Building A Foundation For Engagement: The Role Of Culture In The Formative Phase

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Abstract

The effectiveness of an organization's workforce has an impact on its success. People from various backgrounds come together in an organization as a social unit to work toward a clearly defined objective. Individuals enter the organization with varying ideals, beliefs, and methods of operation. There is need for understanding on how organizational culture, employee engagement, and employee performance are related in NGOs at the foundational phase. The study adopted a case study approach and the findings of the study established that different culture types exist in the organization and affects employee engagement. On organizational culture, the study revealed that hierarchical culture is the most dominant culture followed by market and clan culture. Adhocracy culture exists but at a small extent compared to the latter mentioned cultures. The findings revealed that 67% of employees in indicated they were highly engaged and indicated that employee engagement dimensions existed with varying degrees such as vigor dimension at 67%, dedication dimension 100% and absorption dimension at 41.7%. According to the study's findings, organizational culture (hierarchical) significantly and positively influences employee engagement, $\beta = 0.816$, t(12) = 3.611, p < .01. This suggests that the organization is dependent on established rules. The study advocates for periodic assessments of their culture practices and how they impact on engagement and recommend embracing a clan culture, which can promote a more collaborative work environment and enhance the NGO's capacity for increased productivity.

Keywords: Organizational Culture, Employee Engagement, Non-governmental Organization

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I. Introduction

Organizational culture is the most important managerial resource that helps to increase the company's capitalization and competitiveness in the market, its reputation, and its performance (Zarnadze & Kasradze, 2020). Organizational culture is the most important tool for regulating interaction in a group, a lever for increasing the efficiency and productivity of its members(Zarnadze & Kasradze, 2020). Organizational culture is a system of norms, rules, traditions, and values existing in the organization accepted and shared by members of the organization(Zarnadze & Kasradze, 2020).

Understanding the dynamics of organizational culture is important because culture defines how individuals behave and determines how results are achieved within an organization. Accordingly, this paper approached organizational culture as a direct higher-level predictor of employee engagement, where the relationship between different culture types and employee engagement and their performance is investigated. More specifically, organizational culture and work engagement were investigated under the assumption that different culture types have differing effects on the work engagement of employees.

The internal environment of the organization, where employees work and produce desired results, is significantly influenced by organizational culture (Akpa, Asikhia, & Nneji, 2021). Corporate culture has a major impact on an organization's long-term financial performance (Ali, Said, Abdullah & Daud, 2017). High-performing cultures are a source of long-term competitive advantage in business because they are distinctive and challenging to imitate (Fareed, Noor, Isa, & Salleh, 2016). Significant performance issues, however, have also been linked to a number of organizational culture flaws (Ali et al., 2021).

The ongoing rise in performance expectations for contemporary businesses due to intense worldwide competition, evaluating and developing organizational culture is crucial. According to Siddique (2019), organizational culture has a beneficial impact on business performance and is a crucial factor in obtaining high performance and engaged staff. In essence, having engaged employees is achievable because organizational culture is a significant influencer of employee behavior.

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Problem Statement

Organizational culture plays a significant role in shaping employee engagement and overall corporate performance, with its impact manifesting in either positive or negative outcomes. When the culture within an organization is weak or misaligned, results in low levels of engagement and this translates into low productivity. it often leads to reduced employee engagement, which in turn hampers productivity and performance.

High levels of employee engagement are critical to sustaining an organizations performance and competitive advantage. However, most organizations and their senior leadership have often overlooked how effect organisational culture on employee engagement. Therefore, creating and sustain a conducive culture that facilitates high employee engagement is key for the survival of any organization. It is with this perspective in mind that the researcher selected the topic of study. It is envisioned that the study will provide an understanding of the link between the culture of an organization, employee engagement and their performance.

II. Review Of Literature

The review of the literature provided information that organizations depend on understanding what motivates or facilitates employee engagement. Few researches have taken into account a broader contextual factor measured at a higher organizational level in the prediction of work engagement, despite the fact that job resources are thought to be the most significant predictors of work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2018). The organizational context's impact on work engagement is examined in greater detail in this research.

Organisational culture is defined as a set of shared cultural attributes, that comprise of , norms, philosophies, values and beliefs, and expectations which influence employees and operations of the organizations. Culture helps to explain why different groups of people perceive things in their own way and perform things differently from other groups. Culture communicates to individuals in organizations through values, symbols, physical setting, artefacts and language and thereby facilitating the induction and socialization of employees in the organization. Employee engagement is about an individuals' level of commitment to the organization and their work. An engaged employee is a key asset within an organization and sustaining their engagement continues to be a challenge in many organizations in the developing countries.

The cultural profile of the NGO encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape the work environment and influence employee behavior. Strong organizational cultures and high employee engagement have been directly linked by successful businesses (Soni, 2019). According to Singh's (2016) study, organizational culture is one of the elements that influences employee engagement in a company. Only a modest number of empirical studies have concentrated on issues like the connection between personnel level outcomes and organizational culture (Salihu, Salihu, & Musa, 2016; Abane, Adamtey, & Ayim, 2022; Strengers, 2022). Additionally, according to Matkó and Takács (2017), organizational culture can enhance the conduct and motivation of human resources toward the organization, demonstrating a favorable correlation between engagement and organizational culture. Employees that work for an organization with a strong culture have the same opinions on it and act in accordance with its principles (Flamholtz & Randle, 2016). Organizational culture and employee engagement are closely intertwined. A supportive workplace culture can boost employees' engagement levels by fostering more commitment.

In order to improve our knowledge of the broader organizational culture characteristics that affect employee engagement and performance, this study examines in further detail how the organizational context affects employee engagement during the early years of an organization. The relationship between various organizational culture types and employee engagement and performance is examined in this article, which will therefore approach organizational culture as a direct predictor of employee engagement and performance. The relationship between organizational culture, employee engagement, and performance is examined with the presumption that different culture types have varying effects on employee engagement and performance.

Previous research conducted in the 1980s and 1990s aimed to uncover cultural gaps within non-profit organizations. However, the results were often inconsistent, indicating a need for further investigation. This study intends to enhance the existing literature by offering deeper insights into the various cultural dimensions that exist within non-profit organizations at their foundational stage. By gaining a thorough understanding of how these cultural dimensions affect workplace dynamics, the research can assist founders and employers in identifying and addressing barriers that hinder the cultivation of a positive organizational culture. These insights are vital for developing strategic initiatives aimed at boosting employee performance and engagement. Furthermore, this research will serve as a significant resource for students and scholars with an interest in organizational culture, especially in the non-profit sector. It promises to provide both theoretical richness and practical implications for future research and its applications.

III. Study Purpose And Objectives

The aim of the study was to examine how organizational cultures impacted on employee engagement among NGOs. The purpose of the study was to identify the dominant culture that exists in a foundational-stage

local NGO in a peri-urban context and understand how culture type affects their engagement. The study research questions;

- a) What is the dominant culture present in a local NGO during its foundational stage?
- b) What are the levels of employee engagement within a local NGO?
- c) How does organizational culture relate to employee engagement?

IV. Research Methodology

This study employed a case study approach to explore the connection between perceived organizational culture and employee engagement within a non-profit organization. By focusing on a local NGO, the research offered a detailed and contextualized understanding of cultural dynamics in a practical environment.

The participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that respondents had relevant experience and insights regarding the organization's culture and engagement processes. To enhance the sample further, snowball sampling was utilized, allowing initial participants to refer additional individuals who were similarly knowledgeable about the organizational context. Additionally, convenience sampling was employed in certain instances to include readily accessible individuals who met the criteria for inclusion.

Data was collected using a structured, pre-tested online questionnaire, which included items from two established measurement tools: Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI): This tool, based on the Competing Values Framework (CVF), was utilized to categorize culture types as clan, adhocracy, market, or hierarchy. Utrecht Work Engagement Scale (UWES): This scale was used to evaluate employee engagement across three primary dimensions: vigor, dedication, and absorption.

This study utilized a multilevel framework, viewing organizational culture as a contextual variable at the organizational level, while evaluating employee engagement as an individual-level construct. The questionnaire was administered following the principle of informed consent. Participants were assured of their confidentiality and anonymity, with no personal identifiers collected. They were invited to participate via email and given a two-week timeframe to complete the questionnaire, resulting in 12 valid responses.

A questionnaire was used as the data collection tool for the study to gather quantitative data. To make data analysis easier, data was prepared, coded, and entered into the SPSS version 23 data analysis program. Descriptive statistics were used in terms of percentile distributions while inferential statistics were obtained by performing tests using statistical analysis software, and the findings were utilized to infer the associations between the dependent and independent variables. A comparison of means of each perceived culture type was done using ANOVA.

V. Study Results

The study explored the linkages between the organizational culture dimensions, employee engagement within the NGOs in Kenya. The study begins by profiling respondents demographically, profiling culture within non-profit organization and employee engagement levels.

Demographic Profile of Study Respondents

The demographic profile of the respondents is categorized into gender, age, tenure, work department, year of operation, and focus of the organization. The findings reveals that non-profits organizations are more populated by female employees (58.3%) than male employees (41.7%). This means that women are more focused on working in the NGO than their male counterparts.

The age of the respondents working in the NGO, 14.3% are female between 25 to 30 years, 42.9% are female between 31 to 35 years, and around 43% are women between 36 to 60 years. Looking at the male respondents that work in the NGO, 60% were between 31 to 35 years and 40% were between 36 to 40 years of age.

The analysis of employee tenure reveals insights into the work experience of staff within the NGO. It was found that 58.3% of employees have been with the organization for less than three years, while 33.3% have served between four to nine years. Approximately 8% of employees have been with the NGO for over ten years. Additionally, the study examined the distribution of employees across various departments. The findings indicate that 41.7% of employees were part of the program/project department, 25% worked in the finance/accounting department, 16.7% were in human resources/administration, and the remaining 16.7% were employed in the community liaison department.

Culture Profile within NGO

The study revealed that the NGO is more focused on implementation of development related projects as well as disaster preparedness and crisis management. The study assessed to find out the types of cultures that exist within the organization. Figure 1 shows the ranking of the four cultures within the organization indicating that 92% of the employees observed traits within the clan and market culture existed respectively, while 75% of the

employees indicated traits within the adhocracy culture and finally 100% of the employees in the NGO indicated that traits within the hierarchy culture exist in the organization.

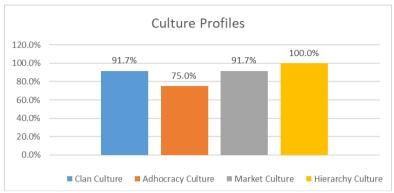


Figure 1: Culture Present in NGO

Looking at the results hierarchy culture is more predominant in the organization than any other culture types. The study findings confirmed that 67% of the respondents indicated that the existing cultures require modification to enhance employee engagement.

Engagement Levels

The study sought to identify the levels of engagement that exist in the organisation. The findings indicated that the dimension of vigor was at 67%, while dedication was at 100% and absorption was at 42% %. From all the three dimensions of engagement, dedication is more dorminant followed by vigor, and lastly absorption. The study also sought to find out the employee engagement levels. From the figure (2), 66.7% of the employees in the NGO stated they were highly engaged and 33.3% were moderately engaged in their workplace.

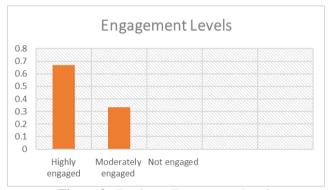


Figure 2: *Employee Engagement Levels*

Culture and Employee Engagement

When asked whether organizational culture influences their level of employee engagement, 75% of the respondents affirmed the impact, while the remaining 25% disagreed. See the figure below.

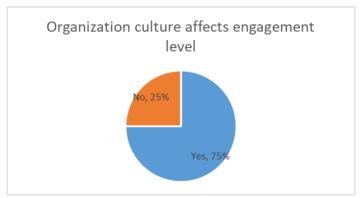


Figure 3: Organizational culture and employee engagement

Regression Analysis for Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement

According study findings, organizational culture accounted for 76% of the variation in employee engagement in the NGOs, with an R^2 value of 0.760 see Table 1. This suggests that organizational culture may account for 76% of changes in employee involvement in the NGO sector.

 Table 1: Organizational Culture and Employee Engagement

Model Summers									
Model Summary									
Model 1 2 Predictors: (R .872a	.760			Adjusted R Square .623		Std. Error of the Estimate .478	
a. Predictors: (Constant), Hierarchy Culture, Adhocracy Culture, Clan Culture, Market Culture ANOVA ^a									
Model 1 Regression		Sum of Squares 5.067	df 4		Mean Square			Sig. .025 ^b	
1	Residual	1.600	7		.229	5.542		.023	
	Total	6.667	11						
a. Dependent Variable: Employee Engagement									
b. Predictors: (Constant), Hierarchy Culture, Adhocracy Culture, Clan Culture, Market Culture									
			Coefficien	ts ^a					
		Unstandardize	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients				
Model		В	Std. Error		Beta	t		Sig.	
1	(Constant)	3.400	2.414			1.4	08	.202	
	Clan Culture	400	.274		344	-1.4	60	.188	
	Adhocracy Culture	.600	.311		.445	1.9	28	.095	
	Market Culture	600	.422		397	-1.4	20	.199	
	Hierarchy Culture	2.200	.609		.816	3.6	11	.009	
		a. Deper	dent Variable: Em	ployee E	ngagement	I	J.		

The Table 1 highlights findings show that the relationship between organizational culture and employee engagement in the NGO was statistically significant, with F (4, 7) = 5.542, p < .05. The model was crucial in illuminating the connection. The null hypothesis that organizational culture has no significant impact on employee engagement is rejected in light of the significance of the F-statistic.

According to the study's findings, organizational culture (hierarchical) significantly and positively influences employee engagement, $\beta = 0.816$, t(12) = 3.611, p < .01. This suggests that a one-unit change in the hierarchical culture would lead to an increase of 0.816 units in employee engagement at the NGO. In light of this, the study came to the conclusion that hierarchical culture significantly and positively influenced employee engagement in NGOs at a foundational stage in Kenya.

VI. Discussions And Recommendations

Discussion

This study set out to examine how organizational culture influences employee engagement in a locally-based organization at its foundational stage, with an additional aim of identifying factors that support organizational growth. The findings underscore the pivotal role organizational culture plays in shaping employee attitudes and behaviors, affirming its significance even in early-stage institutions.

The analysis reveals that hierarchical culture is the dominant within the NGO studied. This structure, characterized by well-defined roles, clear reporting lines, and centralized decision-making, contributes to job satisfaction by fostering role clarity and a sense of positional ownership (Schein, 2010). In its nascent phase, such clarity promotes stability and enhances productivity by minimizing role ambiguity (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). However, the study also identifies inherent limitations: when hierarchy becomes overly rigid, it can stifle innovation and reduce the organization's adaptive capacity. Excessive control may lead to micromanagement, increased bureaucracy, and a decline in creativity ultimately undermining long-term organizational resilience.

Critically, the discussion highlights a tension between the need for control in early development and the necessity for agility as organizations mature. Employees express a desire to grow professionally, seeking opportunities for skills advancement, learning, and recognition. If hierarchical models do not evolve to accommodate these aspirations, organizations risk disengagement and talent attrition. Thus, flexibility must be embedded within the culture to encourage innovative thinking while maintaining structural discipline. This aligns

with Maslach et al.'s (2001) dimensions of engagement, which emphasize the importance of personal accomplishment and growth opportunities.

Empirical findings affirm the study's hypothesis: perceived organizational culture significantly influences employee engagement. Notably, the strongest indicator within the NGO is dedication to engagement demonstrating that employees are committed and invested, provided the cultural context supports their aspirations. These results contribute meaningfully to existing scholarship by showcasing the dual nature of hierarchical culture: both as a stabilizing force and a potential constraint.

In sum, the research strengthens the argument that early-stage organizations must strike a balance between structural clarity and creative freedom. By adapting cultural practices to meet evolving employee needs, NGOs can foster a more engaged and resilient workforce one that drives sustainable growth and innovation.

Recommendation

Understanding the predominant culture in an early-stage of a local NGO is important in determining strategies that enhance productivity and employee engagement. The study revealed that a significant number of respondents (67%) believed that their organizational culture requires modification to better align with the contemporary context and the needs of employees. This insight underscores a crucial aspect of workplace dynamics: the importance of cultivating a culture that not only reflects the organization's values but also addresses the evolving expectations of its workforce. In response to this, the study recommends that the organization adopt a culture that has elements that support a collaborative and a mentorship approach. This would involve establishing structured relationships between experienced employees and those looking to advance in their careers, fostering an environment where knowledge sharing and personal development are prioritized.

Moreover, the recommendation to review and refine cultural elements suggests a proactive stance toward creating an environment that supports career advancement and professional growth. By enabling structures that facilitate upward mobility and provide clear pathways for progression, the organization can enhance employee satisfaction and retention. This focus on professional growth is essential, as employees generally seek roles where they feel they can develop their skills and advance their careers. Implementing mentorship programs and ensuring that the organizational culture encourages feedback and learning opportunities will not only help individual employees flourish but also drive overall organizational success. By embracing these changes, the organization can cultivate a more engaged and motivated workforce, ultimately leading to improved performance and a stronger competitive edge in the industry.

The results of the study indicate that the dimension of dedication among employees is notably high at 90%, suggesting that employees feel a strong sense of commitment and significance in their work. This is a positive indicator for the organization, as dedicated employees are more likely to go above and beyond in their roles and contribute to a positive workplace culture.

However, the low scores in vigor (68%) and absorption (42%) indicate areas that require focus. Vigor measures the energy and mental resilience that employees apply to their tasks, whereas absorption reflects the level of concentration and immersion in work activities. Vigor reflects the energy and mental resilience employees bring to their tasks, while absorption pertains to the degree of concentration and immersion in work activities. To enhance overall engagement, the organization should focus on fostering an energetic work environment and creating conditions that encourage deep focus and involvement in tasks. Strategies could include providing professional development opportunities, recognizing and rewarding employee efforts, and ensuring employees have manageable workloads that allow for sustained focus and energy. By addressing these dimensions, the organization can create a more holistic approach to employee engagement, leading to improved performance and satisfaction.

The current research has brought to light the challenges associated with a hierarchical culture within organizations, particularly in the context of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). While a clear hierarchy can be beneficial during the foundational stages of an organization providing structure and direction it has become apparent that such rigid frameworks may lead to reduced creativity and increased micromanagement among staff as the organization matures. This situation can create an environment where employees feel constrained in their ability to innovate and contribute ideas freely, as they may be overly focused on adhering to established protocols or seeking approval from higher-ups.

To address these issues, the study recommends a shift toward a clan culture, which emphasizes collaboration, teamwork, and a sense of belonging among employees. A clan culture fosters open communication and encourages individuals to work together, share ideas, and support one another's initiatives. By adopting this cultural approach, NGOs can create a more inclusive atmosphere that not only enhances creativity but also promotes a shared sense of purpose among team members. This collaborative environment can significantly improve overall productivity, enabling the organization to scale its efforts more effectively and respond to the diverse needs of its stakeholders.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of periodic reviews of the organizational culture as the NGO continues to grow. This ongoing evaluation is critical because, as organizations evolve, their cultural needs may change. What served well in the early stages might become a hindrance later on; thus, leadership should remain attuned to the potential drawbacks of a hierarchical culture, particularly as it relates to stifling creativity and innovation. By proactively assessing and adjusting the organizational culture, NGOs can ensure that they maintain a dynamic and adaptive work environment that not only harnesses the full potential of their staff but also aligns with their mission and goals. Embracing flexibility in cultural practices will empower employees to take initiative and drive impactful changes within the organization, ultimately enhancing its effectiveness and reach.

This case study demonstrated the strong interplay between organizational culture and employee engagement within the NGO context. By capturing firsthand experiences and employee perspectives, the research generated practical recommendations that can help the organization cultivate a more inclusive and nurturing work environment. Ultimately, the findings emphasize that fostering a positive organizational culture is essential for boosting employee engagement and driving sustained organizational performance.

Future Research

The findings of this paper open up several exciting avenues for future research, especially in understanding the intricacies of organizational culture within NGOs. One significant area for further exploration is the potential influence of employee demographics on their perceptions of organizational culture. Since this study primarily involved participants from a single NGO, it raises important questions regarding how variables such as age, gender, education, and years of experience may shape employees' views of their organization's culture. By investigating a more diverse demographic range, researchers could reveal unique insights into how different groups perceive and navigate organizational dynamics. Understanding these distinctions could lead to more tailored management strategies that address the diverse needs and perspectives of employees, ultimately fostering a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

Furthermore, conducting research involving participants from various NGOs operating within the same region or Nakuru County would enrich the analysis of organizational culture. Such comparative studies could illuminate how different missions, leadership approaches, and operational challenges influence employees' experiences and perceptions across organizations. This methodology can also determine whether certain cultural traits are universally appreciated among NGOs or if there are subtle differences based on the specific context of each organization. This comparative analysis would significantly contribute to the literature by clarifying the role of organizational culture in enhancing or hindering the effectiveness of NGOs within similar socio-economic settings.

Limitation

This study recognizes some limitations that could impact the breadth and applicability of its findings. A primary limitation is that the study was confined to a single NGO in one geographic area or county. This narrow focus may restrict the generalizability of the results to other NGOs, especially those in different contexts, regions, or sectors. Each NGO possesses unique cultural characteristics, operational challenges, and stakeholder relationships that can affect its function and employee experiences. Consequently, the findings may not apply to NGOs with varying missions, sizes, or governance structures. Future studies should aim to encompass a broader spectrum of NGOs across various locations to provide more robust insights.

Another limitation, the small sample size used in this study may not adequately capture the diverse views and experiences of all employees within the organization. Limited sample sizes can pose risks to statistical power and may restrict the ability to make definitive conclusions. It is recommended that future research utilize more substantial and representative sample sizes to enhance the validity and reliability of findings. By addressing the highlighted limitations through more inclusive and expansive research methodologies, subsequent studies can contribute more significantly to the understanding of NGO organizational culture, creativity, and management practices.

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