

Organizational Culture: Creating the Influence Needed for Strategic Success in Health Care Organizations in Nigeria

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Abstract

Just as individuals have personalities, so, too, do health care organizations in Nigeria. In recent times, a great deal of attention has been given to the importance of organizational culture. This is because the importance of culture to any group of people, society, country and business organization cannot be over emphasized. As people work together to accomplish goals, groups develop into organizations. As goals become more specific and longer so do team and work become more specialized, organizations become both formal and institutionalized. Organizations tend to take a life of their own and widely held beliefs, values and practices develop, differentiating one organization from another and often affecting the organizations success or failure.

Keywords: Culture, health care, organization, and productivity

INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture comprises the attitudes, experience, beliefs and values of an organization. Black (2003) defined organizational culture as a specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organization and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization. Organizational values are beliefs and ideas about what kind of goals members of an organization should pursue and ideas about the appropriate kind or standards of behaviour organizational members should use to achieve these goals. An organization's culture embraces all the life experiences each employer brings to the organization. Culture is especially influenced by the organization's founder, executives and other managerial staff because of their role in decision making and strategic direction. Organizational culture according to Donovan (2006) is represented in a group such as language, decision making, symbols, stories and legends, and daily work practices. A company's bulletin board content, the company's newsletter, the interaction of employees in meetings and the way in which people collaborate, speak volumes about an organization's culture. The type of organizational culture put in place will surely affect the performance of the organization. As stated by Schein (2000), culture is the most difficult organizational attributes to change, outlasting organizational products, services, founders and leadership and all other physical attributes of the organization. This organization culture will definitely affect the performance of the firm. It is against this backdrop that this paper intends to examine the impact of organizational culture on corporate health care performance.

DEFINING ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Robbins (2004), there seems to be wide agreement that organizational culture refers to a system of shared meaning held by members that distinguishes the organization from other organizations. This system of shared meaning is, on closer examination, a set of key characteristics that the organization values. Recent research suggests that seven primary characteristics, in aggregate, capture the essence of an organization's culture.

1. **Innovation and risk taking:** The degree to which employees are encouraged to innovative and to take risks.
2. **Attention to detail:** The degree to which employees are expected to exhibit precision, analysis, and attention to detail.
3. **Outcome orientation:** The degree to which management focuses on results or outcomes rather than on the techniques and processes used to achieve those outcomes
4. **People orientation:** The degree to which management decisions take into consideration the effect of outcomes on people within the organization.
5. **Team orientation:** The degree to which work activities are organized around teams rather than individuals.
6. **Aggressiveness:** The degree to which people are aggressive and competitive rather than easygoing.
7. **Stability:** The degree to which organizational activities emphasize maintaining the status quo in contrast to growth.

Each of these characteristics exists on a continuum from low to high. Appraising the organization on these seven characteristics, then, gives a composite picture of the organization's culture. This picture becomes the basis for feelings of shared understanding that members have about the organization, how things are done in it, and the way members are supposed to behave (Scaffold, 2010).

Do Organizations Have Uniform Cultures?

Organizational culture represents a common perception held by the organizations members. This feature was made explicit when we defined culture as a system of shared meaning. We should expect, therefore, that individuals with different backgrounds or at different levels in the organization will tend to describe the organization's culture in similar terms. Acknowledgment that organizational culture has common properties doesn't mean, however, that there can't be subcultures within any given culture. Most large organizations have a dominant culture and numerous sets of subcultures. A dominant culture expresses the core values that are shared by a majority of the organization's members. When we talk about an organization's culture, we are referring to its dominant culture. It is this macro view of culture that gives an organization its distinct personality. Subcultures tend to develop in large organizations to reflect common problems, situations, or experiences that members face. These subcultures are likely to be defined by department designations and geographical separation. The accounting department, for example, can have a subculture that is uniquely shared by members of that department. It will include the core values of the dominant culture plus additional values unique to members of the accounting department. Similarly an office or unit of the organization that is physically separated from the organization's main operations may take on a different personality. Again, the core values are essentially retained but are modified to reflect the separated unit's distinct situation (Nwachukwu, 1988).

If organizations had no dominant culture and were composed only of numerous subcultures, the value of organizational culture as a predictive variable would be significantly lessened. Why? Because there would be no uniform interpretation of what represented appropriate or inappropriate behavior. It is the shared meaning aspect of culture that makes it such a potent device for guiding and shaping behavior.

Strong versus Weak Cultures

It has become increasingly popular to differentiate between strong and weak cultures. The argument is that strong cultures have a greater impact on employee behavior and are more directly related to reduced turnover (Deal, 2011)

A strong culture is characterized by the organization's core values being both intensely held and widely shared. The more members who accept the core values and the greater their commitment to those values, the stronger the culture is. In contrast, a weak culture is characterized by vagueness, ambiguity, and/or inconsistencies. Consistent with our definition, a strong culture will have a greater influence on the behavior of its members because the high degree of shrewdness intensity creates an internal climate of high behavioral control. One specific result of a strong culture should be employee turnover. Anoa (2010) believes that a strong culture demonstrates high agreement among members about what the organization stands for. Such harmony of purpose builds cohesiveness, loyalty, and organizational commitment. These qualities, in turn, lessen employees' propensity to leave the organization (Hill & Jones, 2001).

WHAT DOES CULTURE DO?

We've alluded to organizational culture's impact on behavior. We've also explicitly argued that a strong culture should be associated with reduced turnover. In this section, we more carefully review the functions that culture performs and assess whether culture can be a liability for an organization.

Culture's Functions

Culture performs several functions within an organization. First, it has a boundary defining role; that is, it creates distinctions between one organization and others. Second, it conveys a sense of identity for organization members. Third, culture facilitates the generation of commitment to something larger than one's individual self-interest. Fourth, it enhances social system stability. Culture is the social glue that helps hold the organization together by providing appropriate standards for what employees should say and do. Finally, culture serves as a sense-making and control mechanism that guides and shapes the attitudes and behavior of employees. As the following definition makes clear Donovan(2006), culture defines the rules of the game. Culture by definition is elusive, intangible, implicit, and taken for granted. But every organization develops a core set of assumptions, understandings, and implicit rules that govern day-to-day behavior in the workplace until newcomers learn the rules, they are not accepted as full-fledged members of the organization (Handy, 2009)

Transgressions of the rules on the part of high-level executives or front-line employees result in universal disapproval and powerful penalties. Conformity to the rules becomes the primary basis for reward and upward mobility. As we show later, who is offered a job, who is appraised as a high performer, and who gets a promotion are strongly influenced by the individual – organization fit, that is, whether the applicant or employee's attitudes and behavior are compatible with the culture. It is not a coincidence that employees at Disney theme parks appear to be almost universally attractive, clean, and wholesome, with bright smiles. That's the image Disney seeks. The company selects employees who will maintain that image. And both the informal norms and formal rules and regulations ensure that Disney theme park employees will act in a relatively uniform

and predictable way (Gomez-Mejia & Balkin, 2002).

CREATING AND SUSTAINING CULTURE

An organization's culture doesn't pop out of thin air. Once established, it rarely fades away. What forces influence the creation of a culture? What reinforces and sustains those forces once they are in place?

How a Culture Begins

An organization's current customs, traditions, and general way of doing things are largely due to what it has done before and the degree of success it had with those endeavors. So the ultimate source of an organization's culture is its founders. The founders of an organization traditionally have a major impact in establishing the early culture. They have a vision of what the organization should be. Chatman & Jehn (2004), opined that they are unconstrained by previous customs for doing things or by previous ideologies. The small size that typically characterizes any new organization further facilitates the founders' imposing their vision on all organizational members. Because the founders have the original idea, they also typically have biases on how to get the idea fulfilled. The organization's culture results from the interaction between the founders' biases and assumptions and what the original members learn subsequently from their own experiences (Hofstede, 2012)

The Source of Culture

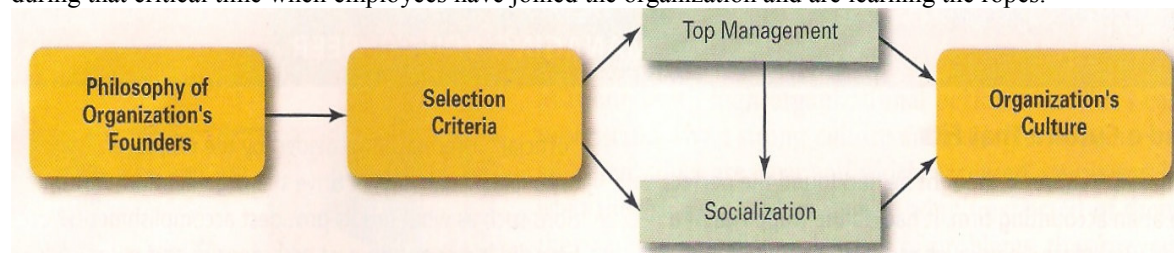
An organization's current customs, traditions, and general way of doing things are largely due to what it has done before and the degree of success it has had with those endeavors. The original source of an organization's culture usually reflects the vision or mission of the organization's founders. Their focus might be aggressiveness or it might be treating employees as family. The founders establish the early culture by projecting an image of what the organization should be. They're not constrained by previous customs or approaches. And the small size of most new organizations helps the founders instill their vision in all organizational members.

How an Organization's Culture Continues

Once a culture is in place, certain organizational practices help maintain it. For instance, during the employee selection process, managers typically judge job candidates not only on the requirements of the job, but also on how well they might fit into the organization. At the same time, job candidates find out information about the organization and determine whether or not they are comfortable with what they see. The actions of top executives also have a major impact on the organization's culture. Baridam ('1990), through what they say and how they behave, top-level managers establish norms that filter down through the organization. This can have a positive effect on employees' willingness to take risks or to provide exceptional customer service. Finally, an organization must help employees adapt to its culture through a process called socialization. Through the socialization process, new employees learn the organization's way of doing things. For instance, all new employees at Starbucks, the global specialty coffee retailer, go through 24 hours of training. Classes are offered on everything necessary to turn new employees into brewing consultants. They learn the Starbucks philosophy, the company jargon, and even how to help customers make decisions about beans, grind, and espresso machines. The result is employees who understand Starbucks' culture and who project an enthusiastic and knowledgeable interface with customers (Black, 2003).

Another benefit of socialization is that because new employees are unfamiliar with the organization's culture, there is the possibility that they might disrupt the beliefs and customs that are in place. The socialization process can minimize the chance of this happening (Johnson, 2011)

Kreitner & Kinicki (2006), argues that the original culture is derived from the founder's philosophy. This, in turn, strongly influences the criteria used in hiring. The actions of the current top managers set the general expectations as to what is acceptable behavior and what is not. Socialization processes, if successful, will match new employees' values to those of the organization during the selection process and provide support during that critical time when employees have joined the organization and are learning the ropes.



How an Organization's Culture is Established and Maintained

How Employees Learn Culture

Culture is transmitted to employees in a number of ways. The most significant are stories, rituals, material symbols, and language.

Stories: Organizational "stories" typically contain a narrative of significant events people, including such things as the organization's founders, rule breaking, reaction to past mistakes, and so forth. For instance, managers at Nike feel that stories told about the company's past help shape the future. Whenever possible, corporate "story-tellers" (senior executives) explain the company's heritage and tell stories that celebrate people getting things done. **Rituals:** Corporate rituals are repetitive sequences of activities that express and reinforce the values of the organization, what goals are most important, and which people are important. One of the best-known corporate rituals is Mary Kay Cosmetics' annual awards ceremony for its sales representatives. Looking like a cross between a circus and a Miss America pageant, the ceremony takes place in a large auditorium, on a stage in front of a large, cheering audience, with all the participants dressed in glamorous evening clothes. Salespeople are rewarded for their success in achieving sales goals with an array of flashy gifts including gold and diamond pins, furs, and pink Cadillac. This "show" acts as a motivator by publicly acknowledging outstanding sales performance (Meek, 2013).

Material Symbols: When you walk into different businesses, do you get a "feel" for the place - formal, casual, fun, serious, and so forth? These feelings you get demonstrate the power of material symbols in creating an organization's personality. The layout of an organization's facilities, how employees dress, the types of automobiles provided to top executives, and the availability of corporate aircraft are examples of material symbols. Others include the size of offices, the elegance of furnishings, executive "perks" (extra "goodies" provided to managers such as health club memberships, use of company-owned resort facilities, and so forth), the existence of employee lounges or on-site dining facilities, and reserved parking spaces for certain employees (Kreitner, 2011).

Language: Many organizations and units within organizations use language as a way to identify members of a culture. By learning this language, members attest to their acceptance of the culture and their willingness to help preserve it.

SUMMARY

The culture of any organization goes a long way in determining its performance outcome. Increased productivity and efficiency is achieved when the core values of the organization is strongly believed by large number of people in the organization because they get committed to the objectives of the organization which is reflected in the way and manner in which they speak or brag about the special attributes of the organization. Thus it was hypothesized that organizational culture has a significant impact on organizational performance and members' sense of identity.

CONCLUSION

1. Increased productivity is achieved when organizations create clear objectives for members; this is mostly found in organizations with strong culture.
2. The characteristics of culture is embedded in performance (whether individual or corporate performance), and vice versa.
3. The three tiers of management respond positively to changes from an existing culture. But lower level personnel tend to respond faster.
4. The culture of an organization shapes members sense of identity; this is often reflected by way of dress code, interaction with other employees, customers, and outsiders within and outside the organization.
5. Organizational culture clarifies and reinforces standards of behaviour.

Organizational culture has a significant impact on corporate performance such that the one affects the other. The need for a desired level of performance can be determined by the changes embarked upon from the existing culture. The three tiers of management Top, middle, and lower level managers tends to respond most to those changes that encourages purposefulness, innovativeness, persistence and risk taking as it is a boost towards commitment to the firms values in order to achieve organizational set objectives. An organizations culture speaks volume of its personality. An organization is not considered or regarded as one that has a strong culture by physical structures, but in the believe a great majority of organizational members have on its core values this tends to increase behaviour consistencies and reduce turnover.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our research in the course of this paper, we recommend the followings:

- a.) Executives of Nigerian firms should take cognizance of the importance of organizational culture and being sensitive to the needs of employees at every given time in order to gain employee commitment so

- as to achieve organizational set goals.
- b.) Organizations should encourage creativity and innovative attitude to allow room for new ideas and ways of doing things.
 - c.) Organizations with strong cultures should give room for little flexibility in order to accommodate changes that may occur to meet up with environmental changes and technological advancements.
 - d.) Regularly carry out training and development programs that are geared towards employee efficiency so as to achieve increased productivity.
 - e.) Improve on the communication skill of the organization to avoid countercultures where subcultures exist.
 - f.) Changes from an existing culture should be well communicated to organizational members. More importantly management executives who just arrived in an organization should have a detailed understanding of the existing culture before initiating new ones. This will avoid resistance within the organization.

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