



The Effect of Organizational Culture on Employee Flourishing in the Workplace

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Abstract

Culture is a concept that has existed for centuries and serves as the driving force behind every organization. It is what identifies a group of people or an organization, and it cannot exist in isolation. Culture determines how an organization can flourish and thrive within its ecosystem. Culture is dynamic and can be transmitted to others (Northouse, 2013). A kingdom culture is centered on the teachings and examples of Christ. It is built on ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership. Kingdom culture promotes an environment where employees are encouraged to uphold the organization's moral values when performing their duties. It focuses on glorifying God in every aspect of its operations while promoting employee well-being. An organization's leaders are an integral part of its culture. Leaders initiate the process of culture creation within their organization. Leaders who understand organizational culture can interpret employee behaviors and cultivate a thriving environment, leading to long-term success. This paper discusses the importance of culture in an organization and its effect on performance and long-term effectiveness. It highlights the impact of an organization's leadership in creating culture, as well as the power of culture in shaping the trajectory of an organization. Furthermore, the text explores the influence of an organization's culture on its employees and how leaders can employ principles of kingdom business culture, such as ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership to positively impact the organization and contribute to the well-being of its employees.

Keywords: organization, culture, employee flourishing, leadership

Introduction

Understanding Culture

The world is a rich and colorful tapestry of people from different ethnic backgrounds, with diverse values, beliefs, and mindsets. These attributes create culture, the fulcrum on which the world spins. Culture can be described as a distinctive behavior or characteristic of a group of people or organization. It is the “way of life, customs, and script of a group of people” (Northouse, 2013, p. 384). All over the world people proudly identify with their culture and would do anything to defend it. There are several schools of thought on culture; however, the central theme highlights how people behave in a group.

Schein (2010) posited that culture is a powerful phenomenon that describes the foundation of the social order that people live in and the rules that govern them. It is the collective programming of the mind that differentiates members of one group from another (Hofstede et al., 2010). Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined *culture* as the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterize an institution or organization. “Culture is an abstraction, yet the forces that are created in social and organizational situations deriving from culture are powerful” (Schein, 2010, p. 7). Cultures have the power to create great things and also blindly destroy things that do not fit (Mhanna, 2017).

People are not born with an innate culture; rather, they learn and eventually adapt to the culture of the group to which they were born (Hofstede et al., 2010). Culture is constantly reenacted and created by interactions among people and shaped by their behavior (Schein, 2010). Culture is an integral part of any entity or group, so it is important to have a clear understanding of the fundamental impact of culture.

Just as culture is associated with human groups, it can also be associated with organizations, which are entities made up of different groups. Culture is a powerful force that operates within an organization and is intertwined with its day-to-day activities (Schein, 2010). Culture is pervasive and influences all aspects of how an organization deals with its primary task, various environments, and internal operations (Schein, 2010). An organization’s culture is the fuel that keeps it running; therefore, it is necessary for organizations to consistently assess and review their culture to determine the best way forward.

Organizational Culture

The culture of an organization is essential for its existence. Understanding how it works is crucial to its success or failure. An organization’s culture reflects how things are done internally, encompassing “values, beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, norms, mission

statements, goals, personal interests, behaviors, and management styles” (Witt et al., 2015, p. 114).

Culture is deeply rooted in the core of the organization and is continuously being passed on to its members. It communicates the unspoken rules and practices of the group to both existing and new members. Cultural values are underlying assumptions that may be hard to express, even for those familiar with the culture (Caligiuri, 2012). New members, in their attempt to assimilate into a group, adopt the culture and begin to demonstrate the same behaviors as the rest of the group, whether positive or negative.

An organization’s culture is created based on the beliefs, values, and assumptions of its founder, the learning experiences of group members as the organization evolves, as well as new beliefs, values, and assumptions brought in by new members and leaders (Schein, 2010). Culture is the DNA of an organization and cannot be easily separated from it. Changing an organization’s culture is complex and requires detailed planning and commitment from all stakeholders (Schein, 2010). Culture has a powerful effect on the performance and long-term effectiveness of organizations, and leadership within an organization must understand the intricacies of culture and how it ties into its corporate structure (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). This could help in major decision making and actions that impact the ecosystem of the organization – employees, customers, products, and brands.

Types of Organizational Culture

According to Cameron and Quinn (2011), almost all organizations develop a dominant type of organizational culture that enables the organization to become more consistent, stable, adaptable, and flexible in dealing with its rapidly changing environment. The four dominant cultures that exist in an organization are clan, hierarchy, adhocracy, and market cultures (Cameron & Quinn, 2011).

The clan culture is a family-type organizational culture that focuses on shared values and goals, cohesion, participation, and collaboration and encourages teamwork, employee involvement programs, and corporate commitment to employees (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The Adhocracy culture is “dynamic and entrepreneurial, with a focus on risk-taking, innovation, and doing things first” (“4 Types of Organizational Culture,” 2013). The hierarchy organizational culture is characterized by a formal, controlled, and structured work environment where employees are governed by procedures and rule enforcement (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). The market-oriented culture is results-oriented, with a focus on competition, achievement, and getting the job done (“4 Types of Organizational Culture,” 2013).

Organizations are constantly evolving, and their culture changes over time. In the earliest stages of the organizational life cycle, organizations tend to display an adhocracy culture characterized by entrepreneurship and move towards the clan culture as they develop (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). As the organization grows, it begins to emphasize and shift to the hierarchy culture, which is eventually supplemented by a focus on the market culture (Cameron & Quinn, 2011). At every point, “the right culture will be one that closely fits the direction and strategy of a particular organization as it confronts its own issues and the challenges of a particular time” (“4 Types of Organizational Culture,” 2013).

Who Determines the Culture Within an Organization

An organization is formed when one or more individuals perceive that they can use the coordinated and concerted action of a group of people to accomplish goals that individual action cannot (Schein, 2010). As an organization evolves, it creates its own culture; developing that culture is a journey that requires adequate preparation (Gostick & Elton, 2012; Schein, 2010). Organizational culture is developed through the constant interaction and communication between its leadership and members (Hackman & Johnson, 2013). “Culture is the behavior that results when a group arrives at a set of generally unspoken and unwritten rules for how they will work together” (Heathfield, 2020, 2: What Makes Up Your Culture?).

An organization’s culture is typically created unconsciously based on the values, beliefs, behaviors, underlying assumptions of its founder and leadership, and the learning experiences of group members as the organization evolves (Jerom, 2013; Schein, 2010). The organization’s founder’s philosophy and leadership play a significant role in setting its culture (Robbins & Judge, 2009).

Founders have their own well-articulated theories about how the groups should work, they choose the basic mission and the environmental context in which the group operates, and they select group members who they think would align with their values and beliefs as colleagues and subordinates, thereby shaping the kinds of response that the group will make to succeed in its environment and to integrate itself (Schein, 2010). “When a group identifies that a particular culture is undermining its performance in the competitive market, the organizational leaders and the founders of the organization will normally review the culture and initiate change” (Jerom, 2013).

The Role of Leadership in Culture

Leadership and culture are two complex phenomena with several dimensions. Culture and leadership cannot be separated mainly because leaders initiate the process of culture creation when they create groups and organizations. After a culture is

established, the leaders must determine the criteria for leadership and select those who will lead within the organization.

“If the elements of a culture become dysfunctional, it is the unique function of leadership to perceive the functional and dysfunctional elements of the existing culture and to manage cultural evolution and change in such a way that the group can survive in a changing environment” (Schein, 2010, p. 22). To effectively manage culture, leaders must have an in-depth understanding of their organization’s culture.

Challenges of Managing Culture Within an Organization

According to Giscombe (2011), “an important aspect of navigating an organization is knowing its culture which is the unwritten rules, or implicitly communicated workplace norms and behaviors that are necessary to succeed within an organization.” The way an organization’s leaders and followers think, feel, and act as they solve problems that arise is determined by the existing culture (Hofstede et al., 2010). A good culture opens the door to innovative solutions. Unfortunately, most organizations are “unaware of their culture until it is challenged, experience a new culture, or made overt and explicit” (Cameron & Quinn, 2011, p. 19).

Organizational leaders must thoroughly know and understand their culture and ensure that it is consistent across the whole organization (Allen, n.d.). The culture must align with business strategy, company goals, and objectives, as well as the company brand; it must create the desired environment for employees to thrive (Allen, n.d.).

Want (2003) discussed that for a corporate culture to work, organizations must focus on closing the gap between business and culture planning. They must create a corporate culture that embraces change and builds a broad consensus for culture change at all levels of the organization (Want, 2003). They must take risks, break down the bureaucratic mindset through empowerment and alternative performance standards that promote innovation, invest in leadership development at all levels, and empower people to lead the change process (Want, 2003).

What Makes a Good Workplace Culture

According to Burchell and Robin (2011), a great workplace has a culture where employees trust their organization and leaders, take pride in what they do, and enjoy the people they work with. Freedman (2014) highlighted that great companies create experiences that make the workplace unique, communicate the organization’s priorities, demonstrate leadership competence, and invest in engaging their employees. For a workplace to be great, there must be a total mind shift of everyone in the organization (Burchell & Robin, 2011). When organizations encourage shared activities that promote interaction, they foster great camaraderie, leading to long-lasting workplace

relationships (Freedman, 2014). These types of environments set the stage for employee flourishing.

Leaders play a critical role in creating a great workplace and have the final authority and say in what makes a workplace stand out. In the best companies, leaders at all levels have a strong commitment to establishing strong ties between the organization and employees, enhancing trust and camaraderie in the workplace (Burchell & Robin, 2011).

Employees are a crucial part of an organization, and it is necessary that they feel valued in their work environment. Organizations must always prioritize their employees and invest in their total well-being. A toxic culture creates a lot of tension, resentment, burnout, and low morale among employees and could eventually derail the organization. A thriving workplace enhances job satisfaction and happiness, while minimizing stress and emotional exhaustion (Young, 2023). To enhance employee performance, an organization must foster a healthy and collaborative environment that prioritizes the physical, emotional, and social well-being of its employees (Gostick & Elton, 2012).

Employee Flourishing in the Workplace

Leaders often have a different perception of their organization's culture than employees do; this gap negatively affects employee engagement, productivity, and innovation, ultimately resulting in higher turnover rates (Warner, 2024). This disparity can be reduced if leaders promote a productive culture where employees can thrive and flourish. Employee flourishing is the ability of an employee to thrive within a group or organization. Flourishing focuses on the optimal state of human functioning where individuals are at their very best in terms of well-being, performance, or character (Young, 2023).

Forward-thinking leaders focus on creating supportive workplaces that speak to employees' fundamental human needs: to have authentic connections, meaningful work, achievement, and moments of positive emotions such as awe, gratitude, and joy that energize and rejuvenate the employees (Young, 2023).

Kingdom Culture

Kingdom culture "is a worldview approach to life where Christian biblical principles help to build or determine one's values, purpose, and strategies" (Lloyd, 2024). It emphasizes the life, leadership, and teachings of Christ who was focused on individuals, scripture, purpose, and himself (Engstrom, 1976, pp. 41-42). Kingdom culture embodies "principles, truths, and wisdom to advance the Kingdom of God on earth, under the revelation of Jesus Christ as the King of the kingdom" (Lloyd, 2024).

According to Bishop (2013), man was created with God's DNA and automatically inherited God-given attributes and values. Unfortunately, humanity lost some of these divine attributes and values after the fall of man. However, reconciliation through Jesus Christ makes these God-given attributes and values available to those who will receive them. Kingdom culture upholds a much higher ethical approach to life (Lloyd, 2024) and requires a conscious mindset to apply its principles. These principles include ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership.

Kingdom Business Principles

In today's society, where morals are declining, it is crucial to understand the significance of values and how they influence and shape the lives of people and organizations. Values are an integral part of people's identity; people cannot separate themselves from their values (Hultman & Gellerman, 2002).

An organization's culture reflects its values and core belief system. Leaders must ensure these values are communicated to all employees. According to Warner (2024), employees value and engage with leaders who are trustworthy and genuine. In today's business environment, a business-as-usual mindset is no longer effective for running an organization, and leaders require a higher standard of accountability, integrity, trust, and honesty. Organizations must find innovative ways to create a work environment that promotes employee flourishing.

One innovative area that leaders can explore is kingdom culture where they can apply kingdom values and principles in their leadership style. "Applying kingdom principles in an organization does not contradict sound business management practices but rather adds a new dimension to management principles" (Lloyd, 2024). Companies like Chick-fil-A and Hobby Lobby have successfully applied these principles in their business and continuously lead in their industries. Leaders who demonstrate Christ-like values and principles could create a healthy and thriving work environment where employees flourish. Some key principles that contribute to employee well-being include ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership.

Ethical Values

According to Ciulla (2014), ethics is the ability to differentiate between right and wrong, or good and evil, as it pertains to the actions, choices, and characters of human beings. Whether positive or negative, one's character plays a significant role in determining ethical behavior. Ethics becomes more intriguing when viewed from a cultural perspective. Culture influences and shapes human behavior. What may seem unethical in one culture could be considered ethical in another. Kingdom culture does not accommodate situational ethics; godly principles do not change based on culture or accepted practices (Hillman, 2024).

Corporate culture often dictates business conduct, and employees inherit whatever the accepted practice is even though it may be unethical (Hillman,2024). In a kingdom culture, employees should not be under pressure to do things that contradict their values and the general standards and code of ethics of the organization. Organizations must therefore create environments that nurture ethics and allow employees to bring their authentic selves to work. Employees should not feel the need to adopt a different persona to fit in, as this can lead to frustration and prevent them from performing at their best.

Organizations should create an environment where employees can question things without being penalized. This could prevent a whistleblower situation and scandals for the organization. Organizations must therefore promote character development and ethical behavior by creating an environment of integrity, transparency, and honesty.

Integrity

Integrity is becoming an important quality in leadership today. *Integrity* is the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles (*Oxford English Dictionary*, n.d.). Leaders continue to face increased challenges with integrity and must make it a priority if they want to establish trust and credibility with their employees. There have been scandals within organizations where leaders have excelled in their craft but failed the morality test. These scandals have impacted the level of trust in leadership. Employees are looking for leaders with integrity who are dependable and trustworthy and can provide solutions to pressing issues without compromise. Leaders can improve their level of integrity by developing character, setting boundaries, and adhering to them. A culture that focuses on integrity and builds a trusting relationship between leadership and employees enhances employee productivity and engagement.

Transparency

Transparency is essential for creating a constructive and high-performance culture (Moore, 2023). A transparent environment allows leaders to be upfront in their communication and to provide honest feedback. Leaders are unbiased and treat employees fairly and without discrimination. “A transparent workplace promotes consistent conversations between managers and employers with honest discussions about goals, objectives, and performance” (Rahaman,2023, 1: How Does Transparency Affect Organizational Performance?). It creates a “safe environment where employees can comfortably share their thoughts and concerns, without fear of retribution, fostering a culture of transparency and responsibility” (Warner, 2024, 1: Establish Open Communication). Encouraging transparency within the workplace promotes employee flourishing.

Honesty

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined *honesty* as adherence to the facts, fairness, straightforwardness of conduct, and a refusal to lie or deceive in any way. A kingdom culture must be based on honesty. This is highlighted in Matthew 5:37a, which specifically encourages the listener to be truthful in their communication. Leaders must be honest in all transactions and dealings with employees. They must avoid evasive responses that mislead or deceive employees. A culture of dishonesty and lies destroys trust and lowers employee morale, which impacts productivity. Embracing a culture of radical honesty improves decision making (Schaap, 2024) and creates an atmosphere of employee flourishing.

Empathy

Empathy is the ability to be sensitive to the needs of others and provide assistance when necessary. Empathy is often lacking in many highly competitive corporate cultures. Most organizations foster a culture of self-interest, where individuals strive to outshine their colleagues. Organizations must nurture a culture of empathy where leaders and employees can interpret the needs of each other and provide support. Leaders must show they care about the total well-being of employees. They should not only give instructions and commands but must be present, seek feedback, and be involved in the welfare of employees. They must be authentic, ask genuine questions, understand employee experiences, and discern employee mood to know their issues and needs. More informed and empathetic decision making will foster an environment where every team member feels valued and motivated which significantly enhances engagement and accountability (Warner, 2024).

Trust

Trust is sensitive and very difficult to build and must be held in high regard. A lot of effort is required to rebuild a broken trust relationship, and it is often nearly impossible to regain the original level of trust. Trust creates a safe place where employees can be themselves and promotes creativity and innovation. Trust is a powerful multiplier that greatly increases a team's productivity, adding real value to the organization (Feltman, 2019). Employees will only trust leaders who are committed and take full responsibility for their actions (Mostovicz et al., 2011). To build trust leaders must be good listeners, truthful, consistent, and honest. Ensuring confidentiality, showing appreciation for employee input, and taking action based on lessons learned from employee interactions are key to creating a high-trust atmosphere (Warner, 2024).

Servant Leadership

In Matthew 23:11-12, Jesus defined leadership as a service to others and he practiced that leadership style throughout his ministry. In contemporary times, servant leaders can be described as selfless and having a strong desire to serve others (Engstrom, 1976, p. 37).

Servant leaders serve others, empathize with them, are selfless, are organized, act as mentors, empower followers, and lead by example. According to Jaramillo et al. (2015), servant leaders act in the best interest of followers by prioritizing their individual growth and development. These actions result in higher levels of organizational commitment by followers. Servant leaders abide by principles of honesty and integrity, have high ethical standards, and always encourage an ethical organizational climate. When the interactions between leaders and followers are constant and direct, the leader's honesty, reliability, and trustworthiness can be directly manifested by the leader and assessed by close followers.

A servant leader brings order in a chaotic situation by identifying the root cause and providing a solution. When followers are lacking in some areas, a servant leader would normally spend time with them to develop them. The servant leader would provide mentoring and training opportunities for followers to help them in their growth and development. Another characteristic of servant leadership is to empower followers by listening, taking ideas and suggestions from them, and allowing them to be part of the decision-making process (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, pp. 18-19).

Servant leaders have a sense of ownership within an organization. They treat the organization as their own and are always looking for ways to minimize overhead costs without depriving followers of the basic tools needed to do their work. Servant leadership always considers followers first, empowers them, and draws out their full potential and capabilities. Organizations that promote a culture of servant leadership allow employees the opportunity to exemplify and replicate a character of service and ownership. When people have a sense of ownership, they tend to be effective and productive. They give their best to ensure that their organization succeeds. This creates a level of pride and accomplishment that enhances flourishing in all areas of their lives.

Conclusion

An organization's success has little to do with market forces, competitive positioning, and resource advantages; rather, it is based on its values, personal values, and vision (Cameron & Quinn, 2011) that drive the organizational culture. Successful cultures build high-purpose environments that are "filled with small, vivid signals designed to create a link between the present moment and the future ideal" (Coyle, 2018, p. 180). The major distinguishing feature in the success of companies is their organizational

culture. Corporate culture is often perceived as vague and disconnected from business performance, leading many companies to avoid measuring, managing, or developing their cultures (Want, 2003). To be successful, organizations must develop a transparent culture that values employees and encourages employee well-being.

Organizational leaders must understand the significant role they play in establishing culture. They must constantly find ways to nurture a good environment for employees to flourish. When employee well-being is properly established, there is room for creativity and innovation leading to long-term success and profitability for the organization. Leaders can create a workplace culture that promotes employee flourishing by prioritizing kingdom principles and values such as ethical values, integrity, transparency, honesty, empathy, trust, and servant leadership. By being accountable themselves, “leaders can create a ripple effect that shapes the entire organizational culture” (Warner, 2024, 2: Key Traits of Effective Leadership). When employees are engaged, they not only give back to their organizations but also to their communities, which promotes flourishing in society and inevitably glorifies God.

Author’s Biography

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