“Institutional culture and staff performance: A case study of the banking industry in South Africa”

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INSTITUTIONAL CULTURE AND STAFF PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF THE BANKING INDUSTRY IN SOUTH AFRICA

Abstract

Although research in the past focused on the direct association between organizational culture and staff performance, the effect of any mediating variable was not fully investigated. Thus, this study aimed to examine the effect of innovation and communication as mediating variables in the association between institutional culture and staff performance.

A quantitative methodology was used to collect data through a survey using an on-line Likert-scale questionnaire. Simple random sampling was used to select 19 employees from two commercial banks in South Africa, which included senior executives, managers, supervisors, administrative staff and cashiers. Since these banks were very similar in size, 10 respondents were selected from Bank A and 9 from Bank B according to the above selection criteria. Both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to address the aim of the study.

The findings confirmed that communication and innovation facilitated the relationship between institutional culture and employee performance, which was mediated by innovation and communication. Thus, the leadership of the banks should strategically and effectively employ communication tools to ensure that the institution remains innovative. Furthermore, an innovative culture should be nurtured, which encourages and invites participation by staff.

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INTRODUCTION

The success of organizations is often associated with the contribution of different people at different levels in the organization, since each person's contribution will demonstrate a significant improvement in its performance. It is for this reason that the association between institutional culture and performance is interpreted as a key measurement of success of organizations.

Culture is not merely about communication or interaction by staff in an organization, but has the capacity to alter people's perspective and behavior to advance the performance of an institution (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). The culture of an organization becomes an essential resource, since it contributes to the organization's ability to attain its full capabilities (Chan et al., 2004), and this is especially important in an industry that focuses on service, namely, the banking sector.

McAleese and Hargie (2004) addressed organizational culture from a communication perspective. According to the aforementioned, there is a positive association between strategy, culture, participa-

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tion, customer service and employee performance, since all these components must operate in a unified manner for an organizational culture to be effective.

Reference has been made to the impact of innovation on an institution's performance (Gopalakrishnan & Damanpour, 1997), since innovation is seen as the mechanism that determines the success and performance of an organization. Many studies addressed the association between institutional culture and employee performance and most studies were conducted from a Western perspective. There are limited studies which have been conducted in South Africa that address the interconnectedness between institutional and employee performance; especially with reference to banks. Thus, this study attempts to address the above limitation by considering the views expressed by Kotter and Heskett (1992). In Kotter and Heskett's (1992) research, reference is made to three viewpoints as the conventional connection between culture and performance.

Recent research has proposed the need to sufficiently describe the relationship between culture and performance by considering certain variables (Cheung et al., 2012). Thus, innovation may have an influence on a company's performance, since a review of the literature highlights the need to sufficiently clarify the connection between innovation and performance (Rosenbusch et al., 2011).

Globally, the banking industry is encountering obstacles pertaining to technological innovations in order to maintain continual competitive advantage (Kline & Boydf, 2014). This situation is also prevalent within the South African environment. The relevance of banks in the competitive environment depends on the technological instruments they utilize and their adherence to legislative requirements. This means that the culture of the banking sector requires banks to be adaptive to the internal and external environment.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

The word culture found expression in the 18th century and it referred to the accomplishments of society by focusing on the beliefs, knowledge, norms and experience which underpin a society (Denison et al., 2004). Scholars view culture as a composite phenomenon that addresses knowledge, belief, norms and experience capabilities, within the societal domain (Hung et al., 2010).

Organizational culture has been associated with the effectiveness and efficiency of organizations and it is seen as a tool that provides organizations with a competitive edge. Some scholars have argued that in the absence of organizational culture, no business will be able to survive in the competitive corporate world (Ricardo & Wade, 2001). Culture has been identified as the instrument that drives an institution's strategy and a component that decisively contributes to organizational performance. This view was confirmed by Ndwiga (2012), who stated that when an organization has an inadequate culture; the implementation of a strategy will be negatively affected.

Culture impacts the performance of an institution as well as the operational and behavioral dynamics of employees. Thus, there is acceptance that organizational culture indirectly contributes to positive behavioral patterns in organizations (Martins & Terblanche, 2003). The patterns of behavior are influenced by managerial procedures that affect decision-making, communication, innovation, etc.

Ezirim et al. (2012) stated that organizations that are proactive and competitively geared have a greater opportunity to increase their market share. Thus, the competitiveness and flexibility of financial institutions has been the subject of numerous studies. For example, Denison (1990) stated that institutional culture is a direct contributor to the financial performance of an institution. Kotter and Heskitt (1992), also argued that an organization's financial performance depends on the presence of a deeply ingrained organizational culture.

Organizations with sustainable cultural dimensions have continued to be relevant in the corporate world. The sustainability of these organizations can be attributed to their ability to transfer values

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to various generations of leadership. The ability to transfer the dimensions of organizations through various generations ensures the strengthening and duplication of the culture (Dacin et al., 2010).

The performance of staff is the focal point of any institution, since it forms the backdrop to the economic advancement of an institution. Thus, if a person performs his or her duties as per the required standards, this can contribute to an increase in the performance of an organization. By recognizing the significance of employee performance on the success of an organization, it is incumbent on the organization to analytically determine components that can be utilized to improve employee performance.

The components utilized to evaluate a person's performance differ from occupation to occupation, but there are three key components that can be attributed to employee performance, namely, skills, knowledge and motivation (Campbell, 1990), which are reflected in any employee's performance, irrespective of the occupation. The productivity of individuals can be aligned with the number of projects he or she is required to manage versus the goal to be achieved (De Witt, 2010). In relation to the banking industry, the focus is only on the number of clients versus the profit margins obtained.

Although the context of organizations may differ, efficiency and effectiveness are fundamental requirements for employee performance (Macleod & Brady, 2008). Thus, if an employee is unable to complete a specific task within the specified period, it is an indicator that something is amiss. Employees in the banking industry, which is service orientated, are expected to be proactive in maintaining the customer-client relationship and introducing new products to them. In the absence of continual engagements with clients, banks run the risk of losing clients to their competitors.

Substantial research has been conducted to demonstrate the relationship between institutional culture and employee performance (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Organizational culture is perceived as the instrument that directs staff behavior to ensure advancement in an institution's success (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).

Numerous studies have been undertaken to explore performance within commercial banks (Petria et al., 2015; Binuyo & Aregbeshola, 2014). The general view is that performance within the banking sector is quantified as its ability to generate profits. This opinion found expression in the studies conducted by various researchers, inter-alia, Sufian and Noor (2012), who delved deeper into the analysis of profitability, with reference to return on assets.

Van der Post et al. (1998) conducted a study on the relationship between institutional culture and employee performance and concluded that culture was central to the financial performance of an institution. Organizations with limited success can be differentiated from organizations that are successful based on the cultural dimensions that are operational in the organizations.

Thus, in an effort to better ascertain a bank's performance Petria et al. (2015) suggested two factors that address performance in the banking industry, namely, macroeconomic and microeconomic factors. Macroeconomic factors include market concentration, GDP growth, inflation and the economic soundness of the banking industry. Microeconomic factors include the credit quality, control, size of the firm, liquidity and efficiency and organizational culture.

Notwithstanding the numerous studies on organizational culture, limited scrutiny was undertaken on the significance of institutional culture in relation to staff performance within the banking industry. The dawn of democracy in South Africa brought about various changes in the way business is conducted in the country, and one of the sectors that has undergone significant changes is the financial service industry, resulting from the introduction of new policies and regulations. The focus of the legislative procedures was to improve and safeguard the banking sector against globalization trends, as well as to attract new investment and to improve competitiveness.

Post-apartheid South Africa has also seen the establishment of several new banks, which targeted the un-banked population with product offerings and marketing strategies. The post-apartheid banking sector with the specific focus on the period between 1990–2000s, was characterized by the merger of some banks and closure of others.

The need for this study arose from the gap in the literature that was identified with respect to institutional culture and employee performance in the South African banking industry, more especially since the banking sector is encountering increasing competition through inter-alia, technological innovations. This study will address these challenges that impact operational efficiency, by focusing on innovation and communication.

2. METHODOLOGY

To address the objectives of this study, a quantitative methodology was selected, since this study approach places significance on numerals and digits in collecting and examination of data (Bryman, 2012). The data collected was easily computed by using the Real Statistics resource pack, which is an Excel add-in.

The research population consisted of 19 employees of two (2) banks in the Durbanville area in the Western Cape province and included senior executives, managers, supervisors, administrative staff and cashiers. Simple random sampling was used to select the sample of participants from different departments within the banks. This approach helped to ensure that a variety of staff represented the research organizations.

Data were obtained through a self-administered questionnaire divided into four sections, namely:

1) Section 1 focused on demographical information about the participants;

2) Section 2 focused on the institutional culture and employee performance;

3) Section 3 focused on the role communication plays in institutional culture; and

4) Section 4 addressed the impact of innovation on employee performance.

To determine the relationship among the research variables, the relevant questions were formulated on a 5-point Likert scale, and respondents were required to indicate their agreement with several questions, where 1 = Strongly Disagree and 5 = Strongly Agree.

The questionnaire was tested among five (5) participants to ensure that they understood the questions and to ascertain whether the questionnaire would address the objectives of the study.

The data were scrutinized through the application of the Real Statistics resource pack, which is an Excel add-in, and parametric and non-parametric tests were conducted.

3. RESULTS

The reliability of the research instrument was assessed by conducting the Cronbach's alpha test. The results of the aforementioned procedure returned a value of 0.878 for the Organizational Culture and Performance measures; 0.792 for the Communication measures and 0.706 for the Innovation measures. The aforementioned results imply that the measurement tool was fairly reliable, since the benchmark for reliability is a Cronbach alpha value of 0.7 (Tavakoi & Dennick, 2011).

The vast majority of respondents (58%) had between 1 to 10 years of experience, with 32% indicating that they had been employed in the industry between 6 to 10 years. It was also determined that:

- an overwhelming majority (94%) of participants 'agreed' that institutional culture significantly contributed to employee performance;

- 69% of the participants 'agreed' that culture significantly contributes to performance and motivation in the institution;

- 69% of participants 'agreed' that the cultural norms of an institution contribute to the professional and personal growth of staff;

- 47% of the participants 'agree' that ongoing training in an institution significantly contributed to employee performance;

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Table 1. Communication and organizational culture

Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Uncertain	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
Effective communication leads to an increase in staff performance	0%	0%	11%	57%	32%	100%
Cooperation between executives and staff contribute to an increase in performance	5%	32%	5%	42%	16%	100%
Staff is generally aware of producing quality work	0%	16%	16%	53%	15%	100%
Staff performance increase because of team work	0%	0%	5%	63%	32%	100%
Informal discussion between staff and their supervisors helps with the performance of staff	5%	5%	11%	37%	42%	100%
The culture of the organization helps to improve communication and staff performance	0%	5%	11%	47%	37%	100%

- 95% of the participants 'agreed' that the success of an institution is attributed to employee performance;
- 84% of the participants 'agree' that culture is a significant contributor to employee performance;
- 85% of the participants 'agreed' that culture has an impact on the ethical behavior of employees in the banking industry; and
- 79% of the participants 'agreed' that institutional culture sustains employee performance and continual development.

Table 1 reflects the participant's response to the various statements pertaining to Communication and the Organizational Culture.

4. EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNICATION

Table 2 reflects the correlation between the various items linked to performance and communication. It is clear from the information in Table 2 that:

- team work provides the most opportunity to increase employee performance in the banking industry, as illustrated by a correlation coefficient of r = 0.502;
- although the correlation between communication and culture is positive (r = 0.061), the coefficient is lower in relation to other variables of communication.

With respect to the participants' response to the questions intended to determine their perception of Innovation in the organization, it was ascertained that:

- 85% of the participants 'agreed' that the culture of the institution contributes to the innovative management;
- 79% of the participants 'agreed' that the institution is committed to obtain innovative ideas from their employees;
- 74% of the participants 'agreed' that no disciplinary action is taken against staff when an innovative idea fails;

Table 2. Correlation between staff performance and communication

Source: Research data.

Statements	Mean	Std. deviation	Coefficient
Communication increases performance	4.210526	0.630604	0.462
Cooperation between executives and staff	3.315789	1.249561	0.381
Producing quality work	3.684211	0.945905	0.432
Team work	4.263158	0.561951	0.502
Informal discussion between staff and supervisors	4.368421	0.597265	0.134
Culture improves communication and staff performance	4.052632	1.129094	0.061

Table 3. Correlation between employee performance, communication and innovation

Source: Research data.

Measure	Employee performance	Communication	Innovation
Employee performance	–	–	–
Communication	rho = 0.519 p = 0.023 (sig)	–	–
Innovation	rho = 0.472 p = 0.041 (sig)	rho = 0.824 p = 0.000 (sig)	–

- 53% of the participants 'agreed' that formal training would improve the innovative ability of employees in the banking industry; and
- 84% of participants 'agreed' that innovative ideas are used to create new business opportunities.

Table 3 reflects the correlations between the three composite measures, namely, employee performance, communication and innovation, using Spearman's rank-order correlations (rho). All three measures are significantly related to one another, because all p values are smaller than 0.050. The strongest correlation is between communication and innovation.

5. DISCUSSION

Scrutiny of the data highlighted that there is a relationship between institutional culture and employee performance. In a study on the banking sector in Nigeria, it was established (Ojo, 2012) that the cultural principles of the industry were consistent with the effectiveness of banks in Nigeria.

The success of an institution, as well as training, had a closer relationship with staff performance and organizational culture. With regard to ethical behavior, informal and formal engagement reflected a positive connection, but their relationship with staff performance is the weakest.

The success of an institution correlates significantly with staff performance on an individual and organizational level. Success can be seen as an internal principle of individuals and organizations, based on tradition, which correlate well with an institution's internal managerial procedures.

Experience and designation significantly contributed to promoting worker performance within the industry. This it is not surprising, since sustainable training is an internal principle that shaped the skills and behavior of staff. However, success focused on innovation and the communication abilities of individuals and the institution (Stewart, 2010).

Kotter and Heskett's (1992) view regarding an adaptive perspective highlights the adaptability of training to cater for internal and external change, to ensure that the institution is efficient and effective. The changing climate of business requires that the institution is flexible to remain relevant in respect of the changed demands of clients.

The findings of this study concur with the adaptive viewpoint presented by Kotter and Heskett (1992), in respect of organizational culture. The principle systems that are internal and external, accommodate the variations based on its flexibility and contribute to an increase of staff performance. Similarly, when looking at the outcomes concerning organizational culture from a systemic viewpoint, it can be interpreted that training and ethical behavior significantly contributed to performance.

This study also reveals that effective systems and values contributed significantly to staff performance. The findings highlight the defects in respect of a strong cultural view with continual internal emphasis, without considering the changing external situations (Hartnell et al., 2011). This study indicates that staff performance is not directly related to organizational culture, but is mediated by communication, which is in direct contrast to the view of Kotter and Heskett (1992).

The research findings alluded to the relationship between staff performance and communication, which can be associated with the view of McAleese

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and Hargie (2004), who assert that the principles of communication have an influence on worker performance. This study addressed the impact of communication on worker performance by focusing on constructs like team work, producing quality work, engagement between staff and executives, informal discussion between staff and supervisors. With respect to the relationship between staff performance and communication, it became evident in this study that no significant group differences exist. Among the constructs tested to quantify the significance of communication on staff performance in the banking industry, team work was the most significantly correlated with staff performance. This means that most of the staff members are of the opinion that teamwork has a significant impact on their performance.

The findings also revealed that communication influenced employee performance, which is consistent with the Southwest Airlines study in America (Cravens & Piercy, 2013), where communication strategy positively contributed to corporate success and staff performance. It also emphasized the importance of communication with reference to the relationship between institutional culture and staff performance. Staff performance was demonstrated by team work, cooperation between executives and staff; and informal discussions between staff and supervisors. From the aforementioned, it seems that there is no direct relationship between a firm's culture and staff performance. This is in contrast with Zheng et al. (2010) who argued that culture facilitates the interplay between communication and worker performance.

The study demonstrated that investment in communication and team work at the institutional level increases staff performance in the banking industry. The findings confirm Shahzad et al.'s (2013) research findings with reference to the significance of communication on worker performance. Garcia-Morales et al. (2014) emphasized that when an institution invests in communication and training, it contributes positively to efficiency and effectiveness, which ultimately increases performance.

It was also established in this study that there is a strong relationship between innovation and staff performance. This finding concurs with that of Shahzad et al. (2013) who reported similar findings from their study of a software house. These researchers also reported that cultural principles were positively related with the performance in the industry.

It was established that both innovation and communication increased staff performance. This view is supported by Carrillo-Hermosilla et al. (2010), who argued that institutional principles can contribute to an institution's strategic position towards staff performance. These researchers argued that innovation is an essential element of staff performance, which ultimately contributes to institutional performance.

The findings also confirmed that communication facilitated the relationship between institutional culture and employee performance within the banking industry. Although a relationship exists between institutional culture and employee performance, the path can better be described by an organizational culture-team work link. The results confirmed the relevance of communication in the establishment of institutional performance as reported by other researchers (Auernhammer & Hall, 2014).

CONCLUSION

This study was undertaken to explore the relationship between institutional culture and employee performance in the South African banking industry to ascertain the extent to which innovation and communication mediate this relationship.

The findings revealed that there is a relationship between institutional culture and staff performance in the banking industry. It was also ascertained that the best way staff associate themselves with the culture of the institution is through the institution's continued success and the training offered. It is therefore important that management uses the success of the institution and training as the central focal point to communicate the values of institution to staff and so improve performance. This can be done by accelerating the interaction between management and staff at all levels, so that internal experiences are carried over efficiently to all staff within the industry. Effective communication of new value systems in the banking industry can be done through a sustainable training program and mentorship. This process is important in the initial stages of creating a new value system in the banking industry.

Innovation was also identified as a significant factor in operational effectiveness and creating a competitive edge in the banking industry. The establishment of a suggestion 'box' in respect of innovative management systems, products or services, should be considered so that more staff is included in the development of new goals and strategies in the banking industry.

It is important that management takes note of link between innovation and communication, since this contributes to staff performance. The effective communication of innovative initiatives and the establishment of programs that encourage innovation among staff are of great importance in the establishment of a value system in the banking industry.

The study also demonstrated a different route from culture to staff performance, namely via innovation and communication. Therefore, it is important that management should focus on innovation and communication in all departments to increase the overall performance of their institution.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Conceptualization: Krishna Kistan Govender, CT Maralack.
Data curation: CT Maralack.
Formal analysis: CT Maralack.
Investigation: CT Maralack.
Methodology: Krishna Kistan Govender, CT Maralack.
Project administration: Krishna Kistan Govender, CT Maralack.
Software: CT Maralack.
Validation: Krishna Kistan Govender.
Visualization: Krishna Kistan Govender.
Writing – original draft: Krishna Kistan Govender.
Writing – reviewing & editing: Krishna Kistan Govender, CT Maralack.

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