

Practicalizing the Theories of Organizational Culture: The Exemplar of a Sales Team

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Abstract

Business applications of the concepts based on theories of organizational culture abound in the literature but in piecemeal. Not unexpectedly, applications of the concepts based on the totality of the theory on all 3 aspects of organizational culture, namely artifacts, espoused values and shared assumptions are hard to stumble upon. Added to this gap is the fact that mixed methods approach to the study of organizational culture is scarce. The objective of this study therefore was to explain the relationships amongst the concepts identified in the organizational culture setting using theory and then also explain the relationship between the core element of organization culture (OG) and Entrepreneurial Orientation (EO). A mixed method approach involving a concurrent nested model was used. In the first part, qualitative approach was used through Field work study of the sales team of a manufacturing company. The research was guided by theoretical propositions. In the second part, a quantitative approach was used to assess the relationship between the central phenomenon of OG, which is values of trust and EO. The theoretical propositions sufficiently “pattern matched” the actual results whilst the bivariate relationship between Trust and EO was positive and significant. Theoretical and practical implications are discussed at the tail end of the article.

Keywords: Organizational culture theory, trust, sales team, concurrent nested strategy, pattern matching;

1. Introduction

Organizational culture (OC) is one of the most explored phenomenon and an inevitable variable in explaining functioning and performances of all kinds of organizations (Janisejevic, 2011). This is not surprising because it has been found to have a positive correlation with performance. However, a review of the literature shows that whilst qualitative researchers have used qualitative studies to explore the tangible aspects of OC, such as artifacts and symbols, other researchers have most often used quantitative studies to explore the intangible aspects of OC, such as norms and values. The use of a qualitative study in this area of OC is minimal. In both cases the theories of OC had been applied piecemeal. Also, a hybrid of the two approaches is missing in the literature. To fill the gap, this paper researched on the effect of the totality of OC theories on all the 3 highly cited elements of OC, based on the model postulated by Schein (2004) namely, artifacts, espoused values and assumptions. A sales team manufacturing firm of a manufacturing firm was used as a case study.

1.1 Objectives and goals of the research

The objectives of the research were:

1. To qualitatively explain the relationships amongst the concepts of organizational culture in a sales team.
2. To quantitatively test the relationship between the core element of OC and EO.

By doing so we achieved the following goal:

Tested and verified the theories of organizational culture in the domains of a sales team in a manufacturing firm in a combined qualitative and quantitative designs, concurrently and by so doing narrowed the ‘gap’ in research.

The rest of the text is structured as follows: A brief profile of the firm, a review of the literature, the method of research, results, discussions and conclusions.

1.2 Brief profile of the case study: Blue Skies Limited

Blue Skies has been producing fresh fruit products from its factory near to Nsawam in Ghana since 1998. The company started by exporting premium quality freshly cut fruit to supermarkets in Europe before eventually diversifying to supply the local market with freshly-squeezed 100% natural juice. From the beginning the approach has differed from many other fruit processors because ‘we believe in adding value at source’ according to the operations manager. This means the fruit is cut and packed in the country of origin, rather than shipped overseas and processed elsewhere. This philosophy not only enables Blue Skies to deliver a better quality product, but also helps to generate social and economic development within the country where the fruit was grown.

Today Blue Skies continues to supply a variety of retailers throughout the world with exceptional quality ‘fresh from harvest fruit’. It also now has factories in South Africa, Egypt and Brazil from where it sources additional fruits that aren’t available in Ghana. The company’s factory in Ghana remains its biggest

operation; having started production in 1998 with only 35 people, the factory now employs over 1,500 people and has an internet café, a library, a clinic and a canteen. It sources fruit from over 150 farms and is proud to support local communities by funding projects with the Blue Skies Foundation.

To date the Foundation has raised over 600,000 GHS with its international partners and completed over ten projects in Ghana. The firm believes that it is their commitment to adding value at source that has contributed the most beneficial impact. In 2008 and 2011 Blue Skies was honored to have been awarded a Queens Award for Enterprise in recognition of their ethos and contribution to sustainable development in Ghana. (Courtesy: www.blueskies.com)

1.3 Literature review

After almost fifty years of research on organizational culture, theories based on the concept abound. Although the literature on the concept covers a wide area, this review will concentrate on four of the themes which dominate the literature. They are: Knowledge sharing, trust, open communication and employee commitment. Entrepreneurial orientation, which is part of the resulting conceptual framework of the study, will also be reviewed. The reason for concentrating on these concepts is that an earlier open survey conducted by the authors (based on an exploratory study of the unidimensional concept of knowledge sharing) had picked these concepts through a coding system

The literature review covered the following: Goal and organization of the review, the definition of theory, and the importance of theory in qualitative social research, the mixed-method approach, a review of organizational culture and the associated themes and their relationships and, finally, the conclusions of the literature review.

1.3.1 Goals and organization of the review

The goals of the review were to gain insights into the various theories used in organizational cultural research, integrate the theories and establish the relationships amongst them. Whilst doing so, a critique of the methods used was touched on. The organizational scheme of the review was built around the propositions derived from the various theories in the literature (Randolph, 2009). And so we placed a proposition at the end of each review.

1.3.2 Definition of theory and its importance in qualitative social research.

The definition of theory abounds. Strauss and Corbin (1998) defined theory as a set of well-developed categories (e.g. themes, concepts) that are systematically inter-related through statements of relationships to form a theoretical framework that explains some phenomenon. But for the purpose of this article we take the definition by Kerlinger (1979) as “a set of interrelated constructs (variables), definitions and propositions that presents a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations amongst variables with the purpose of explaining natural phenomena”. Many authors have acknowledged the importance of theory in social research. Sutton and Staw (1995) opined that references to theory developed in prior work help to set the stage for new conceptual developments. They added that knowledge growth by extending established theory also presents a valuable opportunity to build cumulative theory. Floyd (2009) talked about the importance of borrowing theory in social research. Theory borrowing involves bringing ideas from one theoretical domain, a source, to address an issue or explain a phenomenon in another, a target, domain (Floyd, 2009). Borrowing and integrating theories across different domains can be achieved in three ways (Floyd, 2009; Zahra and Neway, 2009):

- i.* Relatively simple application (or replication) of theory from the source domain to the target domain with few, if any, changes;
- ii.* Using ideas in the source domain to extend theory in the target domain; and
- iii.* Using what has been learned in the target domain to extend theory in the source domain

1.3.3 Review of Theories of Organizational culture

According to Janisejevic (2011), research on OC spans over a period of thirty years. And so it is not surprising therefore that different definitions have been given for this well explored phenomena. It is however important to mention that all the works done on this phenomenon have acknowledged that OC is multidimensional, multilayered and also interdisciplinary.

Although there is considerable diversity in relation to what constitutes an OC, many authors are of the view that it consist of both visible and invincible aspects (Kotter and Hersketh, 1992). For the purpose of this article, we take the definition of OC from Schein (2004) as a pattern of shared tacit assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems”. Schein (2004) identifies OC as consisting of levels ranging from overt, outward manifestations of culture to the deep underlying assumptions that drive the organization’s actions.

Within the framework by Schein, Artifacts refer to the visible structures and processes of the organization. According to him they are the most manifest level of culture consisting of the structured physical and social environment of the organization and the customer. Examples are physical space and other overt behaviors. Janisejevic (2011) refers to these overt behaviors as behavioral symbols.

Behavioral symbols are those that can be seen, such as the way the organization conducts its meetings, administrative procedures or events. An example is open communication. Espoused beliefs, values and norms refer to the strategies, goals and processes used by the organization (Schein, 2004). They are less visible than behaviors and artifacts. The constituents of this level of culture provide the underlying meanings and interactions by which the patterns of behavior and artifacts can be deciphered (Schein, 2004).

Shared values are the central elements of organizational culture (Hofstede, 1990). They prescribe and direct the behavior of people. An example is Trust. Norms arises from values and they determine the everyday lives of members of the organization. An example is knowledge sharing. Shared assumptions are the most concealed aspect of the three levels (Sinikas, 2007). They are most of the time taken for granted in a subconscious manner (Schein, 2004). An example is organizational commitment. It is the way the staff and managers of the exporting firm view human nature and development among other things. These assumptions are translated into beliefs and values or how people believe they are supposed to behave or believed to be right or wrong, which are then expressed into actions and behavior (Eriksson, 2010). In this way these cultural elements are reciprocal. They give and take from each other.

We next review the concepts used in the research work. Theoretical propositions are placed at the end of each review.

1.3.4 Organizational trust and knowledge sharing.

Trust is an example of organizational values. Rokeach (1973) defines values as the stable belief that a certain way of behaving or existential state is personally or socially more desirable than the opposite way of behaving or existential state. According to Hofstede (2001) values are the central elements of an OC. Just as works on OC abounds, so is the situation for organizational trust. This is because of the interest that most organizations have in the topic (Mayer et al (1995) and the link with other concepts. Authors of the works on trust also admit that most works have focused on the characteristics of the trustor and the trustee. In addition, they have incorporated the theme of willingness to take risk.

In a typical trustor-trustee relationship, a trustor relies on the works of others and also has the propensity to trust others. A trustee must be trustworthy, competent, have the ability to perform, benevolent and must be of high integrity. According to Mayer et al (1995) trust entails the willingness of a party to be open to the actions of another party based on the hope that the other party will carry out or perform a particular deed important to the trustor irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party. In this article we refer to the parties as the members of the sales team. The performance of the particular action is knowledge sharing. Knowledge sharing is an example of cultural norm.

Norms are rules of conduct, most often informal, that arise from values and represent the directions for everyday behavior for members of the organization (Janisejevic (2011). According to Alavi et al (2009) norms significantly overlap with the values from which they emerge on one hand and as well as with the behavioral practice that they determine, on the other hand.

Knowledge sharing assist people in doing their work more effectively; retains their job and facilitates their personal development and career progression (Gurteen, 1999). Knowledge sharing activities involves two or more people. Both parties are vulnerable to each other. People who share knowledge (i.e. the trustees) to people who acquire the knowledge (i.e. the trustors) risk transferring a valuable resource which may make them lose knowledge power and thus lose the capability to take advantage in certain situations. On the other hand, the trustors face the risks of being giving wrongful knowledge which will prove detrimental to their work.

However, in an environment, where the element of trust is manifest, there is a link to positive results. Lee et al (2012) found a positive relationship between certain elements of culture, such as trust and learning culture (as independent variables) and creative organizational learning (as an intermediate) and organizational performance as outcome variable. Nayir et al (2008) demonstrated how effective knowledge management practices combined with a unique OC enabled a company manage challenges to ensure success.

The initial exploratory research that we conducted (based on the dimension construct of knowledge sharing) revealed that trust is the core values of the sales team. Based on the organizational theory that cultural values drive cultural norms, the following theoretical proposition was made:

P1: A culture value of trust amongst the sales team will drive a cultural norm of knowledge sharing

1.3.5 Open communication and trust

Open communication is an example of an organizational cultural artifact or symbols (Janisejevic, 2011). Symbols comprises of words, objects or movements which convey a certain communication. Communication can be defined as the exchange of information, thoughts and emotions which plays an important role in balancing organizational goals and objectives (Boyazi, 1996). Therefore open communication can be defined as communication in an open or transparent manner. In the OC literature, two type of symbols were identified; semantic symbols and behavioral symbols. Semantic symbols appear in the form of words, such as jokes, anecdotes, metaphors, stories and jargons whilst behavioral symbols can be seen and felt, such as the way the organization conducts its meetings and other events (Janisejevic, 2011). In the course of conducting an

observational studies it was common to hear the sales teams use metaphors such as “marketing guru”, “bill gates” etc amongst themselves. At this point it is too early to determine whether this practice had an impact on trust. This will be addressed under “results” of the study. Rather, it is appropriate to refer to the works of Morgan and Hunt (1994) who put forward that communication was an antecedent of trust, just as Ball et al (2005) found a strong relationship between communication and trust. Barret (1997) claimed that an organizational culture which is based on trust that manifests in openness and sincerity is an OC that supports creativity and innovation. OC theory posits that artifacts or symbols strengthen the organizational values of the organization. The organizational value amongst the sales team had been identified as trust. Based on this we made the following theoretical proposition:

P2: An organizational culture of open communication of the sales team will strengthen the values of trust

1.3.6 Organizational commitment and trust

Herscovitch et al (2002) defines organizational commitment as the degree to which an employee identifies with the goals and values of the organization and is willing to exert effort to help it succeed. Westrum (2004) identifies two conceptualization of organizational commitment as employee’s loyalty to the organization and employee’s intention to stay in the organization. Employee loyalty is an organizational citizenship behavior that reflects the allegiance to the organization to the promotion of its interests and image to the outsiders. (Bettencourt et al, 2001). Seonghee et al. (2008:1) states that intention to leave refers to the subjective estimation of an individual regarding the probability of leaving an organization in the near future. The opposite is intention to stay.

Darulehsan (2005) views organizational commitment as an attitude of attachment to the organization which leads to particular job-related behaviors. Attitudes are based on values and arise from them and they induce a certain behavior, just like norms do (Janisejevic (2011). According to Davis et al (1995) attitudes represents belief on the object of conduct which then produces a certain behavior towards the object. Since organizational commitment, a cultural attitudes, are based on values, we propose the following:

P3: An attitude of organizational commitment will emerge from values of trust and its connections

1.3.7 Entrepreneurial orientation and organizational culture

EO refers to the entrepreneurial process, namely how entrepreneurship is undertaken-the methods, processes and practices and decision making styles used to act entrepreneurially. Dess and Lumpkin (2000) outlined five salient dimensions of EO, namely, autonomy, risk taking, proactiveness, Innovativeness, Competitive Aggressiveness, Risk Taking and Pro-activeness. For the purpose of this article we excluded competitive aggressiveness. Competitive aggressiveness appeared to have a similar in meaning with pro-activeness, as perceived by the participants.

Autonomy refers to the independent action of an individual or a team in bringing forth an idea or a vision and carrying it through to completion (Dess and Lumpkin, 2000). In general, it means the ability and will to be self-directed in the pursuit of opportunities (Dess and Lumpkin, 1996). Business ideas come from individual members of an organization. Individuals or team members are autonomous if they show that their ideas are considered and experimented by their organizations.

Risk taking involves venturing into the worlds of unknowns without any fear for the consequences. Perhaps one of the most widely cited descriptions of entrepreneurs or entrepreneurship is the willingness to assume risk (Dess and Lumpkin, 2000). Only societies with a cultural foundation that supports the proclivity of entrepreneurs to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty and to commit resources to risky ventures will reap the benefits of those who are willing to engage in risk-taking behaviors (Lee and Peterson, 2000).

Pro-activeness is the practice of taking initiatives as well as anticipating opportunities. Cultures that emphasize entrepreneurial initiatives, by encouraging entrepreneurs to pursue and anticipate opportunities and to participate in new and emerging markets, are classified as proactive (Lee and Peterson, 2000).

Proactive people do what is necessary to bring their concepts into fruition and gain an advantage by being first to capitalize on new opportunities (Lumpkin and Dess, 2000).

Innovativeness reflects a firm's tendency to engage in and support new ideas, novelty, experimentation, and creative processes that may result in new products, services, or technological processes (Lumpkin and Dess, 2000). Schumpeter (1934) outlined an economic process of "creative destruction," by which wealth was created when existing market structures were disrupted by the introduction of new goods or services that shifted resources away from existing firms and caused new firms to grow. The key to this cycle of activity was entrepreneurship: the competitive entry of innovative "new combinations" that propelled the dynamic evolution of the economy (Schumpeter, 1934).

An organization’s culture shapes behavior, and so it is vital that the culture facilitates entrepreneurial behaviors (Schneider, Ehrhart and Macey, 2013). Any organization looking to become entrepreneurial needs to ensure that its culture supports its ‘intrapreneurs’ (existing employees that have entrepreneurial potential (Menzel, Aaltio and Ulijn, 2007). Blue skies sales team showed some element of entrepreneurship in an initial cultural assessment survey conducted by some predecessor researchers. The document was obtained by kind

courtesy of the management of Blue Skies. It showed that whilst the whole organization picked a clan culture, the sales department picked an adhocracy culture. Adhocracy culture is associated with such concepts as entrepreneurship and innovation. Since values are the core of organizations and based on the preceding findings, we made the following propositions:

P4: An organizational culture of trust (values) will positively correlate with entrepreneurial orientation

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Philosophy

A combination of qualitative and quantitative approach was used in the study. A qualitative post-positivism worldview was taken in the first instance when qualitative propositions, based on the theory of OC were generated and explored. Post-positivists have the elements of being reductionists, logical, an emphasis on empirical data collection, cause and effect oriented, and deterministic, based on priori theories (Creswell, 2007). In the second instance a positivist's worldview was taken when a quantitative correlational relationship was explored between the core values of organizational culture, trust and EO. Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) described this combined approach as the philosophy of pragmatism. The specific mixed method strategy used was the concurrent nested strategy, as suggested by Creswell (2003).

2.2 Participants

Participants were the sales team of the organization. They attracted selection for the study from the way they conducted their knowledge sharing activities. Their noticeable cultural norm of knowledge sharing through their frequent meetings triggered the interest of the researchers. The main activity of the team was field work, specifically sales and marketing. All members of the sales team, numbering 36, participated. There were nine (9) females and twenty-seven (27) males, with an average age of 26 years. The average number of years in service was six (8) years. All had Higher National Diploma in Marketing.

2.3 Procedure

Field work was conducted in all cases. Before we started the research we had a meeting with top management to discuss and approve a case study protocol. As part of the protocol we made an undertaking not to divulge confidential information to any third party without the expressed consent of management. The case study protocol captured the purpose, outline of report, questions, data collection, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. A multi-site case study was researched. This involved a study of the cultural elements exhibited by the sales teams before their outside trips (in the office), during outside trips and after each sales and distribution trips (back to the office).

2.3.1 Order of data collection data collection

For each investigative research question an appropriate data collection system was designed. We started with data collection on knowledge sharing based on participant observation. Naturally this concept was the first choice because of the visible manner in which the sales team conducted their meetings before and after every field trip. The first investigate question, based on an open survey was *why do you share knowledge amongst yourselves?* The structured self administered questionnaires required the respondents to individually list and explain the factors that stimulated their participation in the cultural norm. The exercise was done for about a month. Organization and control was not an issue because so much trustworthiness had existed between the researchers and participants since we started the field. All participants had shown a lot of enthusiasm to be part of the research exercise. Not surprisingly a response rate of 100 percent was chalked.

The open survey was followed by a focus group discussion of the main themes identified in the first open survey exercise. Most anthropologists have acknowledged that focus group discussions is the data collection of choice when one wants to discuss contents of an open survey and also understand why people feel about something (Bernard, 2006 p233) or share a common belief or culture. Thus the focus group discussion was conducted after the open survey for this dual purpose. The goal was to discover the elements of cultural values. There were 4 groups. Each group comprised 9 members. Two of the authors of this article moderated two of the groups whilst some other well trained moderators took over the management of the other two groups. The groups met once every week for over a period of 2 months. On all occasions the meetings were tape recorded in addition to taking down of notes. The recorded sound was transcribed and compared with the notes.

The last bit of data collection for the qualitative study was based on a very sensitive concept of organizational commitment. Organizational commitment is an example of an attitude. We wanted to know whether employees were aligned or committed to the goals of the organization. Different attitudes abound in every organization but we decided to explore organizational attitude because in our estimation it is very important information for organizations because of its link with staff turnover. Data collection method was an open self administered, highly confidential survey. Being a very sensitive concept, the questions were very short (Bernard, 2006 p276). The questions were: Are you happy here? Would you exit the organization? If yes: how

soon? Whether Yes or No, please explain.

For open communication, which was an example of a semantic symbol the data came from the proceedings of the knowledge sharing meetings, team interactions and the focus group discussions. Data collection procedures were a combination of semi-structured interviews and participant observation.

For the quantitative study a bivariate quantitative analysis of the relationship between Trust and EO was employed. The core organizational cultural value of trust was scored against some elements of entrepreneurial orientation: namely, risk-taking, innovativeness, autonomy and proactiveness. For the quantitative variable of trust, the participants were asked to score on a Likert-scale 1-5 whether they “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “neutral”, “agree” or “strongly agree” on items relating to trust originally prepared by Lim et al, (2012). A similar arrangement was made for autonomy, risk-taking, innovativeness and proactiveness; using an adapted Miller et al (1989) validated scale. A non-parametric statistics, Spearman’s Rho was used because of the small sample (Pallant, 2010). We had left competitive aggressiveness because some authors had found multi-collinearity between proactiveness and competitive aggressiveness and had chosen proactiveness (Guller et al, 2009). Pallant (2010) states that where researchers have found a situation in a bivariate correlation of .07 or more, they may need to consider omitting one of the variables. We chose the position as found by these authors.

We chose Trust and left the other elements in line with Hofstede’s (1991) view that the core of culture is formed by values.

2.4 Data analysis

2.4.1 Content analysis

The goal of the research of the research was to test practical application of the theories of OC amongst the sales team. The use of content analysis was thus the obvious choice. We adopted one of the three approaches to qualitative content analysis prescribed by Hsieh and Shannon Bernard (2005). This was the directed content analysis. Bernard (2006 p507) provides the guidance in the use of content analysis which we adapted.

We firstly set aside codes predetermined from the literature. The codes were based on all the concepts involved in the study. The codes showed all the operational definitions for the main concepts and sub-concepts. We then reviewed all the transcripts, and coded them. We categorized them under those that described the predetermined themes and those that did not. The next thing to do was that we looked for subcategories or sub concepts that matched the predetermined themes. For those that did not, we weighted their importance on their impact on the organizational cultural contexts. Where their impact was central we incorporated them into the study; where they were not central we did not. We determined the amount of impact by asking all the respondents to rank all the codes on the basis of very important, important and not important. Initially 29 codes emerged from the data. A second and third round of coding resulted finally into 4 main themes.

2.4.2 Data analytical strategy and techniques

The strategy here was to rely on theoretical propositions as suggested by Yin (2009).

The pattern matching techniques was used. This is the appropriate one when relying on theoretical propositions and also ensured the internal validity of the findings, according to Yin (2009). Logic of reasoning was deductive. Using this mode of reasoning, codes, categories and themes were predetermined, based on theory. Thus codes, categories and themes were imposed on statements made by participants (Yin, 2009). In the study, the pattern of propositions (based on Theory) were matched (compared) with the findings. Where the propositions matched with the findings, it is likely that your theoretically based explanation is appropriate to explain your findings (Yin, 2009). Since the research paradigm was mostly qualitative, both researchers and participants were involved in the interpretations of the findings that were made. Where it became necessary, observation of documents (from secondary sources) was made and compared with other data in order to better understand some of the phenomena.

2.4.3 Use of synthesis matrix

In order to do a critical analysis of past studies on the main concepts, a synthesis matrix was used in the literature review. A unidimensional analysis of the main concepts and sub concepts, showing the definitions made by various authors, was prepared. It was from this that operational definitions were compiled for the coding exercise. The same literature review exercise employed a two-dimensional analysis of related concepts which showed purposes, methodology, findings and conclusions of the various studies. A similar technique was used in the analysis of the primary data collected. In that case “expressions” or ‘quotes” made by the participants were matched against the pre-coded main concepts and sub-concepts for the unidimensional analysis whilst for the two- dimensional analysis the relational “expressions” or “quotes” were put in the grid. This approach made comparisons and contrasting of “expressions” painless. The use of matrix is highly recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994).

2.5 Validity issues

To ensure validity in the data collected and analyses, the following measures were taken.

2.5.1 Triangulation

Some areas of the study were triangulated. The approach to data collection was mixed, involving observation, an open survey and focus group discussions. The approach to data analysis was also mixed, qualitative and quantitative. This ensured credibility of the findings.

2.5.2. Checks from both sides

In order to remove the threat of respondent and interviewer bias, the two parties were involved in the interpretation of the research findings. Whilst harnessing trustworthiness, this approach also ensured transparency in the data findings.

2.5.3 Identification of discrepant and negative cases

Where negative cases arose, such cases were given serious attention and consideration. Where it was felt that such negative cases had a great impact on the findings, the particular area of study affected by the negative cases were subsumed into the research. However, where it was felt that the strength of the negative cases was minimal, they were completely disregarded for this particular research.

2.5.4 Intensive involvement

The researchers had been part of the trips to Accra on every Friday of the week. On each occasion, before, during and after trips, the pattern of behavior had been observed and recorded by the researchers. This went on over a period of three months

2.6 Grounds for hypothesizing trust-EO relationship

Amongst all the concepts derived from the study, Trust was solely tested against EO. The justification was that most authors including Hofstede (2001) have established values (trust in this study) as the core of OC. Akin to the concept of central phenomenon in grounded theory, the central category (in this case trust) is the one around which theory is developed (Creswell, 2007). This study supported the views of the authors. Most of the themes discussed by the participants centered on the concept of trust. We chose EO because the initial OC assessment done by some previous researchers had picked a predominant clan culture followed by an adhocracy culture. Market and hierarchy followed in that order. Thus the firm has some units competing for some values. Variables associated with a clan culture included open communication, team building, human resource training, commitment, empowerment amongst others, whilst variables such as entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation were associated with an adhocracy culture.

2.7 Reliability issues

We adopted Creswell's position (2007, p. 211) on the intercoder agreement process which he had assisted to design. Since we used predetermined codes, we delved straight on to the fifth stage of the process. We asked two members of our faculty to state "yes" or "no" in agreement or disagreement to the themes that we had coded. The coders were guided by the definitions gleaned from the predetermined ones from the literature. Our target was an 80% agreement amongst the authors and the coders, as recommended by Miles and Huberman (1994).

2.8 Ethical issues

A large part under this issue was addressed in the case study protocol. Specifically issues such as confidentiality, honesty, transparency and friendliness formed the ethical guiding principles for the study

3. Results

Under this section we report the results of the key cultural contexts of the sales team, emerging behavior and relationships amongst the key cultural concepts. By so doing we addressed the theoretical propositions. Based on the philosophical ontological assumption taken by qualitative researchers, we show the implications for practice by way of quotes and themes of participants (Creswell, 2009 p. 17) as evidence of the reliability of the results.

3.1 Knowledge sharing and trust

The first variable that we investigated was the cultural norm of knowledge sharing. The open manner in which the sales team assembled in the morning, and late afternoon after their field trips, attracted our foremost attention. The sales team assembled on a daily basis to interact with each other and according to them "share knowledge and experiences gained with the customers". The process of knowledge sharing was done both on and off the field. Off the field (in the office) the sales team was seen taking turns in "lecturing" (in vivo) each other. There was always a question time. Answers to the question why do you share knowledge were very intriguing. The key cultural context as manifested in the coded focus group interview and the coded open survey was trust. Significant statements such as "in my work I am not afraid to seek help from my colleagues in order to acquire knowledge, because they will give me" (benevolent trust), "anytime I apply the knowledge that I acquire from

my team -mates, they work” (competent trust), “most of the time my suggestions are taken, because they eventually work and that is a motivation” (benevolent trust),”I am not afraid to share information because others are also willing to share,. It is give and take matter”. These statements clearly show that the culture of trust was manifest in the working lives of the sales team. This very important element of the culture has been learned and shared by both old and new workers and become entrenched in the sales system so much that a sales person is inclined to believe that s/he could improve her/his affiliation with others by offering knowledge and skills. They also believed that by doing so, they would develop a more positive mind-set towards sharing knowledge. This positive attitude was manifested, by way of an observation, of the sales teams anytime they met for their normal meetings before and after every sales trip. The atmosphere for the meetings was that of congeniality.

3.2. Open communication and trust

Open communication was another behavior that emerged from the element of trust. Through an observation, it was common to hear the sales teams use metaphors such as “marketing guru”, “bill gates” “you are a shark” etc, referring to those that had made some intelligent or valuable contribution during the meetings Such semantic behaviors strengthened the connection between open communication and trust as inferred particularly from two of the statements “I am always challenged to offer something positive because over here they recognize useful contributions and, of course, others will reciprocate because they trust that when they also make contribution, due recognition will be given them” and “over here you are a teacher at one time and a student at the another time. At one time you are admired. At another you admire”. This and similar statements made by other participants supported the link between the two variables.

3.3 Organizational commitment and trust

Organizational commitment was the other element of organizational culture that emerged from trust. The sales teams showed signs of being committed to the realization of the values of trust, cultural norm of knowledge sharing and open communication. These cultural factors have influenced their behavior so much that they would want to remain in the firm. 100 % are happy. 100 % would not like to quit. “After all, I have learned and acquired a lot of skill that I need in my career. I would wish to remain in order to learn more”. “This is more than another qualification in marketing. I need more, where else can I get more? “Other places might not have the kind of people we have here”. “I am not thinking about leaving; otherwise I lose a lot of marketing stuff”.”We are like a family. Except I die, I don’t leave here, to where?” These and other statements showed how the team was committed to the organizational goals and values.

3.4 Intercoder agreement

The inter coder agreement was 85% overall meeting the standards suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994).

3.5 Results of relationship between organisational trust and EO

Table 1 Spearman’s Rho Correlations between organizational trust and EO

	Trust	EO
Trust		
Correlation coefficient	1.00	.581
Significant two tailed		.000
N		36
EO		
Correlation coefficient	.581	1
Significant two tailed		.000
N		36

NOTE: The results show a strong positive correlation between the two variables, $r=.581$, $n=36$, $pp<.0005$

4. Discussions

The research brings together all known records of theories relating to organizational culture. Under this heading we make comments under research and practice implications and also show the research limitations.

4.1 Implications for Research practice

4.1.1 Methodological approach and theoretical insights

The use of a mixed method was used on the grounds that the strengths of the two opposing approaches of

quantitative and qualitative would neutralize their two weaknesses. There are other reasons. As posited by Clark (2010) combining quantitative and qualitative data helps one to develop a more complete understanding of a problem; to develop a balancing picture; to compare, validate, or triangulate results; to provide illustrations of different perspectives for trends; or to scrutinize processes/experiences along with outcomes. Very prominently we were able to triangulate methods of data collection and the findings of the study making it more credible and trustworthy. Therefore the use of a single approach to studying organizational theory in previous studies is criticized here and so calls for further scrutiny.

Another methodical approach which made our work unique was the decision to pick EO against Trust. Before starting this exercise, we used the organizational culture assessment index report prepared by our predecessor researchers. Though not part of the main objective initially, the results led us to pick EO and match it against the core phenomenon of OC, which is Trust, after we picked the sales department as operating under an adhocracy culture. Whilst making us to familiarize ourselves more with the background of the whole organization, this 'opportunistic' move enabled us select a relevant variable for the quantitative study. Therefore that venture paid off.

We started the main business of testing and extending the extending the theory by looking firstly at the cultural norm of knowledge sharing. Creswell (2007, pp 303) used a similar approach by starting with cultural norms to set the stage for a study on social abuse. The cultural norm of knowledge sharing was so transparent amongst the sales team that it was the obvious choice for the first point of investigations. Through the route of knowledge sharing we were able to link trust. From that point, all other variables congregated around this important organizational value. We found this approach as a novelty.

4.1.2. Validating the sufficiency of the findings and extending the theory

We worked with the theories but were able to show adequate evidence to support them through the case study. Most works which used theories would use a quantitative approach. Trust drives knowledge sharing but beyond that we found that semantic behavioral tendencies (open communication) by the use of words such as "you are a guru" "you are a shark" from amongst the sales team was an antecedent factor in making trust drive knowledge sharing further. In the absence of such "spirit of praise" our proposition is that such relationship will cease to exist in no time. As human beings, naturally one needs some form of motivation to share knowledge, especially if it is done so "for free". Those that are being praised will reciprocate with some benevolent gesture. The more the praises flow the higher the reciprocal gesture. In such an atmosphere it is not surprising therefore that organizational commitment is taken for granted. Because staff benefit from knowledge sharing, through the values of trust, and with trust strengthened by open communication they remain glued to the vision, mission and objectives of the organization and therefore are unwilling to leave.

The close association with the participants on and off the field of work provided sufficient evidence of the existing cultural domains. Especially for knowledge sharing the theory worked well amongst the sales teams given the frequency and location in which they shared knowledge. Knowledge sharing was done not only in the offices but also in the field of work during their outings. As the common saying goes "practice makes perfect". One could argue that knowledge sharing will be more effective in the field than in the office because more practical experience and value-added experience would be gained in the field than off the field. In working with the theory we also looked at who were involved in the process of trust and knowledge sharing. Our position is that knowledge will not be shared when "all crew members are captains of the ship". Even though the average number of years was six (8) and all had Higher National Diploma in Marketing, there were some more experienced ones in terms of exposure to field work. The more experienced ones shared knowledge (benevolent trust) and the less experienced ones acquired (competent trust). Our position therefore is that the theory will work better when the composition of a team is varied especially on the basis of experience. It is imperative therefore that management rewards experience. Rewarding and recognizing experience would ensure that new team members gain a shorter learning curve. Especially in a culture of trust which promotes knowledge sharing, this theory will surely work.

Our curiosity to test the element of an advocacy culture amongst the sales team, EO as against the core culture of the organization in a quantitative study was worthwhile. Trust showed a strong correlation with EO. The theory of OC works beyond the use of a singular research paradigm, therefore.

4.1.3 Originality and filling of research gap

This article is original in nature. We went beyond the domains of organizational culture theories by not only introducing new concepts but also adding another pattern of relationship, a quantitative mode, in the whole set up.

The findings also add to the qualitative research paradigms on the link between organizational trust culture and entrepreneurial orientation. It provides a framework which could be tested using a quantitative study to enhance the external validity of the findings and further improve knowledge in the two concepts. In that case a Structural Equation Modeling is recommended.

4.2 Practical implications

4.2.1 The importance of cultural values and norms in an organization

Business organizations can take a cue from this case study. In the case study trust, as a value, took the central role. This had driven knowledge sharing amongst the sales staff. For them sharing of knowledge had become the custom. ‘Knowledge is power’ as the saying goes; however this is a situation where staff did not use knowledge (by hiding) as a tool to gain promotion or recognition but rather share their knowledge freely. Staff felt emotionally safe to share ideas and this had led to a spirit of entrepreneurial orientation, including innovation and creativity. Hence, knowledge sharing was being used as a tool to obtain a competitive edge. For managers, therefore it is of the essence for them to invest in creating a culture that boosts trust relationships.

4.2.2 Knowledge sharing and the Organizational structure

In very large organizations it is difficult to find people who are knowledgeable and also willing to share knowledge about a particular subject. This is even worse in dispersed organizations where staff members are so spread out that they do not have the opportunity to get to know others involved in the same type of work from whom they can share knowledge or learn from others. In such situations it is important that management travel around and acquaint themselves to all members of staff wherever they are located. Management can also create forums for knowledge sharing through information technology systems. Facilitating knowledge sharing in small organizations is not too difficult. However, the problem is that staff members may be reluctant to let others know about their expertise, because they do not believe that their expertise in a certain field is needed or they simply do not want to be attracted to others. What management should do in a small or large organization is that amongst others, they should show leadership by example by demonstrating trust-building behaviors, create a common understanding of how the operations of the business works, reward knowledge sharing and promote an environment in which in which competence- and benevolence-based Trust becomes a central part of an organization’s knowledge management agenda

4.2.3 Research limitations

This research suffers from a few limitations.

Firstly, case studies are specific to firms and so lack the potential to generalize the results just as this study was limited to the specific firm, in spite of its internal validity. Secondly, the number of respondents was not large enough which prompted the researchers to use a non-parametric statistics. Non-parametric statistics lack the level of toughness, especially in detecting differences in groups, as compared to their parametric partners (Pallant, 2010). A wider application of statistical tools could have been utilized if a larger number of respondents had been used.

5. Conclusions

We started this work backed by the motivation to add new knowledge through some methodical approach and theoretical developments into organizational culture. The use of a mixed method approach and the associated strategies and techniques, including the use of pattern matching and synthesis matrix made the research a novelty. Also we extended the theory of organizational culture by not just introducing new perspectives but also explaining why the new perspectives added to new knowledge. We have been able to answer the research questions we outlined earlier in this paper, as the results show. The actual data we obtained matched the theoretical propositions that we made. The main finding was the fact that trust is a potential organizational value, for success.

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