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Nurturing a Culture of Creativity, Innovation and Continuous Improvement

Edwinah Amah PhD and Gift Worlu

Abstract

The paper reviews literature on the effect of nurturing a culture of creativity, innovation and continuous improvements. The paper concludes that the success of organizations to a very large extent depends on the ability of the manager to cultivate a culture of creativity, innovation and continuous improvement**.** The paper therefore recommends that to cultivate and nurture a culture of creativity, innovation and continuous improvement a manager must have a consciousness and belief in individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence.

Keywords: culture, creativity, innovation, inspirational motivation.

INTRODUCTION

Whereas structure is important in defining individual responsibilities within the workflow process, a congruent culture ensures that individuals carry out these responsibilities with minimum resistance. More importantly, strong culture dictates the way things should be done and creates expectations shared by group members, which are not outlined explicitly by formal structure. In the work place, corporate culture is a specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups that control the way they interact with each other and with other stakeholders outside the organization (Hills and Jones, 2001). Corporate culture relates to goals that should be pursued and standard of behaviour that should be maintained by employees as they pursue those goals. It has also been argued that strategic group membership and associated collective behaviours are the primary sources of durable differences in firm profitability and organization effectiveness (Caves and Porter, 1977: Porter, 1979). This implies that the collective behaviour of organization members which culture helps to control is important to its effectiveness. In relation to this argument, Glasister and Buckley (1998) identified corporate culture as one of the factors responsible for organizational effectiveness.

Goold and Campbell (1986) after examining some of the successful companies such as General Electric, Hewlett Packard and Matsushita, observed that, "there are a series of things concerned with corporate objectives and culture that seem to matter". They are of the view that corporate strategy and culture are important to successful organizations. A strong corporate culture (that is, one in which everyone understands and believe in the firm's goal, priorities and practices) that encourages the participation and improvement of all organization's members has been identified to be one of its most important assets (Denison, 1985). The impact of corporate culture on the design and management of organization is a constant theme in contemporary writing about American business (Denison, 1985). Corporate culture has been cited as an explanation for the differences in productivity among American firms, and differences in productivity between American and Japanese companies (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Denison, 1985).

Culture is an important force determining managerial attitudes and practices, and does influence the practice of management (Ukaegbu, 2001). Cultural differences may often affect management expectations and styles. The impact of culture in organizations is becoming increasingly important. Effect can be positive, as evidenced in the cases of Wal-Mart, UPS, and South-West Airlines. Employees of South West airlines for example, actually accept lower wages than their industry counterparts in order to be part of the 'fun' working environment created by South West's people Department Motto: Hire for Attitude, Train for Skills. Cultures of obscurity and distrust, however, can have a negative effect on organization performance such as recently observed at Enron and WorldCom(Amah, 2014).

In order to achieve their goals, organizations are driven by their own kind of culture known as 'corporate culture', which has significant influence on member's attitudes and behaviours. Bateman and Snell (1999) observed that a company's culture provides a framework that organizes and directs people's behaviour on the job. Corporate culture impact individual behaviour on what it takes to be in good standing and directs the appropriate behaviour for each circumstance. Culture is an essential quality of excellent organizations (Peters and Waterman, 1982; Amah, 2006).

Sorensen (2002) showed that the relationship between cultural strength and performance reliability depends on how strong culture firms learn from and respond to their own experiences and changes in their environment.

Creativity is the essence of culture. It is the fuel, which keeps the flame of culture burning brightly in all parts of the world. Creativity has always been and will always remain mankind's most powerful asset in terms of invention and innovation. It enables us see problems as opportunities to be seized rather than as diabolical curses to be endured. Nations, which recognize the importance of creativity and place it at the core of

all, planning and programming are bound to flourish (Ukaegbu, 2001).

SOURCES OF CORPORATE CULTURE

An organization's current customs, traditions and general way of doing things are largely due to what has been done before and the degree of success it has had (Robins, 2003). The ideas that become part of culture may come from any where within the organization (Daft, 2003). This includes a combination of founders, past leadership, current leadership, crisis, events, history and size. Senior management may try to determine corporate culture. They may wish to impose corporate values and standards of behaviour that specifically reflect the objectives of the organization.

Subsequent leaders applying the transformational leadership concept can break the organization away from the founder's values (Schein, 1985, Peters, 1978). Transformational leaders often alter and strengthen organizational culture by communicating and enacting their vision of the future.

LEADERSHIP AND THE CULTURE OF CREATIVITY INNOVATION AND CONTINOUS IMPROVEMENT.

- The leader manager must have a consciousness and strong belief in:
a) Individualized consideration: where the leader-manager gives personal attention to followers, builds a considerate relationship with each individual and attends to their personal needs
b) Intellectual stimulation : The leader –manager encourages followers to use their imagination and to always reflectively consider old ways of doing things.
c) Inspirational Motivation: Creating a clear picture of the future that is both optimistic and attainable.
d) Idealized Influence: Leader-manager being a role model for their followers; as the manager shows great persistence and determination in the pursuit of organizational objectives, and high standards of ethical and moral conduct (Bass and Avolio 1990, Avolio et al 1991).

MANAGERIAL PRACTICES FOR NURTURING CULTURE OF CREATIVITY,
INNOVATION AND CONTINOUS IMPROVEMENT

Certain managerial practices are expected of managers who want to nurture the culture of creativity, innovation and continuous improvement.

a) **Quality Industrial Counseling (QIC) (Ahiazu, 1999).**

In correcting an employee focus must be on "what" has gone wrong not "who" has gone wrong. Place emphasis on helping the staffs understand and identify with the correct work process, to prevent recurrence of errors. Correction needs to be done without humiliating the staff in the presence of a third party.

b) **Motivational Language Theory (MLT)**

This is based on the assumption that whatever is said to an employee affects his behavior either functionally or dysfunction ally. The effect also extends to other members of the organization who hear the communication. Managerial communication can be categorized into three types:

i) Those that reduce employees' uncertainty and increase his knowledge;
ii) Those that implicitly reaffirm the employee's sense of self worth as human being; and
iii) Those that facilitate the employee's construction of cognitive ways which he adopts in guiding himself and his work. It is therefore, important that managers should be mindful of what they say and write to workers at workplace.

c) The adoption of the behavioral operant conditioning technique of stimulating "self-efficacy perception" of the individual members of staff regularly. Self-efficacy has three dimensions namely i) Magnitude-which refers to the level of difficulty that the worker believes he can attain; ii) Strength-which has to do with whether the conviction regarding the magnitude is weak or strong; and iii) Generality-which indicates the degree to which the expectation is generalized across situations. Methods that can be used to achieve this include enactive mastery, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal.

d) The application of "Positive Behavior Reinforcement" technique. This is base on the notion that knowledge and skills are acquired or learned. The focus of this technique is the use of reward or reinforcement to sustain the desired behavior.

The scheme can be modified into the following form to suite our purpose:
- Specify the desired behavior in explicitly operational terms, and ensure that those concerned are fully aware of the expected standard.
- Positively reinforce desired behavior, and where possible ignore undesired behavior
- Minimize the time lag between desired response and reinforcement, or bridge the gap via verbal mediation.
- Apply positive reinforcement relatively frequently, preferably on variable ratio schedule.
- Ascertain contingencies that are perceived as positive and/or negative by the individual, and make

allowance for such perception while dealing with each individual.

- Ascertain the response level of each individual and use a shaping procedure to obtain a final complex response.
- Avoid using punishment as a primary means of obtaining desired behavior, rather apply punishment as a last resort, and ensure that the recipient is fully informed of the reason for the punishment.

f)   **Managerial Walking the Floor**

A practice whereby a manager or head of department or unit, or even chief executive, comes out from his office once in a while, and visits his workers in the general office or on the shop-floor to talk with them briefly and offering general encouraging words to the workers psychologically.

g)   **Respectful Handling of Worker**

The African cherishes personal dignity and self-respect a great deal. Substantial research evidence has shown the necessity for the recognition of this fact by managers at the African workplace (Peil, 1972; Dorjahn and Hogg, 1966; Kapferer 1972).

h)   **Humor and Story Telling**

The frequent use of "humor" and "storytelling" by leader –managers, results in invaluable transformation effect in organization. Humor relaxes one's listeners and makes them more receptive to what is being communicated. Stories illustrate how things are done or should be done around here. Humor and story telling should be part of every leader-manager's communication repertoire.

i)   **Rites and Ceremonials at Work Place**

A rite is made up of ritualistic activities, dramatically executed to mark a change from one status or position to another, for a person on whom the activities are performed. A ceremonial is composed of a system of several rites connected together in a single occasion or event. Rites improve workers operational efficiency; positively motivating and conditioning workers' behavior. It also enhances their level of achievement and commitment to the organization.

j)   **Workers Role Perception**

Has to do with how a worker feels regarding the level of importance he believes is attached to his work by his immediate boss. If a worker has any reason to believe that his boss does not consider his contribution at the workplace, he will continue to experience a miserable quality of work until the situation is changed.

k)   **Work Stress**

Every work is stressful. It is the duty of the manager to ensure that workers under him do not suffer from the stressful feelings that accrue from situations of:

i)   Role ambiguity
ii)   Role incompatibility
iii)   Role conflict
iv)   Role overload
v)   Role under load

l)   **Work Leisure Relations**

This is based on the argument that commitment to work is higher where one's work is close to one's leisure.

With these practices a leader-manager can cultivate and nurture a culture of creativity, innovation and continuous improvement in the organization. When such culture is in place the employees will focus on the changing needs of customers and other stakeholders and support initiatives to keep pace with the changes. In organizations with such culture employees tend to assume responsibility for the organization's performance. They are proactive and quick. Employees in such organizations tend to seek out opportunities, rather than wait for them to arrive. They act quickly, learn through discovery rather than engage in paralysis by analysis. Managers that nurture culture of creativity, innovation and continuous improvement are concerned about customers and employees. They value processes that contribute to useful change. Behavior is flexible; managers initiate change when needed, even if it involves risk. Managers demonstrate by their actions that taking risks and admitting failures are desirable traits.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

It is important for managers to build a culture as an explicit role with a set of objectives as it is a consensual system of regulation that reaches far beyond any system of bureaucratic or administrative control. To cultivate and nurture a culture of creativity, innovation and continuous improvement a manager must have a consciousness and belief in individualized consideration, intellectual stimulation, inspirational motivation and idealized influence. He also needs to put in practice the specific managerial practices we have discussed above. To cope and be effective in this ever-changing environment, the manager needs to cultivate and nurture a culture that encourages creativity, innovation and continuous improvement.

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