

The Influence of Culture Traits and their Imbalance on Employee Job Satisfaction and Turnover Intentions

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to explore if culture traits and their imbalance had influence on employee job satisfaction and turnover intentions. It was expected that the overall culture and the traits oriented towards the two contrasts of external adaption and internal integration on one hand, and change and stability on the other, would all have positive and negative associations with job satisfaction and turnover intentions respectively. It was further expected that the imbalance of traits would significantly influence job satisfaction and turnover intentions. The study was based on the survey of all employees in a manufacturing company in Lesotho.

There were generally positive and negative associations between culture and job satisfaction and turnover intentions respectively. Though the measure of the imbalance of traits was positively and significantly related to turnover intentions at 99 percent confidence level, it was only negatively related to job satisfaction at 90 percent confidence level. The post hoc tests indicated that the imbalance between flexibility (change) and stability traits were responsible for the positive effects on turnover intentions. The results, managerial implications and prospects for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Organisational culture; Culture traits; Job satisfaction; Turnover intentions; Culture imbalance

Introduction

For the past four decades, organizational culture has been an important theme in business and organizational studies. Organisational culture has been a popular theme in organisational studies because it has the potential to affect organisationally and individually desired outcomes. Because of its 'socially complex' and 'causally ambiguous' nature, organisational culture can further give organisations a sustained competitive advantage [1,2]. There is however, according to McKinnon, Harrison, Chow and Wu [3], paucity of empirical research to provide support, especially on some of the outcomes that have attracted a lot of attention, including organisational commitment, job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

Though studies in organizational culture originally adopted qualitative research designs, recent studies have included quantitative research designs in the inquiry of the concept. For instance, the study discussing instruments for exploring organisational culture identified 70 instruments deployed in studying this concept, 48 of which could be submitted to psychometric assessment [4]. Thus culture can be analysed quantitatively to permit comparison between organisations [5]. While many studies adopted a positivist and quantitative research paradigm [5-8], little empirical evidence exist that examine the relative influence of specific cultural values and their imbalance on employee attitudes and intentions. This study adds to a growing number of studies in this under-researched area. Specifically, the study explored the influence of culture traits and their imbalance on both job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

The other pertinent problem, according to Vandenberghe [9], is that 'organisational culture measures are rarely used outside the national context where they are developed, and therefore their generalisability to other nations is often questionable'. This problem is partly addressed in this study by examining the generalisability of organisational culture assessment to Lesotho, a landlocked country in Southern Africa.

The paper is outlined as follows. Section two after this introduction describes the framework of culture used in the study, and derives testable hypotheses from the review of literature in organisational culture, job satisfaction and turnover intentions. Section three describes the methodology used, and section four presents the results. Section five discusses the results, their limitations and prospects for future research. The final section is the conclusion.

Framework of Organisational Culture and the Hypotheses of the Study

Denison's Organisational Culture Survey (DOCS) was used to assess culture in this study. Even though there is no universally accepted definition of culture, many authors agree that corporate culture refers to the set of values, beliefs, and behaviour patterns that form the core identity of an organization [7,10]. Like many frameworks of culture, DOCS conceptualises culture as a multidimensional construct. According to Denison [11], culture consists of four traits, namely, involvement; consistency; adaptability and mission as shown in the Table 1.

Point of Reference	External	Adaptability	Mission
	Internal	Involvement	Consistency
		Change and Flexibility	Stability and Direction

Table 1: Denison’s Cultural Traits. Source: Adapted from Denison [11].

Denison and colleagues [6,12,13] described these traits as outlined below.

Involvement refers to employee commitment; sense of ownership; involvement in decisions that affect them; and team orientation. Consistency focuses on a coherent set of management principles; consensus regarding right and wrong ways to do things; and coordination and integration across the organisation. Adaptability is the extent to which the organisation has the capacity to deal with internal change in response to external market demands. A shared mission explains why the organisation exists; where it is headed; and hence provides the sense of direction by identifying goals and course of action for the organisation.

Denison and Mishra [6] observed that the four traits can be organised into the framework designed to acknowledge two contrasts: the contrast between internal integration and external adaptation, and the contrast between change and stability as shown in the Table 1. They argued that ‘this focus is consistent with Schein’s [14] observation that culture is developed as an organisation learns to cope with the dual problems of external adaptation and internal integration’ [6]. Gillespie et al. [13] argued that ‘the learned responses to the problems of internal integration are observed by the traits of involvement and consistency’, while ‘survival in the external environment is characterised by the adaptability and mission traits’. According to Denison and Mishra [6], the stability traits of mission and consistency are important predictors of profitability, and the change traits of involvement and adaptability are important for growth.

In general, Denison and colleagues suggested that adaptability and mission represent an external focus, while consistency and involvement are internally-focused traits [6,12,13]. They equally acknowledged the contrast between the change-oriented traits of adaptability and involvement, and the stability-oriented traits of mission and consistency. To my knowledge, there is little empirical work that focuses on how the traits oriented towards the above two contrasts of culture and their imbalance impact on employee attitudes and intentions.

Culture traits and job satisfaction

Job satisfaction can be defined as the ‘degree to which employees have a positive affective orientation towards employment by the organisation’ [15]. This ‘affective orientation’ should plausibly increase as a result of a widely and intensely held culture values. O’Reilly et al. [5] found significant correlations between person-culture fit and normative commitment, overall job satisfaction, turnover intentions and actual turnover. McKinnon et al. [3] agreed that some emphasis on the cultural values of respect for people, innovation, and stability were strongly associated with affective commitment, job satisfaction and information sharing. The study by Lund [16] established that job satisfaction was positively related to clan and adhocracy cultures, and negatively related to market and hierarchy cultures. Other studies that

established strong relationships between culture and job satisfaction include that of MacIntosh and Doherty [17] and Egan et al. [18].

Past literature has however only been suggestive on how the values/ traits relating to the core definition of culture, namely the ‘observation that culture is developed as an organisation learns to cope with the dual problems of external adaptation and internal integration’, affect employee attitudes such as job satisfaction. In their comparison of the impact of organisational culture between the US and Russia, Fey and Denison [12] observed that involvement was the most important dimension of culture for firms whose primary goal was employee satisfaction. They posited that ‘organisations with a top-down vision often find it difficult to focus on the empowerment and the bottom-up dynamics needed for alignment’ (p.688). Whereas vision is an external but stability-oriented trait, empowerment is a sub-trait of involvement, which is an internal but change-oriented trait, and both are related to job satisfaction. Johnson and McIntye [18] ‘found that the measures of culture most strongly related to job satisfaction were empowerment, involvement and recognition’. Employee empowerment, involvement and recognition tap into Denison’s [11] involvement trait, which is a flexible and internally-oriented trait. Vancouver and Schmitt [19] found that goal congruence was significantly related to job satisfaction, organisational commitment and intention to quit. The study by Beehr et al. [20] established that employees who were most satisfied came from sub-units whose actions were aligned with the organisation’s overall goals. Both goal congruence and alignment tap into the measurement of the consistency trait, which is both a stable and internally-oriented trait.

Thus in line with prior research, I expected that all cultural traits would have a positive correlation with job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1a: Internally-focused and externally-focused culture traits have positive associations with job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1b: Stability-oriented and change-oriented culture traits have positive associations with job satisfaction.

Culture traits and turnover intentions

Turnover intention can be defined as ‘a conscious and deliberate willingness to leave the organisation’ [18]. In this study turnover intentions and not actual turnover is used because there is a strong relationship between the two concepts [21]. In fact the Theories of Reasoned Action and Planned Behaviour suggest that intentions are the best predictors of behavior [22]. Conceptually, employees whose culture fits that of the organisation should express low willingness to leave and vice versa.

Though there has not been shortage of studies on turnover intentions, only a few studies focused on culture and turnover intentions [8,18,23]. MacIntosh and Doherty [24] established that organisational culture was inversely associated with intentions of club staff to leave. Sheridan [8] found that professionals hired in firms emphasising the interpersonal relationship cultural values were likely

to stay longer than those hired in the firms emphasising the completion of work task cultural values. Even though Carmeli [23] found that the organisational culture that provided challenging jobs reduced withdrawal intentions (intention to leave occupation, job and organisation), other dimensions of culture were not significantly related to withdrawal intentions. McKinnon et al. [3] could only establish a weak relationship between certain cultural traits (respect for people, innovation, and stability) and propensity to remain.

In general, it is known that certain cultural values/traits reduce employee turnover intentions and/or actual turnover, or alternately, increase employee propensity to stay.

Hypothesis 2a: Internally-focused and externally-focused culture traits have negative associations with turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 2b: Stability-oriented and change-oriented culture traits have negative associations with turnover intentions.

Imbalance of traits (culture), job satisfaction and turnover intentions

The 'balanced culture' phenomenon provides intuitively plausible propositions. For instance, an organisation that focuses on internal processes at the expense of external orientation is likely to compromise customer focus and lack strategic direction. Conversely, an organisation that focuses on external issues at the expense of internal issues is likely to lose internal integration and coordination. Similar ineffectiveness may result when the organisation focuses on stability at the expense of adaptability, in which case the organisation may react slowly to environmental changes; or when the organisation focuses on flexibility at the expense of stability, in which case there may be conflict and lack of coordination.

The contradictory and paradoxical nature of culture is acknowledged by many theorists. For instance, Schein [14] observed that 'culture is developed as an organisation learns to cope with the dual problems of external adaptation and internal integration' [6]. In their qualitative analysis of some ineffective organisations, Denison and Mishra [6] found that some highly consistent cultures were resistant to change and creativity. They argued that for effectiveness, each trait had to be balanced by others. They further submitted that 'it is the balancing of competing demands that distinguishes excellent managers and organisations from their mediocre counterparts'. Yilmaz and Ergun agreed that 'organisations need to simultaneously complement internal integration and coordination with external adaptability, attain a balanced composition of stability and flexibility, and blend top-down control with bottom-up involvement'. Though Yilmaz and Ergun [2] found that the overall imbalance of traits had insignificant effects on effectiveness, they found that the imbalance of certain pairs of traits had both negative and positive effects on certain measures of effectiveness. Since it is assumed that culture imbalance reduces effectiveness, we expected it to reduce job satisfaction and to increase turnover intentions.

Hypothesis 3: The imbalance of culture traits has negative and positive associations with job satisfaction and turnover intentions respectively.

Methodology

The survey research design was used to collect data for the current study. The employee survey was deemed appropriate because the aim

of the study was to relate one variable to another. The research setting was a local clay brick manufacturing company in Lesotho.

Sample and procedures

The targeted population included all 110 employees of the company. The self-administered questionnaires were delivered to 105 employees (excluding five employees who were not available at the time of the survey). 99 questionnaires were returned, the response rate of 94 percent. Of the respondent sample, 81 percent were males. The median age of employees was above 35 years of age, and they had served a company for a median of 7 to 9 years. The sample was made up of staff from finance, manufacturing, human resources, quality assurance and sales and marketing departments. Following a meeting in which the rationale and the purpose of the study was explained together with assurances of confidentiality and the voluntary nature of employee participation, employees were requested to collect the questionnaire from the human resources office and to return the completed questionnaire to a sealed suggestion box situated outside human resources office of the company.

Measures

Unless otherwise indicated, all scale variables were measured on a 5 point Likert-scale ranging from 1(strongly disagree) to 5(strongly agree).

Turnover intentions: This concept was a dependent variable, and it was measured with five items adapted from Michigan Organisational Assessment Questionnaire. The sample items included: 'It is likely that I will look for another job within the next 6 months'; 'As soon as I can find a better job, I will quit this organization'; 'I often think about quitting my job'; 'I often think about leaving my organization'; and 'I will probably look for a job outside this organisation within 3 years'. The Cronbach's alpha (internal reliability) of the scale was 0.92.

Organizational culture: 12 items selected from Denison's [11] Organizational Culture Scale were used to measure culture traits. The items were selected such that they each represent the three subscales under each of the four traits identified by Denison [11]. The items are reproduced in the appendix. The Cronbach's alpha for mission trait was 0.79, and that of adaptability trait was (0.46). The Cronbach's alpha for consistency was 0.66, and that for involvement trait was (0.48). The Cronbach's alphas for internally-focused traits (an index of six items from involvement and consistency cultural traits) and externally-focused traits (an index of six items from mission and adaptability) were the same at 0.74. The Cronbach's alpha for stability trait (an index of six items from mission and consistency traits) was 0.80, and that of flexibility or change trait (an index of six items from involvement and stability traits) was moderate at 0.64.

Following Yilmaz and Ergun [2], I operationalised the degree of culture imbalance as the sum of the absolute values of the pair-wise differences between the culture traits (|internally-focused versus externally-focused traits| + |change-oriented versus stability-oriented traits|).

Job satisfaction: One global indicator of job satisfaction, 'I consider my job rather unpleasant', was used to tap into job satisfaction level. The item was selected from the items developed by Brayfield and Rothe [25], as cited in Judge et al. [26]. The item was reverse coded so that higher scores indicated higher levels of job satisfaction.

Demographic factors: Three demographic factors were included in the model as control factors. Gender was coded 1 for males, and 2 for females. Age was coded 1 for those below 20 years of age; 2 for those who were 20 years up to 24 years of age; 3 for those who were 25 years up to 35 years of age; and 4 for those who were above 35 years of age. Tenure at the organization was coded 1 for those who worked for less than 1 year; 2 for those who worked for 1 to 3 years; 3 for those who worked for 4 to 6 years; 4 for those who worked for 7 to 9 years; 5 for

those who worked for 10 to 12 years; and 6 for those who worked for more than 12 years.

Results

The means, standard deviations and correlations of the study variables are shown in Table 2.

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Gender	1.19	0.39	-									
2. Age	3.6	0.61	-0.17	-								
3. Tenure	4.06	1.92	-0.32**	0.64**	-							
4. JS	3.08	1.55	0.11	-0.23*	-0.25*	-						
5. Intent	3.22	1.44	0.05	-0.12	-0.22*	-0.41**	-0.92					
6. IFT	3.11	0.94	0.03	0.18	0.07	0.29*	-0.29*	-0.74				
7. EFT	3.45	0.94	0.18	0.12	0	0.16	-0.26*	0.69*	-0.74			
8. COT	3.29	0.86	0.04	0.11	0.01	0.24*	-0.23*	0.86**	0.81**	-0.64		
9. SOT	3.26	1	0.15	0.18	0.06	0.21	-0.34**	0.85**	0.88**	0.72**	-0.8	
10. IMB	1.13	0.75	-0.01	-0.01	-0.13	-0.2	0.31**	-0.40**	-0.04	-0.25*	0.19	-

*p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; JS=Job satisfaction; IFT=internally focused traits; EFT=externally focused traits; COT=Change oriented traits; SOT=Stability oriented traits; IMB=imbalance

Table 2: Means (M), Standard Deviations (SD) and inter-correlations among study variables.

Age and tenure were negatively related to job satisfaction ($r=-0.23$, $p \leq 0.05$ and $r = -0.25$, $p \leq 0.05$ respectively), suggesting that older employees with longer tenure were more likely to express lower job satisfaction than younger employees with shorter tenure. That notwithstanding, employees with longer tenure expressed lower intent to leave than employees with shorter tenure ($r=-0.22$, $p \leq 0.05$).

There was also a significant negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover intention ($r=-0.41$, $p \leq 0.01$), suggesting that employees with high job satisfaction expressed lower intentions to leave relative to those with lower levels of job satisfaction.

Hypothesis 1a predicted that the measure of both internally-focused and externally-focused traits would correlate positively with job satisfaction. The measure of internally-focused traits indeed correlated positively and significantly with job satisfaction ($r=0.29$, $p \leq 0.05$), but the relationship between externally-focused traits, though in the expected direction, was not significant ($r=0.16$, $p \geq 0.05$). Thus hypothesis 1a was partially supported. Hypothesis 1b was also partially supported because the change-oriented and stability-oriented traits were correlated to job satisfaction at 95 percent and 90 percent confidence levels respectively ($r=0.24$, $p \leq 0.05$; $r=0.21$, $p \leq 0.10$).

Hypotheses 2a and 2b were supported because the internally-focused traits; externally focused-traits; stability-oriented traits; and change-oriented traits were all significantly and inversely related to turnover intentions ($r=-0.29$, $p \leq 0.05$; $r=-0.26$, $p \leq 0.05$; $r=-0.23$, $p \leq 0.05$; and $r=-0.34$, $p \leq 0.01$ respectively). Though the measure of the imbalance of traits was positively and significantly related to turnover intentions at 99 percent confidence level ($r=0.31$, $p \leq 0.01$), it was only

negatively related to job satisfaction at 90 percent confidence level ($r=0.20$, $p \leq 0.10$). Thus hypothesis 3 was partially supported.

Variable	Job satisfaction (β)	Turnover intention (β)
Gender	0.01	-0.03
Age	-0.16	0.06
Tenure	-0.15	-0.26
IFT-EFT	-0.1	0.09
COT-SOT	-0.12	0.23*
Culture	0.25*	-0.23*
R-Square	0.17	0.2

Standardized regression coefficients. *p ≤ 0.05; **p ≤ 0.01; IFT=internally focused traits; EFT=externally focused traits; COT=Change oriented traits; SOT=Stability oriented traits

Table 3: Results of regression analyses (post hoc analyses).

Following Yilmaz and Ergun [2], I explored the possibility that the effect(s) of an imbalance between a given pair of traits might offset the imbalance in other pairs by conducting the post hoc exploratory analysis. Accordingly I estimated two regression models in which job satisfaction and turnover intentions were respectively dependent variables; and demographic factors, absolute values of individual pairwise differences between culture traits, and overall culture were

independent variables. I used overall culture instead of culture traits because the high correlation between the culture values ($r=\pm 0.80$) would lead to multicollinearity. The Cronbach's alpha for overall culture (12 items) was 0.84. The results of post hoc exploratory analyses are shown in Table 3.

Regression coefficients in Table 2 suggest that culture predicted job satisfaction and turnover intentions positively and negatively respectively. It also shows that after controlling for demographic factors and overall culture, the imbalance between change-oriented traits and stability-oriented traits was the one responsible for the positive relationship between the overall imbalance and turnover intention. In other words the higher the imbalance between the change-oriented traits and stability-oriented traits the higher the turnover intentions, and vice versa.

Discussion

The central theme of this study was that the culture traits would be positively and negatively related to job satisfaction and turnover intentions respectively. I further hypothesised that the imbalance of culture traits would reduce job satisfaction and increase turnover intentions. The measure of culture traits was based on Denison's Organisational Culture Survey (DOCS) because it is the framework of culture that captures clearly the two thematic contrasts of culture, namely, external adaptation and internal integration on one hand, and change and stability on the other hand.

Though the internally-focused traits and change-oriented traits were positively and significantly related to job satisfaction, the externally-focused traits and stability-oriented traits were not significantly related to job satisfaction. This pattern of results may be explained based on the fact that the involvement trait, which correlates well with job satisfaction, is the constituent of both the internally-focused traits and change-oriented traits. For instance, Fey and Denison [12] found that involvement was the most important dimension of organisational culture for companies whose primary goal was job satisfaction. Similarly, the study by Johnson and McIntye [18] established that the measures of culture most strongly related to job satisfaction were empowerment, involvement and recognition. Similar pattern of results between the involvement trait and job satisfaction were noted by Yilmaz and Ergun [2] in a non-Western environment. This replication in Lesotho gives us confidence to suggest that managers who want to improve employee job satisfaction using culture traits can do so by emphasising the involvement (empowerment) trait.

All culture traits explored in this study were inversely related to turnover intentions, suggesting that the perception of higher culture traits corresponded with lower employee turnover intentions and vice versa. Even though various culture dimensions, values and traits were used in the past, the current finding is generally in accord with the extant knowledge in the literature [2,3,5,18,24].

The prevailing wisdom in organisational culture theories is that the imbalance of culture results in ineffectiveness [2]. In line with this view, this study found that the measure of the imbalance of culture traits was positively related to turnover intentions. Even though past studies used objective measures of effectiveness [2,6], it is known that turnover intentions and turnover are closely related, and the latter may result in ineffectiveness in the form of lost experience, cost of advertising of new positions, interviews, and selection [27]. This study specifically found that the high imbalance between change-oriented

traits and stability-oriented traits was associated with high turnover intention. It is possible that change at the expense of coordination and integration, or stability at the expense of flexibility and employee involvement frustrate employees and increase their intentions to leave. This supports the 'balanced culture' hypothesis.

When interpreting the results of this study certain limitations have to be considered. First, the cross-sectional and correlational approach adopted precludes causal inferences. For instance, as assumed in this study, it is possible that culture traits influence job satisfaction. This however would not preclude the possibility that people who are satisfied with their jobs would be more likely to perceive coherent culture than those who are less satisfied. Although our assumption that culture traits impact on job satisfaction and turnover intentions was based on current thinking in job satisfaction and turnover intentions studies, experimental and longitudinal studies are required to draw inferences that culture impacts on these variables.

Second, the data used in this study was collected from one source (self-reported) at one particular point in time. This approach lends itself to common method variance. While measurement of perceptions and attitudes can meaningfully be explored through self-reported data, future studies can reduce the possibility of common method variance by collecting data from different sources at different points in time.

Third, the population was small and confined to a particular industry that is dominated by men. This limited the statistical powers of the instruments used, and the generalisability of the results. Future studies can test the same hypotheses in a number of industries using relatively larger samples.

Conclusion

For the past four decades, organizational culture has been an important theme in business and organizational studies. However, little is known about how different dimensions, values, and traits or their imbalance influence job attitudes and behavioural intentions. Based on the survey of employees in a clay brick manufacturing company in Lesotho, the study reported here was the first attempt to close that gap. The study found that the measures of the internally-focused traits (involvement and consistency) and change-oriented traits (involvement and adaptability) were significantly related to job satisfaction. The study also established inverse and significant associations between turnover intentions and culture traits (internally-focused traits; externally-focused traits; change-oriented traits; and stability-oriented traits). The study finally found that the imbalance of culture traits had a positive and significant influence on turnover intentions.

To a large extent, the results suggest that culture traits and their imbalance matter in job satisfaction and turnover intentions.

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