant." This indicates that the routing, sequence, and responsibilities for approvals and sign-offs are clear and reliably executed, which is critical for ensuring that each permit or project undergoes proper technical review, legal vetting, and management authorization before proceeding. The implication is that accountability lines are visible, reducing the risk of unauthorized approvals or bypassed steps, and supporting audit trails that can withstand scrutiny by internal auditors, COA, or oversight agencies.

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The lowest mean, though still "Highly Compliant," is 3.30 for Item 1 ("Our office has clear written procedures for each step of the building permit and project review process"). This slightly lower rating compared with other items suggests that while procedures exist and are generally followed, there may be perceptions that documentation of these procedures is not as comprehensive, accessible, or consistently updated across all steps as it could be. The implication is that further standardization, documentation, and dissemination of step-by-step SOPs (e.g., flowcharts, desk manuals, online guides) would help new staff, ensure consistency across personnel and shifts, and provide a clear reference during audits or disputes. This is particularly important given the complexity of building-permit processing, which involves multiple documentary, technical, and legal checks under PD 1096, its IRR, and local ordinances.

Table 3 Transparency

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
1. Criteria for approving, deferring, or disapproving building permits are transparent and applied consistently.	3.27	Highly Compliant
Information about permit requirements and processes is clearly communicated to applicants and stakeholders.	2.83	Moderately Compliant
Records of permit applications, approvals, and denials are properly kept and can be retrieved when needed.	3.63	Highly Compliant
Complaints or inquiries related to building permits are logged, tracked, and resolved using a standard process.	2.97	Moderately Compliant
Decisions related to building permits and projects are free from undue political or personal influence.	3.23	Moderately Compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.19	Moderately Compliant

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Compliant; 2.50-3.25 – Moderately Compliant; 1.75-2.49 – Compliant; 1.00-1.74 – Non-Compliant

The overall weighted mean of 3.19 ("Moderately Compliant") shows that transparency mechanisms are functioning at an acceptable but not optimal level. This implies that minimum expectations for openness, information-sharing, and accountability are generally met, but not consistently or comprehensively enough to be rated "Highly Compliant." In the context of building permits and government projects, where decisions affect property rights, public safety, and taxpayer funds, moderate rather than high transparency can create risks of mistrust, delays, or allegations of favoritism, particularly when stakeholders perceive processes as unclear or decisions as discretionary.

The highest weighted mean is 3.63 for Item 3 ("Records of permit applications, approvals, and denials are properly kept and can be retrieved when needed"), rated "Highly Compliant." This indicates that documentation and records management for permit transactions are strong, which is critical for audit trails, legal defense of decisions, and stakeholder verification. The implication is that the office can reliably reconstruct permit histories, respond to inquiries or disputes, and demonstrate compliance with the National Building Code and local ordinances during audits or reviews. This strength in record-keeping provides a solid foundation upon which other transparency dimensions can be built.

Item 1 ("Criteria for approving, deferring, or disapproving building permits are transparent and applied consistently") has a mean of 3.27 ("Highly Compliant"), showing that decision-making standards are perceived as clear and fairly applied. This suggests that applicants and staff generally understand what is

required for permit approval under PD 1096, its IRR, and local ordinances, and that similar cases are treated similarly. The implication is that the office has established predictability and rule-based decision-making, which supports fairness and reduces opportunities for arbitrary or biased approvals or denials.

Item 2 (mean 2.83) "Information about permit requirements and processes is clearly communicated to applicants and stakeholders." This is the lowest-rated item, suggesting that while records and criteria may be sound internally, external communication—through signage, guides, websites, or frontline orientation—may not be consistently clear or accessible. The implication is that applicants may experience confusion, require repeated visits, or feel that information is not readily available, which can lead to delays, complaints, and perceptions of opacity or gatekeeping. Improving communication tools (e.g., online permit guides, step-by-step checklists, public FAQs, or citizen charters) would help align external transparency with the strong internal record-keeping
The pattern of high record-keeping and consistent criteria but weaker communication, grievance handling, and perceptions of independence suggests that the office has strong internal controls but less robust external-facing transparency. To move from "Moderately Compliant" to "Highly Compliant," management should prioritize: (1) improving clarity and accessibility of information to applicants and stakeholders through multiple channels; (2) formalizing and publicizing complaint and inquiry mechanisms with clear timelines and accountability; and (3) reinforcing measures to protect decision-making from undue influence, such as clear documentation of technical grounds for decisions and oversight by independent reviewers. Doing so would align the transparency profile with the already strong legal knowledge, internal controls, and record-keeping demonstrated in previous tables, thereby supporting the National Building Code's intent of ensuring public safety through accountable, predictable, and transparent regulatory processes.

Table 4 Procurement Capability Enhancement

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Our office provides or supports training on building regulations, procurement, and compliance.	3.4	Highly Compliant
I have received sufficient orientation on my specific responsibilities in the permit and project processes.	3.33	Highly Compliant
There are opportunities to attend seminars or workshops on new laws and technical standards.	3.67	Highly Compliant
Tools and systems used for managing permits and projects are updated or improved when needed.	3.17	Moderately Compliant
Management considers workload and staffing needs to maintain compliance with legal and regulatory requirements.	3.4	Highly Compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.39	Highly Compliant

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Compliant; 2.50-3.25 – Moderately Compliant; 1.75-2.49 – Compliant; 1.00-1.74 – Non-Compliant

The overall weighted mean of 3.39 ("Highly Compliant") reflects that capacity-building efforts are consistently implemented and valued, supporting staff readiness to enforce the National Building Code, apply RA 9184 procurement rules, and maintain updated knowledge of evolving technical standards and local ordinances. This high level of capability enhancement is important because effective regulation of building permits and project implementation requires ongoing learning, given the technical complexity of structural safety, fire protection, accessibility standards, and

procurement compliance. The implication is that the office has a culture of professional development that helps sustain high legal knowledge and internal control performance.

The highest weighted mean is 3.67 for Item 3 ("There are opportunities to attend seminars or workshops on new laws and technical standards"), rated "Highly Compliant." This shows that staff have access to external learning opportunities—whether through DILG, DPWH, GPPB, professional organizations, or other agencies—that keep them current on updates to building codes, environmental regulations, procurement guidelines, and related issuances. The implication is that the office actively facilitates continuous professional development, which directly supports the high "Knowledge of Laws" rating observed in Table 1 and helps prevent obsolescence of skills or reliance on outdated practices.

The lowest mean is 3.17 for Item 4 ("Tools and systems used for managing permits and projects are updated or improved when needed"), rated "Moderately Compliant." This is the only item that falls below the "Highly Compliant" threshold, suggesting that while training, staffing, and orientation are strong, the technological and systems infrastructure (e.g., permit-tracking software, digital filing, online application portals, updated templates) may not be upgraded as frequently or comprehensively as needed. The implication is that staff may rely on manual processes, outdated forms, or disconnected systems that slow processing, increase error risks, and limit the office's ability to fully leverage digital tools for efficiency, transparency, and real-time monitoring. This finding echoes the "Internal Systems" challenges identified in earlier procurement-focused tables, where outdated software and lack of integration were rated "Highly Challenging.

The pattern of high capability-enhancement scores especially in training, seminars, orientation, and workload management—demonstrates a strong commitment to human capital development that supports the high legal knowledge and internal control ratings observed in Tables 1 and 2. However, the relative weakness in tools and systems (Item 4) suggests a gap between well-trained people and enabling technology, which could limit the full potential of the office's capacity.

Table 5 Conflict of Interest Management

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Personnel involved in permit evaluation, inspection, or procurement disclose potential conflicts of interest.	3.13	Moderately Compliant
Individuals with conflicts of interest are prevented from participating in related decisions.	3.1	Moderately Compliant
Allegations of favoritism or collusion are formally investigated.	3.2	Moderately Compliant
Staff are oriented on ethical standards regarding gifts, favors, or benefits from applicants or contractors.	3.3	Highly Compliant
Violations of conflict-of-interest policies result in appropriate disciplinary measures.	2.7	Moderately Compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.09	Moderately Compliant

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Compliant; 2.50-3.25 – Moderately Compliant; 1.75-2.49 – Compliant; 1.00-1.74 – Non-Compliant

The overall weighted mean of 3.09 ("Moderately Compliant") shows that conflict-of-interest management is the weakest area among the compliance dimensions examined so far, indicating that systems for identifying, preventing, and addressing conflicts are not yet consistently or rigorously applied. In the context of building permits and government projects—where decisions involve substantial private interests, property values, and public funds—moderate rather than high compliance in this area creates risks of real or perceived

favoritism, corruption, or compromised technical judgment. This is particularly concerning given that the National Building Code and RA 9184 both emphasize accountability, transparency, and integrity in regulatory and procurement processes.

The highest weighted mean is 3.30 for Item 4 ("Staff are oriented on ethical standards regarding gifts, favors, or benefits from applicants or contractors"), rated "Highly Compliant." This indicates that ethics orientation and awareness-building on what constitutes inappropriate benefits or inducements are conducted with some regularity. The implication is positive: staff have been informed of ethical boundaries, which is a necessary first step in building an integrity culture. However, the fact that this is the only item reaching "Highly Compliant" while all others remain "Moderately Compliant" suggests that awareness has been established, but operationalizing that awareness into consistent disclosure, recusal, investigation, and enforcement remains weak.

The lowest mean is 2.70 for Item 5 ("Violations of conflict-of-interest policies result in appropriate disciplinary measures"), rated "Moderately Compliant" but near the lower bound. This is the most critical finding, indicating that enforcement of conflict-of-interest rules is weak or inconsistent. The implication is that even when violations are identified, they may not result in commensurate sanctions (e.g., reprimands, suspension, dismissal), which sends a signal that rules are negotiable or that consequences are minimal. This undermines the entire conflict-management system because without credible enforcement, disclosure, recusal, and investigation mechanisms lose their deterrent and corrective power, and staff may perceive that ethical violations carry little risk.

The pattern of only one "Highly Compliant" item (ethics orientation) and four "Moderately Compliant" items particularly the very low enforcement score indicates that conflict-of-interest management is a critical vulnerability in the office's compliance profile. This is especially concerning given the high stakes of building permits (public safety, property rights) and government projects (procurement integrity, public funds).

Table 6 Monitoring

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Regular internal or external audits review compliance in permits and related projects.	3.4	Highly Compliant
Findings from audits are acted upon promptly by management.	3.1	Moderately Compliant
Performance indicators or monitoring tools are used to track compliance.	3.03	Moderately Compliant
Staff can report lapses or irregularities without fear of reprisal.	3.13	Moderately Compliant
Audit and monitoring results are used to improve systems and procedures.	3.3	Moderately Compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.19	Moderately Compliant

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Compliant; 2.50-3.25 – Moderately Compliant; 1.75-2.49 – Compliant; 1.00-1.74 – Non-Compliant

The overall weighted mean of 3.19 ("Moderately Compliant") shows that monitoring functions meet basic expectations but fall short of the "Highly Compliant" standard achieved in other areas such as legal knowledge, internal controls, and capability enhancement. This implies that the office conducts audits and reviews, but the subsequent steps—management response, use of performance indicators, safe reporting channels, and application of findings to process improvement—are not yet robust or consistently applied. In the context of building permits and government projects, where monitoring is essential to verify compliance with the National Building Code, local ordinances, and RA 9184, moderate rather than high effectiveness in this area creates risks that non-compliance, inefficiencies, or irregularities may persist undetected or unresolved.

The highest weighted mean is 3.40 for Item 1 ("Regular internal or external audits review compliance in permits and related projects"), rated "Highly Compliant." This indicates that audit activities—whether by internal audit units, COA, or other oversight bodies—are conducted with reasonable frequency and coverage. The implication is positive: the office is subject to periodic review, which provides an external check on compliance with legal, technical, and procedural requirements and helps identify gaps or weaknesses in permit-processing and project-approval systems. This strength in audit frequency provides a foundation for accountability, though its value depends on how audit findings are used in subsequent steps.

The lowest mean is 3.03 for Item 3 ("Performance indicators or monitoring tools are used to track compliance"), rated "Moderately Compliant." This indicates that systematic, data-driven tracking of compliance (e.g., dashboards, KPIs, checklists, real-time monitoring systems) is limited or inconsistently applied. The implication is significant: without structured performance indicators, management may rely on anecdotal information or reactive problem-solving rather than proactive, evidence-based monitoring of permit-processing quality, timeliness, error rates, or compliance with National Building Code and RA 9184 requirements. This gap in systematic tracking limits early detection of emerging issues and makes it harder to assess whether interventions are working or whether compliance is improving over time.

The pattern of high audit frequency but weaker follow-through on findings, limited use of performance indicators, and a not-fully-safe reporting environment suggests that the office has the monitoring inputs (audits) but lacks the complementary systems for effective response and continuous improvement. This is a common challenge in public sector monitoring: audits identify problems, but without structured follow-up, staff empowerment, and data-driven tracking, the monitoring function does not achieve its full potential.

Table 7 Continuous Improvement

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Staff feedback is sought to improve building and permit processes.	2.93	Moderately Compliant
Lessons from past projects or audit findings are used to revise procedures. Staff feedback is sought to improve building and permit processes.	2.97	Moderately Compliant
Updates to guidelines and forms are communicated clearly to all concerned staff.	3.2	Moderately Compliant
Staff are encouraged to suggest innovations to enhance compliance and service delivery.	3.1	Moderately Compliant
Training content is updated when new laws or recurring errors are identified.	3.17	Moderately Compliant
Overall Weighted Mean	3.07	Moderately Compliant

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Compliant; 2.50-3.25 – Moderately Compliant; 1.75-2.49 – Compliant; 1.00-1.74 – Non-Compliant

The overall weighted mean of 3.07 ("Moderately Compliant") shows that continuous improvement efforts meet minimum expectations but fall short of the robust, proactive learning culture needed to sustain high compliance with the National Building Code, RA 9184, and local ordinances. This implies that while the office may respond to some audit findings or legal updates, it does not systematically solicit staff input, document lessons learned, or rapidly translate new requirements or recurring errors into process, training, or system improvements. In a regulatory and procurement environment that is constantly evolving—with updates to building standards, environmental requirements, procurement rules, and local policies—a "Moderately Compliant" continuous improvement capacity creates risks of stagnation,

outdated practices, and missed opportunities to prevent recurring problems.

The highest weighted mean is 3.20 for Item 3 ("Updates to guidelines and forms are communicated clearly to all concerned staff"), rated "Moderately Compliant." This indicates that when changes to legal or procedural requirements occur (e.g., revisions to National Building Code IRR, new GPPB resolutions, local ordinance amendments), there is some effort to inform staff, but the communication is not yet consistently clear, timely, or comprehensive. The implication is that staff may not always be aware of or fully understand new requirements, leading to continued use of outdated forms, procedures, or interpretations, which increases error risk and potential non-compliance. Strengthening communication channels (e.g., formal circulars, briefings, updated desk manuals, online repositories) would help ensure that all personnel operate with current knowledge and tools.

The lowest mean is 2.93 for Item 1 ("Staff feedback is sought to improve building and permit processes"), rated "Moderately Compliant." This is the weakest aspect of continuous improvement, indicating that management does not consistently solicit input from frontline staff who directly process permits, conduct inspections, and interact with applicants and contractors. The implication is significant: without regular, structured feedback from those closest to operations, management may lack awareness of practical challenges, bottlenecks, or emerging compliance risks, and improvement efforts may be misaligned with actual needs. Strengthening feedback mechanisms (e.g., periodic staff surveys, focus groups, debrief sessions after major projects or audits) would provide valuable intelligence for targeted improvements and enhance staff ownership of reforms.

The pattern of all five items rated only "Moderately Compliant"—with particularly low scores for staff feedback, use of lessons learned, and encouragement of innovation—suggests that the office has a reactive rather than proactive improvement culture. While some updates occur (e.g., communication of new guidelines, occasional training revisions), there is no systematic, staff-engaged, data-driven process for capturing lessons, soliciting ideas, and rapidly translating insights into better procedures, tools, or training.

2. Challenges Affecting Legal Compliance
Directions: For each item, indicate to what extent the issue is a challenge in your work. 4 – Highly Challenging | 3 – Challenging | 2 – Moderately Challenging | 1 – Not a Challenge.

Table 8 Documentation Quality

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Incomplete or missing requirements in permit or project documents.	3.5	Highly Challenging
Errors in forms and supporting documents causing delays or rework.	3.43	Highly Challenging
Difficulty verifying the accuracy of plans, clearances, and technical documents.	3.43	Highly Challenging
Inconsistent filing and record-keeping leading to difficulty in retrieval or audit.	3.57	Highly Challenging
Late or unclear updates in forms, templates, or guidelines.	3.73	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.53	Challenging

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Challenging; 2.50-3.25 – Challenging; 1.75-2.49 – Moderately Challenging; 1.00-1.74 – Not a Challenge

The overall weighted mean of 3.53 ("Highly Challenging") reflects that documentation problems are not isolated incidents but systematic and persistent barriers affecting day-to-day operations. This is significant because the National Building Code, its IRR, RA 9184, and local ordinances all rely heavily on documentary compliance—complete applications, accurate plans, verified clearances, proper filing, and up-to-date forms—to ensure that permits and projects

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meet legal, technical, and safety standards. When documentation quality is highly challenging, even well-trained staff operating under strong internal controls may struggle to process permits efficiently, defend decisions during audits, or maintain transparent records, leading to delays, errors, and increased vulnerability to audit findings or disputes.

The highest weighted mean is 3.73 for Item 5 ("Late or unclear updates in forms, templates, or guidelines"), rated "Highly Challenging." This indicates that changes to required forms, document templates, or procedural guidelines-whether due to revisions in the National Building Code IRR, new GPPB resolutions, or local ordinance amendments—are not communicated promptly or clearly to staff and applicants. The implication is that personnel and clients may continue using outdated formats or following superseded procedures, resulting in rejected applications, rework, delays, and confusion about current requirements. This challenge directly links to the "Moderately Compliant" rating for communication of updates in the Continuous Improvement table (Table 7, Item 3), confirming that weak update dissemination is both a process gap and a major operational pain point.

The pattern of all five documentation dimensions being "Highly Challenging" indicates a critical operational constraint that undermines the benefits of strong legal knowledge, internal controls, and training. This aligns with findings from Philippine public sector studies that identify documentation deficiencies—incomplete submissions, errors, outdated forms, weak filing—as major contributors to procurement and regulatory delays and audit observations.

Table 9Personnel Workload

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Insufficient number of staff to process permits and projects efficiently.	3.47	Highly Challenging
High workload making it difficult to meet legal timelines and standards.	3.4	Highly Challenging
Delays in preparing compliance reports due to competing tasks.	3.47	Highly Challenging
Staff fatigue or burnout affecting attention to detail.	3.53	Highly Challenging
Frequent staff movement or turnover requiring repeated re-orientation.	3.2	Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.41	Highly Challenging

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Challenging; 2.50-3.25 – Challenging; 1.75-2.49 – Moderately Challenging; 1.00-1.74 – Not a Challenge

The overall weighted mean of 3.41 ("Highly Challenging") reflects that workload and staffing issues are not isolated problems but systemic pressures affecting day-to-day operations, staff well-being, and compliance outcomes. This is critical because the National Building Code, its IRR, RA 9184, and local ordinances impose detailed documentary, technical, and procedural requirements that demand adequate time, attention, and personnel to execute properly. When workload is highly challenging, even well-trained and well-intentioned staff may struggle to maintain quality, meet legal timelines, or avoid errors, undermining the effectiveness of the strong legal and control frameworks observed in earlier compliance tables. This pattern is consistent with national studies on Philippine public procurement and regulatory agencies, which frequently identify insufficient staffing and excessive workload as major barriers to compliance and service delivery.

The highest weighted mean is 3.53 for Item 4 ("Staff fatigue or burnout affecting attention to detail"), rated "Highly Challenging." This indicates that sustained work pressure is not only creating inefficiency but also compromising staff mental and physical health, which in turn reduces the quality and accuracy of permit reviews, technical evaluations, and compliance checks. The implication is serious: when staff are exhausted, the risk of overlooking errors in documents, missing critical safety or zoning issues, or

making rushed decisions increases significantly, potentially resulting in non-compliant permits, unsafe structures, audit findings, or liability. Burnout also contributes to turnover, absenteeism, and decreased morale, creating a negative cycle that further strains remaining personnel. Management must treat this as a priority well-being and operational risk, requiring interventions such as workload redistribution, additional staffing, process streamlining, or mental health support.

The lowest mean is 3.20 for Item 5 ("Frequent staff movement or turnover requiring repeated re-orientation"), rated "Challenging" rather than "Highly Challenging." While this is the least severe of the workload issues, it still indicates that staff turnover is a notable problem, requiring recurring investment in onboarding and training and resulting in temporary capacity loss as new personnel learn their roles. The implication is that institutional knowledge may be lost, consistency in decision-making may suffer, and remaining staff must absorb additional mentoring and supervision duties, further adding to their workload. This challenge also links to the "Highly Compliant" rating for orientation in the Procurement Capability Enhancement table (Table 4, Item 2), suggesting that while onboarding processes exist, the frequency of turnover still creates operational strain.

Table 10 Training

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Limited training on updated laws, codes, and permitting procedures.	3.63	Highly Challenging
Insufficient technical training on specialized building, environmental, or safety requirements.	3.7	Highly Challenging
Uncertainty on how to interpret or apply certain legal provisions in actual cases.	3.43	Highly Challenging
Mistakes in practice due to lack of understanding of requirements.	3.5	Highly Challenging
Delayed or uneven dissemination of new issuances or internal policies.	3.57	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.57	Highly Challenging

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Challenging; 2.50-3.25 – Challenging; 1.75-2.49 – Moderately Challenging; 1.00-1.74 – Not a Challenge

The overall weighted mean of 3.57 (“Highly Challenging”) indicates that training is not a minor or occasional concern but a core structural barrier to effective legal compliance and service delivery. This is critical in a context where personnel must apply complex, evolving frameworks such as the National Building Code and its IRR, environmental and safety regulations, and procurement rules to actual building permits and projects; without adequate and updated training, even strong internal controls and clear procedures cannot be fully operationalized. The implication is that capacity-building needs to be treated as a priority reform area, not a support activity. The highest weighted mean is 3.70 for Item 2 (“Insufficient technical training on specialized building, environmental, or safety requirements”), followed closely by 3.63 for Item 1 (“Limited training on updated laws, codes, and permitting procedures”) and 3.57 for Item 5 (“Delayed or uneven dissemination of new issuances or internal policies”), all “Highly Challenging.”

Item 2’s very high score shows that staff feel particularly underprepared for specialized technical aspects—such as structural safety provisions, fire and life safety, environmental clearances, and related standards—which are central to the protective purpose of building regulation. The implication is that technical reviews may rely heavily on a small number of experts, risk inconsistent judgments, or miss critical non-compliances, potentially compromising public safety and increasing exposure to liability.

Item 1 indicates that even general training on updated laws, codes, and permitting procedures is perceived as limited, suggesting that many staff do not receive

regular, structured updates when national codes, IRRs, or local ordinances change. The implication is that outdated interpretations and procedures may persist in practice, leading to errors, rework, or decisions misaligned with current legal requirements.

Item 5 highlights that even when new issuances or internal policies exist, information about them reaches staff slowly or unevenly. The implication is that compliance becomes "uneven by information": some personnel operate with updated rules, while others unknowingly apply superseded standards, resulting in inconsistent treatment of applicants and increased risk of disputes or audit findings.

Table 11 Internal Systems

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Inadequate digital systems for tracking applications, inspections, and approvals.	3.57	Highly Challenging
Outdated or manual processes increasing the risk of errors and delays.	3.6	Highly Challenging
Limited integration or coordination among offices involved in permits.	3.73	Highly Challenging
Lack of standard tools for monitoring compliance across projects.	3.5	Highly Challenging
System or technical problems causing late submissions or missed deadlines.	3.4	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.56	Highly Challenging

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Challenging; 2.50-3.25 – Challenging; 1.75-2.49 – Moderately Challenging; 1.00-1.74 – Not a Challenge

An overall weighted mean of 3.56 ("Highly Challenging") means that almost all aspects of the internal systems environment—digital tools, process design, integration, monitoring instruments, and system reliability—are experienced as major obstacles rather than mere inconveniences. This has serious implications: in a setting where building permits and related projects must comply with detailed technical and legal requirements, weak systems can nullify the benefits of strong legal knowledge, good internal controls, and staff training, because staff are forced to work around system limitations through manual, time-consuming, and error-prone methods.

The highest mean is 3.73 for Item 3 ("Limited integration or coordination among offices involved in permits"), rated "Highly Challenging." This suggests that the different units and offices that participate in the permit process (e.g., zoning, planning, engineering, fire safety, environment, treasury) are not well integrated in terms of workflows, information-sharing, or system linkages. The implication is that applications may have to be physically or manually routed, data re-entered multiple times, and clearances followed up individually, leading to delays, lost documents, inconsistent information, and frustration for both staff and applicants. It also increases the risk that a requirement cleared by one office is not properly reflected or recognized by another, threatening consistency and transparency.

The pattern of all five items being "Highly Challenging" indicates that internal systems are one of the most serious structural constraints in the entire compliance environment. Process efficiency and timeliness are severely impaired, making it harder to meet legally mandated timelines and service standards and increasing applicant dissatisfaction. Error and risk exposure are elevated, because manual, fragmented, and unreliable systems create more opportunities for mistakes, lost documents, inconsistent records, and audit vulnerabilities. Staff workload and burnout are aggravated, as personnel must compensate for system weaknesses through extra tracking, follow-ups, manual encoding, and physical coordination. Data-driven management and continuous improvement are constrained, since the office lacks standard tools and integrated data to monitor performance, spot trends, and evaluate reforms.

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Table 12 Process Timeliness

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Difficulty meeting legally prescribed processing times for permits and projects.	3.27	Highly Challenging
Last-minute changes to schedules or requirements affecting compliance.	3.13	Challenging
Limited time to thoroughly review documents before approval.	3.1	Challenging
Pressure to rush permit issuance or project approvals.	3.63	Highly Challenging
Delays in early stages (e.g., endorsements, clearances) affecting the overall timeline.	3.47	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.31	Highly Challenging

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Challenging; 2.50-3.25 – Challenging; 1.75-2.49 – Moderately Challenging; 1.00-1.74 – Not a Challenge

The overall weighted mean of 3.31 ("Highly Challenging") means respondents experience time-related pressures as a serious barrier to implementing building-permit and project-approval processes in full accordance with legal and technical standards. This suggests that even when staff know the rules and internal controls are in place, they frequently operate under conditions that force trade-offs between speed and thoroughness, increasing the risk of errors, incomplete reviews, and non-compliance with mandated processing periods.

Implication: Time pressure undermines the effective implementation of the National Building Code, local ordinances, and related procurement or project rules, since these frameworks assume that officials have sufficient time for proper evaluation, coordination, and documentation before approval.

The highest weighted mean is 3.63 for Item 4 ("Pressure to rush permit issuance or project approvals"), rated "Highly Challenging," followed by 3.47 for Item 5 ("Delays in early stages affecting the overall timeline") and 3.27 for Item 1 ("Difficulty meeting legally prescribed processing times"), both also in the "Highly Challenging" range.

A 3.63 mean on Item 4 indicates that staff often feel strong pressure—whether from internal expectations, applicants, project proponents, or external stakeholders—to accelerate approvals. Such pressure can lead to shortened reviews, skipped checks, or incomplete documentation being accepted just to meet expectations or avoid complaints. While 3.10 mean on Item 3 indicates that staff often do not have enough time for detailed document and technical checks, even though such checks are critical for safety and legal compliance.

Table 13 Feedback Mechanisms

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Audit findings that recur because corrective actions are not fully implemented.	3.27	Highly Challenging
Slow response to issues raised by employees or external stakeholders.	3.33	Highly Challenging
Lack of systematic tracking of complaints or non-compliance reports.	3.37	Highly Challenging
Staff not consistently encouraged to report challenges and gaps.	3.77	Highly Challenging
External audits exposing systemic problems not captured in routine monitoring.	3.77	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.5	Highly Challenging

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Challenging; 2.50-3.25 – Challenging; 1.75-2.49 – Moderately Challenging; 1.00-1.74 – Not a Challenge

The findings show that feedback mechanisms are critically weak, with an overall weighted mean of 3.50 interpreted as "Highly Challenging." This indicates that the office lacks effective systems to capture, track, respond to, and learn from internal and external feedback, resulting in recurring problems, unresolved issues, and missed opportunities to improve compliance and service delivery.

The overall weighted mean of 3.50 ("Highly Challenging") reflects that feedback and corrective loops—essential components of effective internal control systems as emphasized in the National Guidelines on Internal Control Systems (NGICS)—are not functioning adequately. This implies that even when audits are conducted, complaints are raised, or staff observe problems, the mechanisms to systematically record, prioritize, act upon, and close out these inputs are weak or absent. In the context of building permits and government projects, where external oversight (COA) and stakeholder accountability are critical, weak feedback mechanisms mean that the same deficiencies can persist across audit cycles, eroding public trust and increasing vulnerability to more serious compliance failures.

A mean of 3.27 in Item 1 indicates that corrective actions for audit observations are not fully or consistently implemented, allowing the same deficiencies to appear in subsequent audit reports—a pattern widely documented in Philippine public sector audit practice. The implication is that the office may prepare formal responses or action plans but does not follow through with complete implementation, monitoring of progress, or verification of effectiveness. This undermines the entire purpose of audits, which is to drive continuous improvement and accountability.

Table 14 Support Services

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Insufficient budget for necessary tools, software, or materials to ensure compliance.	3.33	Challenging
Limited administrative support for documentation and reporting.	3.53	Highly Challenging
Difficulty accessing legal or technical experts when complex issues arise.	2.47	Challenging
Resource constraints (budget, equipment, connectivity) hindering compliance.	3.03	Challenging
Delays in improving systems and facilities due to procurement or approval processes.	3.13	Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.05	Challenging

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Challenging; 2.50-3.25 – Challenging; 1.75-2.49 – Moderately Challenging; 1.00-1.74 – Not a Challenge

The findings show that support services are a moderate but notable constraint, with an overall weighted mean of 3.05 interpreted as "Challenging." This indicates that while support functions—budget, administrative assistance, expert access, resources, and system improvements—are not at crisis levels, they are insufficient to fully enable staff to meet compliance and service standards efficiently, particularly in administrative support for documentation.

The overall weighted mean of 3.05 ("Challenging") suggests that support services meet basic needs but fall short of providing the robust enabling environment required for consistently high performance in building-permit and project-approval processes. This implies that staff often must "make do" with limited tools, administrative backup, or resources, which can slow work, increase manual burden, and constrain the

full implementation of internal controls, training, and monitoring systems. In the context of complex regulatory and procurement requirements under the National Building Code, RA 9184, and local ordinances, even moderate support deficiencies can compound other challenges (workload, documentation, systems) and limit the sustainability of compliance efforts.

The highest weighted mean is 3.53 for Item 2 ("Limited administrative support for documentation and reporting"), rated "Highly Challenging." This indicates that clerical, logistical, or administrative assistance for preparing, organizing, filing, and submitting documents and compliance reports is severely inadequate. The implication is that technical and professional staff—who should be focused on permit reviews, technical evaluations, inspections, and decision-making—are instead spending significant time on routine administrative tasks such as encoding, photocopying, filing, collating reports, and tracking submissions. This misallocation of effort reduces efficiency, contributes to workload and burnout (as seen in Table 2), and increases the risk of documentation errors or delays (as seen in Table 1). Strengthening administrative support—through additional clerical staff, document management systems, or streamlined reporting templates—would free technical personnel to focus on higher-value compliance and service activities

The lowest mean is 2.47 for Item 3 ("Difficulty accessing legal or technical experts when complex issues arise"), rated "Challenging" but near the boundary with "Moderately Challenging." This relatively lower score—the only one below 3.00—suggests that access to expert advice (e.g., legal counsel, structural engineers, environmental specialists) is less of a problem compared with other support dimensions. The implication is that the office either has internal expertise, standing arrangements with consultants, or functional referral mechanisms that allow staff to obtain guidance when needed, even if not always immediately or comprehensively. This relative strength is important because it means that complex or ambiguous cases involving interpretation of the National Building Code, RA 9184, or local ordinances can generally be escalated or clarified, reducing the risk of incorrect decisions due to lack of expertise.

Table 15 Conflict Management

	Weighted Mean	Verbal Description
Inconsistent practice of disclosing conflicts of interest.	3.26	Highly Challenging
Perceptions of favouritisms or bias that are not promptly addressed.	3.7	Highly Challenging
Unclear procedures for handling grievances related to permits or projects.	3.53	Highly Challenging
Limited tools or systems for documenting and tracking conflict-of-interest cases.	3.23	Challenging
Need for clearer and more strictly enforced conflict management policies.	3.77	Highly Challenging
Overall Weighted Mean	3.5	Highly Challenging

Legend: 3.26-4.00 – Highly Challenging; 2.50-3.25 – Challenging; 1.75-2.49 – Moderately Challenging; 1.00-1.74 – Not a Challenge

The findings show that conflict management is a critical weakness, with an overall weighted mean of 3.50 interpreted as "Highly Challenging." This indicates that mechanisms to identify, disclose, address, and prevent conflicts of interest, favoritism, and bias in building-permit and project-approval processes are severely inadequate, creating significant integrity and accountability risks.

The overall weighted mean of 3.50 ("Highly Challenging") reflects that conflict management is one of the most problematic areas in the entire compliance and challenge profile, alongside documentation quality, personnel workload, training, internal systems, and feedback mechanisms. This implies that the office lacks robust safeguards to ensure

impartiality and fairness in decisions that affect property rights, public funds, and safety standards. In the context of building permits and government projects—where decisions involve substantial private interests, competitive advantages, and discretionary judgments—weak conflict management undermines the integrity objectives of the National Building Code, RA 9184, and local accountability frameworks, and exposes the office to corruption risks, legal challenges, and erosion of public trust.

The highest weighted mean is 3.77 for Item 5 ("Need for clearer and more strictly enforced conflict management policies"), rated "Highly Challenging." This indicates widespread recognition among respondents that existing conflict-of-interest policies—if they exist—are either unclear, not well-known, or not consistently enforced. The implication is that staff may be uncertain about what constitutes a conflict, what disclosure or recusal is required, or what consequences follow from violations, leading to inconsistent practice and potentially allowing compromised decision-making to occur. This gap directly threatens the fairness and credibility of permit and project approvals and signals an urgent need for policy clarification, dissemination, training, and visible enforcement.

The lowest mean is 3.23 for Item 4 ("Limited tools or systems for documenting and tracking conflict-of-interest cases"), rated "Challenging" rather than "Highly Challenging." This indicates that the infrastructure for recording, monitoring, and managing conflict-of-interest disclosures and cases—such as declaration forms, registers, tracking databases, or case logs—is weak but not as severe as policy clarity and enforcement issues. The implication is that even when conflicts are disclosed or cases arise, there may be no systematic way to document, monitor, or follow up on them, making it difficult to ensure accountability, learn from past cases, or demonstrate to auditors or stakeholders that conflicts are properly managed. Strengthening these tools (e.g., standardized disclosure forms, conflict registers, digital tracking systems) would support better enforcement and transparency.

3. Test of Relationship Between the Level of Legal Compliance and the Challenges Encountered in Building and Permit–related Procurement and Project Implementation in LGU Cabanatuan City

Table Test of Relationship Results

		DQ	PW	T	IS	PT	FM	SS	CM
Knowledge of Laws	Pearson Correlation	0.116	0.228	0.074	0.023	-0.169	-0.053	0.135	0.238
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.542	0.227	0.697	0.903	0.372	0.781	0.478	0.205
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Internal Controls	Pearson Correlation	0.163	.382*	0.098	0.275	-0.224	0.019	0.134	-0.158
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.391	0.037	0.606	0.142	0.233	0.92	0.482	0.403
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Transparency	Pearson Correlation	0.096	0.133	-0.027	-0.11	0.333	0.014	0.127	0.17
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.614	0.484	0.888	0.564	0.072	0.94	0.503	0.37
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Procurement Capability Enhancement	Pearson Correlation	0.292	0.24	0.326	.525**	0.059	-0.19	0.134	-0.011
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.118	0.201	0.079	0.003	0.757	0.314	0.481	0.955
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30

Conflict of Interest Management	Pearson Correlation	-0.035	-0.091	.397*	-0.008	0.211	-0.035	0.152	-0.151
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.853	0.632	0.03	0.965	0.262	0.855	0.424	0.424
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Monitoring	Pearson Correlation	0.272	-0.111	0.016	0.123	.471**	-0.131	-0.012	0.171
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.145	0.56	0.933	0.517	0.009	0.491	0.95	0.365
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
Continuous Improvement	Pearson Correlation	-0.006	-0.218	0.333	-0.27	0.158	-0.05	0.238	-0.036
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.975	0.247	0.073	0.149	0.404	0.793	0.206	0.852
	N	30	30	30	30	30	30	30	30
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).									
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).									
Legend: DC-document quality; PW-personnel workload; T-training; IS-internal systems; FM-feedback mechanism; SS-support services; CM-conflict management									

The results indicate that, overall, the level of legal compliance in LGU Cabanatuan City shows only a few significant linear relationships with the identified challenges in building- and permit-related procurement and project implementation, suggesting that most compliance dimensions do not directly translate into reduced operational difficulties in these areas. The significant positive correlation between internal controls and personnel workload ($r = 0.382, p = 0.037$) implies that as internal controls become more stringent, staff perceive higher workload, reflecting the broader Philippine experience where added compliance checks and documentary requirements tend to increase administrative burden in public procurement.

The strong positive correlation between procurement capability enhancement and internal systems ($r = 0.525, p = 0.003$) suggests that when LGU personnel receive more intensive training and capacity-building, the internal systems that support procurement and project implementation become more established and functional, consistent with recent findings that continuous capacity development is a key driver of systematized, ICT-supported procurement processes that improve adherence to RA 9184 and subsequent reforms. The moderate positive correlation between conflict of interest management and training ($r = 0.397, p = 0.030$) indicates that better mechanisms to prevent and manage conflicts of interest tend to co-occur with more extensive training efforts, which aligns with emerging practices that integrate ethics and integrity modules into procurement trainings to strengthen ethical behavior and reduce opportunities for undue influence.

Likewise, the significant positive correlation between monitoring and project timeliness ($r = 0.471, p = 0.009$) implies that stronger monitoring practices are associated with better adherence to project schedules or fewer time-related issues, consistent with recent evidence that systematic monitoring and digital tracking of procurement and construction milestones can mitigate delays in local infrastructure and building permit processes.

In contrast, knowledge of laws, transparency, and continuous improvement show no significant correlation with any of the challenge dimensions, which implies that awareness of legal frameworks and formal transparency declarations alone do not automatically address practical issues such as document quality, internal system weaknesses, or conflict management in project implementation.

These findings imply that LGU Cabanatuan City should move beyond compliance understood mainly as legal awareness or formal transparency and instead focus on strengthening institutional arrangements, particularly risk-based internal controls, structured capacity-building programs, robust conflict-of-interest safeguards, and data-driven monitoring systems, that

more directly influence workload, system performance, ethical conduct, and project timeliness. The positive association between internal controls and workload further suggests the need to balance control mechanisms with process simplification and standardization (e.g., use of streamlined forms and digital tools), so that compliance does not unduly overburden personnel and thereby create new bottlenecks in procurement and permit processing. Overall, the pattern of correlations supports an implication that effective legal compliance in LGU Cabanatuan City is less about "paper compliance" and more about embedding rules into organizational systems, capacities, and monitoring arrangements that can sustainably improve the quality and timeliness of building- and permit-related procurement and project implementation.

Recent literature broadly aligns with the study's findings by showing that procurement reforms are most effective when internal controls, capacity-building, and monitoring are institutionalized, but may also increase workload and complexity for LGU personnel. Analyses of the Philippine public procurement system highlight that compliance with RA 9184 and its revised IRR has expanded documentary requirements and procedural checks, which can heighten administrative burden and perceived workload, especially at the local level where staffing and technical capacity are limited, supporting the observed positive relationship between internal controls and personnel workload. Updated internal audit and internal control guidance for government and LGUs likewise emphasizes that strengthening control systems and compliance audits around procurement is necessary for good governance but must be balanced with process efficiency and adequate resourcing, echoing the implication that controls can strain personnel if not accompanied by process streamlining.

Several recent initiatives and studies underscore that procurement capability enhancement through structured training is strongly associated with improved internal systems, mirroring the significant correlation between capability enhancement and internal systems in the table. LGU procurement manuals and GPPB-recognized training programs stress that continuous capacity development in RA 9184 procedures, planning, and use of electronic platforms (PhilGEPS and related systems) leads to more standardized workflows, clearer roles, and stronger documentation and records management. Capacity-building efforts led by sectoral projects, such as harmonized procurement training for LGU partners under national programs, similarly report that repeated training and coaching build institutional memory and internal processes that support more compliant, timely, and coordinated procurement.

The positive association between conflict of interest management and training is supported by recent work on ethical procurement practices, which notes that integrity, conflict-of-interest rules, and accountability mechanisms are increasingly embedded in procurement-focused trainings and manuals as a way to move beyond purely procedural compliance. New guidance and learning interventions on internal control and internal audit for LGUs emphasize ethics, rules on evidence, and compliance audits focused on procurement, indicating that training does not only cover technical steps but also governance and integrity dimensions that underpin effective conflict-of-interest management. This convergence suggests that LGUs that invest more in training and learning and development are more likely to operationalize conflict-of-interest policies, align with national integrity standards, and institutionalize ethical screening and disclosure mechanisms in procurement.

Recent literature on monitoring and project implementation validates the significant link between monitoring and project timeliness found in the study, showing that enhanced monitoring systems and third-party oversight reduce delays and improve delivery of infrastructure projects. Multi-stakeholder monitoring mechanisms and digital monitoring initiatives (such as TPM systems and digital platforms for real-time infrastructure tracking) demonstrate that independent or technology-enabled monitoring can identify slippages early, improve information flows, and allow local leaders to take corrective action before delays escalate, thereby improving adherence to timelines. Sectoral analyses of construction delays in public projects also point to inadequate oversight and weak supervision as major factors behind time overruns, reinforcing the view that stronger monitoring and

evaluation arrangements are crucial for timely project completion in LGUs.

At the same time, several assessments of Philippine procurement reforms and open government initiatives suggest that legal awareness and formal transparency commitments by themselves do not automatically resolve operational bottlenecks or reduce day-to-day challenges, which is consistent with the non-significant correlations between knowledge of laws, transparency, and the various challenge indicators. Evaluations of the public procurement system note persistent issues such as planning weaknesses, capacity gaps, and implementation delays despite the existence of robust legal frameworks and transparency tools, implying that outcomes depend more on how rules are embedded into internal systems, human resource capabilities, and monitoring regimes than on legal knowledge alone. Collectively, these recent sources reinforce the study's implication that LGU Cabanatuan City must prioritize institutional strengthening—internal controls that are risk-based and manageable, systematic capacity-building, embedded ethics and conflict-of-interest safeguards, and robust monitoring, over mere "paper compliance" to effectively address procurement and project implementation challenges.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, the following were drawn:

1. The level of legal compliance in building- and permit-related procurement and project implementation in LGU Cabanatuan City is generally high in terms of knowledge of laws, internal controls, and procurement capability enhancement. However, transparency, conflict of interest management, monitoring, and continuous improvement are only moderately compliant, revealing that the existing compliance culture is still more procedural and inward-looking than fully transparent, integrity-driven, and learning-oriented.

2. The challenges affecting legal compliance are systemic and severe, particularly in documentation quality, personnel workload, training, internal systems, feedback mechanisms, and conflict management, all of which were rated Highly Challenging, while support services and some aspects of process timeliness were rated Challenging. Even with high legal knowledge and established internal controls, frontline implementation is constrained by incomplete and error-prone documentation, excessive workload and burnout, limited and delayed training, fragmented and outdated systems, weak feedback and grievance mechanisms, and insufficient administrative support, which together undermine efficient and consistent compliance with legal and regulatory standards.

3. The test of relationship reveals that only a few dimensions of legal compliance are significantly associated with the challenges encountered, specifically: internal controls with personnel workload, procurement capability enhancement with internal systems, conflict of interest management with training, and monitoring with process timeliness.

4. The study concludes that while LGU Cabanatuan City can already be characterized as legally knowledgeable and procedurally structured, its building- and permit-related procurement and project implementation processes remain vulnerable due to documentation, workload, systems, and integrity issues that are not fully addressed by current compliance efforts. Accordingly, the enhancement of legal and regulatory compliance must prioritize: (a) strengthening digital and integrated internal systems and documentation management; (b) addressing staffing and workload imbalances; (c) institutionalizing regular, targeted, and technically focused training and timely dissemination of issuances; (d) reinforcing conflict-of-interest and conflict management policies and enforcement; and (e) establishing robust monitoring, feedback, and continuous-improvement mechanisms that convert audit and field insights into concrete, sustained process reforms.

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RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the conclusions, the following are offered:

1. Strengthen documentation and information management
   To address highly challenging documentation problems, the LGU should:
- Develop and enforce standardized, city-wide forms, checklists, and templates for all building- and permit-related transactions, with version control and clear effectivity dates.
- Establish a centralized, preferably digital, records management system for permit applications, clearances, plans, and related procurement documents, with clear filing, tagging, and retrieval protocols.
- Design and disseminate a "documentation guide" or manual for both staff and applicants that clarifies complete requirements, common errors, and step-by-step submission procedures.

2. Reduce workload and support staff well-being
   Given that personnel workload and burnout are highly challenging, management should:
- Conduct a workload analysis and use the results to justify additional plantillas, job orders, or contractual staff dedicated to permit processing, technical review, and compliance reporting.
- Reallocate tasks and streamline workflows (e.g., pre-screening desks, document reviewers, technical evaluators) to minimize duplication of work and unnecessary steps.
- Institutionalize measures to mitigate burnout, such as reasonable caseload caps, rotation schemes for particularly tedious tasks, and access to employee wellness or counseling services.

3. Institutionalize structured, continuous training
   To reconcile high perceived capability enhancement with highly challenging training gaps, the LGU should:
- Develop an annual, competency-based training plan that includes: (a) core legal updates (National Building Code, RA 9184, IRRs, local ordinances), (b) specialized technical topics (structural, environmental, fire, accessibility), and (c) case-based workshops on interpreting and applying provisions to real scenarios.
- Require mandatory onboarding and periodic refresher trainings for all staff engaged in building permits and project review, with attendance tracked and content updated whenever new issuances are released.
- Forge partnerships with DILG, DPWH, PRC-accredited professional organizations, and procurement training providers to access updated and accredited learning opportunities.

4. Upgrade internal systems and digital tools
   In light of the gap between well-trained personnel and only moderately compliant systems, the LGU should:
- Invest in or adopt an electronic permit management system (or enhance existing eBPLS/permit modules) to handle application intake, routing, status tracking, and document storage.
- Integrate internal systems used by the City Engineering Office, City Building Official, City Planning, and CENRO to minimize double encoding, manual handoffs, and inconsistent data.
- Provide targeted ICT training and user support so staff can fully utilize new tools, and designate a focal team responsible for ongoing system maintenance and improvement.

5. Deepen transparency and external communication
   To move transparency from moderately to highly compliant, the LGU should:
- Develop and post clear, user-friendly process maps, requirement lists, and FAQs (online and on-site) for building permits and related clearances, including indicative timelines and fees.
- Formalize and publicize a standard complaints and inquiries mechanism (hotline, email, online form, logbook) with defined response times, responsible officers, and feedback to complainants.
- Regularly publish summary statistics on permit applications, approval/denial counts, and average processing times, while protecting personal data, to demonstrate openness and accountability.

6. Strengthen conflict-of-interest management and integrity enforcement
   Given that conflict-of-interest management is the weakest compliance area, the LGU should:
- Adopt or update a written conflict-of-interest policy specific to building permits and procurement (covering disclosure, recusal, and prohibited acts) and ensure all staff formally acknowledge it.
- Institutionalize a confidential disclosure system (e.g., annual interest declaration and case-based disclosures) and require documented recusal where conflicts arise.
- Establish clear, graduated sanctions and procedures for investigating and addressing violations, and ensure that at least some cases and actions (with identities anonymized where necessary) are reported internally to signal that rules are enforced.

7. Enhance monitoring, performance indicators, and safe reporting
   To make monitoring more effective and actionable, the LGU should:
- Define and track key performance indicators (KPIs) for building- and permit-related processes, such as average processing time per permit type, rate of returned applications, and frequency of audit findings.
- Require action plans for each audit or monitoring report, assign responsible persons, and set deadlines for addressing findings, with periodic management reviews of completion status.
- Strengthen safe reporting channels (e.g., anonymous reporting box, secure email) and formally protect staff who report lapses or irregularities, integrating this into internal policies and orientations.

8. Build a culture and mechanisms for continuous improvement
   To shift from a reactive to a proactive improvement culture, the LGU should:
- Institutionalize regular feedback sessions (e.g., quarterly) with frontline staff to surface bottlenecks, emerging risks, and ideas, and formally document agreed improvement actions.
- Require that lessons learned from audits, complaints, and difficult cases be summarized and fed back into SOPs, training modules, and templates within a defined timeframe.
- Create a simple “innovation and improvement” incentive (e.g., recognition, certificates) for teams or individuals whose suggestions lead to measurable gains in compliance, timeliness, or client satisfaction.

9. Align reforms with the identified relationships
   Given the significant relationships found in the study, the LGU should:
- When tightening internal controls, simultaneously simplify procedures and increase staffing or automation so that workload does not become unsustainably high.
- Couple procurement capability enhancement activities with concurrent upgrades in internal systems, so that new knowledge is immediately applied through improved workflows and tools.
- Integrate ethics, conflict-of-interest modules, and case discussions into all major trainings, and ensure that monitoring improvements (dashboards, regular reviews) are explicitly linked to targets on process timeliness and backlog reduction.

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