Thinking Tomorrow Today: Planning for Uncertainty and Building Organisational Culture that Can Walk the Talk

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ABSTRACT

Thinking tomorrow, today is about generating and manipulating ideas proactively and progressively. The critical issue is about expanding the scope of understanding all the facets of the organisational activities, and maintaining same approach and strategy through the future in a sustained manner. Manager’s ability should be screened on the basis of their pro-activeness and innovativeness in the management of thoughts that would foster the organisational advancement and effectiveness. This study is based on a case study design using secondary sources of data from a tertiary educational institution through an in-depth study and analysis of its organisational culture. Many of the early studies of this occurrence identified strong support for the idea that organisational culture and performance were indistinguishably linked. Recommendations given include the use of competitive and time effective management process to review, update, integrate, implement visions, decisions, and plans for tomorrow, whether in expansionary or recessionary times.

Keywords: Organisation Culture; Planning; Tomorrow/Today; Performance,

INTRODUCTION

The implications of leadership and dire need for productivity and service excellence are not limited to the purely intellectual demands placed on the leadership of an institution and the team; they also extend to corporate purpose, organization, and function. An institution of higher learning devoted to the identification of central ideas and the formulation of strategies for moving swiftly from ideas to operations will differ in structure and activity from an institution that is primarily concerned with just the management of money, or of physical human resources.

The case study organisation, that is, the Federal Polytechnic Bauchi, Nigeria, today stands on the threshold of history more than any other time to actualize the mission of the institution of contributing optimally to the technological development of Nigeria through training of human resources in the application of science, engineering, and commerce. This is because of the uncertainty in the National and Global perspective; in the economy, society, politics, that has become so great as to render it ineffective, if not counterproductive, the kind of planning most organisation do on forecasting based on probabilities. Yet the management of the institution has to make decisions that commit to the future current resources of time and money. Worse, if they have to make decisions not to commit resources, then, that way, they can forgo the future. Every of such commitment is based on assumptions about the future. The challenge is that every assumption about the future has to be ‘reasonable.’
LITERATURE REVIEW

Understanding Organisational Performance.
The degree of an achievement to which an employee fulfils the organisational mission at the workplace is called performance (Cascio 2006). According to Stannack; Barne (as cited by Awadh and Saad 2013), performance has been perceived differently by various researchers, but most of the scholars relate performance with measurement of transactional efficiency and effectiveness towards organisational goals.

In the existing literature, studies relating to organisational culture and performance tend to differ on the performance measures that are used, depending on the types of organisation and industry sector studied. Therefore, measures of organisational performance include those that relate to service quality, customer perceptions, workforce retention, and most commonly, economic performance (Lim, 1995).

According to Den Hartog and Verburg (2004), the role of employees in enhancing organisational performance has attracted much research attention. They assert that a single and widely accepted definition of Human Resource Management (HRM) does not exist.

Storey (2007) defines Human Resources Management (HRM) as ‘a distinctive approach to employment management which seeks to achieve competitive advantage through the strategic deployment of a highly committed and capable workforce, using an integrated array of cultural, structural and personnel techniques’. Hence, within the HRM field, several authors argue for the existence of so-called ‘high involvement work practices’ (Delaney & Huselid, 1996) or ‘high performance work practices’ (Huselid, 1995) that are likely to result in increased organisational performance.

According to Delery as cited by Den Hartog and Verburg (2004), the overall results of empirical work suggest substantial benefits from managing human resources effectively, although many questions remain unanswered. The arguments put forward sound convincing and based on the evidence deduced this researcher supports the position.

Traditionally, organisational performance has been measured in financial terms where consideration of budgets, operations and assets has been key to determining success (Yeo, 2003). However, it has been argued that such traditional financial measures are not capable of differentiating between the performance of different organisations (Chakravarthy, 1986). This can give misleading indications of an organisation’s continuous improvement and innovation. Non-financial measures relating to views and behaviours of customers, investors, and stakeholders have therefore become increasingly important (Lee, Lee, & Kang, 2005), and it has been argued that corporate performance cannot be measured without identifying the inter-relationships amongst different situations and contexts, and intangible attributes such as knowledge, competencies, and partnerships (Cotora, 2007). One such measure relates to individual competence. On an individual level, performance refers to the extent to which an employee carries out an assignment or task. It refers to the degree of accomplishment of the task that makes up that employee’s job (Casico, 2006). Management scientists claim that such competence inevitably contributes to overall organisational success, along with other measures such as relationships with customers and other stakeholders, and staff morale and motivation (Yeo, 2003).

The positive impact of culture on organisational performance.
Organisational culture has received much attention in recent times due to its potential impact on organisational performance. Many of the early studies of this phenomenon identified strong support for the idea that the two were inextricably linked. For example, Kotter (2008) claimed that corporate culture has a long-term impact on the performance of the organisation, Davison and Al-Shagha (2007) proposed that certain types of culture could enhance organisational performance, and it was suggested that there are significant relationships between organisational culture and performance.

Similarly, other studies found that because organisational culture shapes the behaviours and attitudes of all employees (Burnes, Cooper, & West, 2003; Hofsteds, 1980), it, therefore, has a subsequent impact on organisational performance (Bititci, Mendibil, Nudurupati, Garengo, & Turner, 2006). There is also more recent evidence to support the causal relationship between culture and performance (Hartnell, Ou, & Kinicki, 2011).

According to Sørensen (2002), there are three main reasons why a strong corporate culture improves organisational performance. Firstly, it is claimed that there is enhanced coordination and control within the organisation whereby corporate culture reinforces that certain behaviours are to be enacted and others discouraged. Secondly, it is proposed that strong culture improves goal alignment between the corporation and its employees, and therefore workers are better equipped to take the correct course of action when encountering unforeseen circumstances and situations. Finally, Sørensen (2002) argues that a strong corporate culture enhances employee motivation, as they feel their contribution and involvement are recognised. However, it has been claimed that such strong cultures can have a ‘dark side’ and can be manipulative and used as a form of control (Grant & Jordan, 2015).
Franco and Bourne (2003) asserts that organisational culture is one of the critical factors that support strategic performance measurement and success. In particular, they found that for effective performance measurement and success, there needs to be a culture that is supportive of team ownership of problems, risk-taking and entrepreneurship, and one which focuses on continuous quality improvement.

According to Kotter (2008), there are certain types of organisational culture which can improve performance. It is claimed that such performance-enhancing cultures comprise of those which have shared values and practices, can adapt to change and be responsive, are strategically appropriate, and where large stakeholders are valued and where there is effective leadership at all levels.

An ideal culture for delivering successful organisational performance is one which can simultaneously reconcile the conflicting demands of being adaptive, consistent, inclusive, and directed. Both these approaches suggest there is ‘one best way’. However, critics dismiss this and claim that culture is not static and cannot be generically applied to different organisations and industries (Kelley, MacNab, & Worthley, 2006).

Furthermore, while other commentators claim that certain organisational cultures enhance performance; others have identified culture types that can instead inhibit performance. For example, Tseng (2010), in her study of knowledge sharing and organisational culture, found that hierarchical cultures, with their emphasis on control and stability, are more likely to encounter resistance to change which will then impact on their ability to interact with the external environment effectively. Similarly, from her study, Tseng (2010), also identified ‘clan culture’ as resulting in poorer organisational performance due to being overly prudent and conservative, despite having a focus on employee cohesion and morale.

Organisational culture could be in the form of ‘culture of quality’. According to Davison and Al-Shaghana (2007), it is also generally agreed that there is an association between the quality concept and the corporate culture concept; about 50 years ago, Juran (2003) proposed the application of the anthropological concept of culture to business organisations in order to create a beneficial change. Pirsig (1999) pointed out, through the character ‘Faidros’ of his book, that quality and culture are tied together. Hence, two important courses of action are needed to become superior in quality. First, to develop technologies, in order to create products and processes that would meet or exceed customers’ needs and expectations, and secondly to stimulate a culture throughout the organisation that continually views customer-focused quality as a primary goal (Gryna & Juran, 2001).

It is widely recognised that one of the most common reasons why quality initiatives fail is when there is a culture that does not support the effort. Tacit factors drive success and not quality tools and techniques alone; research shows that successful implementation is dependent on having improvement strategies embedded in cultural change (Cameron & Quinn, 2011; Hostage, 1975; Juran, 2003; Snell & Dean Jr, 1992).

According to Wright (1996), a culture where everyone in the organisation has a passion for excellence begins with a Vision of the future or Mission Statement that can capture the imagination and motivate employees and others – this begins with the Chief Executive, but must be communicated to the rest of the organisation.

Developing a positive ‘Quality Culture’ in an organisation

To develop a positive quality culture, Gryna and Juran (2001) suggests that an organisation must foster five key behaviours: create and maintain an awareness of quality, provide evidence of management leadership on quality, encourage self-development and empowerment of employees, provide opportunity for employee participation to inspire action, and provide recognition and rewards. Woods (1997) again emphasises the powerful influence that business and organisational leaders have on the development of their company’s and organisation’s culture – employees will naturally adopt their leaders’ behaviours and attitudes toward work. Hence, leaders have to be aware of their influence and consciously use various proactive steps to instil appropriate values in others and move their organisation’s culture towards one based on quality values. The main areas to consider are said to be: rules and policies consistent with values that will lead to behaviours and actions that help people perform well; training in communication, teamwork and Total Quality Management (TQM) tools; recognition programmes set up to recognise behaviours and actions that support the desired cultural values; and the use of legends and symbols to help people understand what the company is about and what they are supposed to do. Wal-Mart’s effective management of organisational culture led to successful performance, as evident empirically.

Turner Construction’s culture of safety, diversity, inclusiveness and innovation that supports performance.

According to Gallan (2013), Turner Construction has earned Occupational Health and Safety Advisory Services (OHSAS) 18001 registration, which recognizes the development and implementation of a comprehensive safety program that strives to provide and maintain the safest possible work conditions. Turner’s safety first philosophy is trademarked as Building L.I.F.E. (Living Injury Free Every day). This approach strives to
eliminate worksite incidents through pre-planning construction activities with safety engagement commencing at project pursuit. These standards along with their policies, mandatory safety inspections and training programmes have created a comprehensive and effective safety organisation. Building L.I.F.E. is supported by four guiding principles of injuries are preventable, perform a job only if it is safe, working safely is a condition of employment and practice, and expect safe behaviour everywhere, every day.

According to Gallan (2013), Turner Construction fosters a culture of diversity and inclusion in which all employees contribute to creative ideas, seek challenges, and have the opportunity to grow. Accordingly, their diverse and inclusive workforce positions the company to grow, enhances their presence in diverse markets, and helps them build enduring relationships with each other, industry partners, and their clients. Hence, they do their best work in teams made up of individuals with different backgrounds, skills and passions and thereby they cultivate diversity in their offices and on their sites.

Google’s Culture of minimising Distractions to its employees.
In terms of applying the culture of minimising distractions to employees, this in practice, Google claim that the benefit package offered to its employees is intentionally designed to remove as many day to day distractions as possible so that employees can focus on delivering their best work. According to Eric Schmidt (Executive Chairman of the organisation) “The goal is to strip away everything that gets in our employees’ way. We provide a standard package of fringe benefits, but on top of that are first-class dining facilities, gyms, laundry rooms, massage rooms, haircuts, carwashes, dry cleaning, commuting buses – just about anything a hardworking employee might want. Let’s face it: programmers want to programme, they don’t want to do their laundry. So we make it easy for them to do both” (Levin-Epstein, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), a research can be quantitative or qualitative. Furthermore, a study is said to be qualitative if it describes a phenomenon, event problem; information gathering is done through the use of qualitative measurement scales and if analysis is done without quantifying variables in event, phenomenon and problem. Likewise, a quantitative research quantifies the degree of variations in a situation, phenomenon, issue or problems and adopts the use of predominant quantitative variables in data assembly.

Research design
A research design assists to provide a specific direction for a study (Yin 2009). In a qualitative study, there are various designs such as narrative, phenomenological research, grounded theory, ethnography and case studies (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). This study is based on a case study design using secondary sources of data.

Secondary data
According to Saunders, Lewis, and Thornhill (2009), secondary data includes raw data and unpublished summaries which have been collected for other purposes. This implies that the required information is available and only needs to be extracted by the researcher. Secondary research provides bases for supporting and explaining questions(Ghauri & Grønhaug, 2005).Secondary data could include organisational data, books, and journal, audio and video recorded materials to obtain historical and other forms of information (McGivern, 2013). This study adopted the use of secondary data as information source. Furthermore, the research benefited from the adoption of research of desk research option for data sourcing. Desk Research is the research technique which is mainly acquired by sitting at a desk. Desk research is basically involved in collecting data from existing resources hence it is often considered a low cost technique as compared to field research, as the main cost is involved in executive’s time, telephone charges and directories. However, it could also be a complete waste of time and money if the researcher does not have the proper knowledge of how the research in performed.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND FINDINGS

On the issue of organisational culture and organisational performance, it is evident in the current literature that there is some divergence in viewpoints over the relationship between organisational culture and performance. In early studies there appeared to be strong support for the notion that culture can indeed be managed to deliver positive business results, and that there are certain types of culture which particularly lend themselves to enhancing organisational performance.
The case example provided by Google suggests that their approach to managing culture, with its clear focus on its employees, has delivered significant business benefits in relation to attracting and maintaining the best talent, and stimulating creativity and innovation.

It has also been queried whether it is a culture that influences performance or if it is a performance that influences culture. Attempts to develop a framework for evaluating this causal link have been made and models such as the ‘cultural web’ may help to break down culture into its parts so that it can be more easily analysed.

Other critics claim that a strong organizational culture can actually have a negative impact on performance due to the fact that it can make organisations less adaptable and responsive to change because the accepted way of doing things is so firmly embedded. In times of crisis or uncertainty, there is evidence that some organisations are less able to react which in turn impacts negatively on their longer term sustainability.

Therefore, to arrive at decisions that have to be specific, measurable, achievable, reasonable, and time based, traditional planning strategy asks ‘what is most likely to happen?’ However, in a strategic thinking approach based on ‘thinking tomorrow today’ or planning for uncertainty, the question been asked is ‘what has already happened that will create the future?’ In the case of Federal Polytechnic Bauchi (case study organisation), the first thing to look at, for instance, is in demographics. The number of students that would be seeking for higher education in the next five years or so would have been in secondary school. Other issues to ponder are the flexible and inconsistent policies on Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) scores/cut of points and the admission by Joint Admission and Matriculation Board (JAMB), the proliferation of private polytechnics, and the accreditation of courses hitherto available only in Federal Polytechnic Bauchi to other State Polytechnics, and equally important the issue of tuition and registration fees in these institutions.

The Polytechnic management has to ponder on such questions: "What do these facts mean to the survival of the institution? What opportunities do they create? What threats? What changes do they demand in the way the institution is organized and run, in their goals, products (students), services, and in their policies? And what changes do they make possible and likely to be advantageous?"

The next question is: 'What changes in the tertiary educational level and the current structure emerging in the basic values, and in science and technology have already occurred but yet to have the full impact?' And closely related is the next question: ‘what are the trends in economic and societal structure and how do they affect our business?’

Core competence encompasses "What is the Federal Polytechnic Bauchi good at? What does the institution do well? What gives it a competitive advantage?" Therefore, matching the institution's strengths to the changes that have already taken place produces, in effect, a plan of action. It enables the institution to turn around the unexpected into an advantage. Uncertainty ceases to be a threat and becomes an opportunity.

There is, however, one caveat: that the institution creates the resources of knowledge and of people to respond when opportunity knocks. This means creating and maintaining resources for the future in people and their development. The people enable the institution makes its future – and this is the challenge they will now have to throw their searchlight on, and thus the aim of this study.

The Polytechnic management must assume responsibility for strategizing, for choosing and modifying the institution's vision and mission, for developing new competencies, for validating the choices made, and for energizing the values and aspirations of the institution's members at all levels to sustain those choices.

The institution must realize that at the heart of this process are ‘learning organizations and learning persons. Globally, there is the resurgence in the development of organizational capability not only in management ranks but wherever creative contributions to future competitive advantage can be sparked and developed. This extends beyond training and encompasses appropriate incentives, careful career planning and placement, decentralization, delegation, an open supportive climate for learning, and the nurturing of teamwork and collaborative entrepreneurship.

Thinking tomorrow today is distinguished by its emphasis on providing strategic criteria for resource allocation that depart from marginal, ad hoc or trend increase. It ensures that resource allocation decisions are taken in full view of long-term consequences of resource redeployments. Thus, strategic thinking enables institutions to embark on manpower planning, concentrate their human resources development efforts on the areas and skills that hold great potential for the future, and to gradually withdraw resources from and less productive ones.

**FINDINGS**

Firstly, attempts to measure the causal link between organisational culture and performance appear to be underdeveloped and commentators claim that more research is needed in this area. Secondly, critics of the culture/performance link claim that the very notion that organisational culture can be managed is misguided. They claim that due to the complexity of culture and all of the different factors that impact on it, it cannot be managed and instead emerges. Although others have suggested, it can be ‘manipulated’ to achieve desired
corporate outcomes. Thirdly, the answers to the question ‘What has already happened that will make the future?’ define the potential of opportunities for an institution. To convert this potential into reality requires matching the opportunities with the institution's strengths and competence. It requires the analysis of the institution's 'core competence'.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

From the foregoing, one can come to the conclusion that management teams face a period of unprecedented dynamic transformation of the operating environment, which is throwing up tremendous operating challenges. Tomorrow will not be the same as yesterday for an institution as changes need to be managed in a pro-active manner. The present Management of the case study organisation must, therefore, modify existing management practice and culture, and take on methodologies more appropriate to tomorrow's rapidly changing environment. It must be stressed that management of organisations must recognize, grasp, and achieve some fundamental objectives to secure a firm basis for competitive success in the local and national sphere. The following are therefore recommended for adoption:

1) A continuous watch on trends and cross impacts of development in the operating environment for early warning of new opportunities and risks to ensure prompt responses.
2) The effective access and use of technology to satisfy their customers' strategic needs and improve productivity. This poses a lot of problems because of the double level of client ship of students and parents/guardians.
3) The use of competitive and time effective management process to review, update, integrate and implement visions, decisions, and plans for tomorrow, whether in expansionary or recessionary times.
4) The effective use and development of more competent, knowledgeable and academics-driven top management and support teams.
5) The understanding that The Federal Polytechnic Bauchi is committed to the highest standards of openness, probity and accountability, and this can be attested with the wind of change currently sweeping over the institution and the education industry at large.
6) The understanding that an important aspect of accountability and transparency is a mechanism to enable staff and other members of the institution to voice concerns in a responsible and effective manner. An effective top-down and down-top communication would go a long way in entrenching good corporate governance and is also a key element in reducing information gap between the general staff and the management.

It is evidently clear, therefore, that there are conflicting views over the notion that managing organisational culture effectively is crucial for successful organisation performance, however, a connection between the two does appear to be well established and, therefore, an important area for further research.

REFERENCES


