Factors which Influence the Corporate Culture of an Entity- Analysing the Dynamics of Culture Stability and Inevitable Change

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Abstract- **The main objective of the paper is to evaluate literature on corporate culture to assess the ideal culture and to explain how corporate culture change occurs within an organisation. Focus is given to types of corporate culture, the respective attributes and specific factors that influence corporate culture change. The study is based on available literature from journal publications and related authoritative sources of academic literature. During the study the types of corporate culture and the respective attributes were discussed. Prior studies show that corporate culture is intrinsic and unique to a particular entity, defines the social values of group members, is developed over time and passed from one generation to the other. Further reviews also show that corporate culture is man-made, social in nature, controls the mind-set of members and is generally static over time. Discussions made postulates that corporate culture needs to be stable for it to be associated with the identity of a particular entity. Nevertheless, inevitable change exists in response to various factors. There is a gap in literature in that prior studies falls short in identifying the best corporate culture. From this review it has been concluded that there is no a single ideal corporate culture. Rather, a hybrid corporate culture is beneficial because it adopts the benefits of many cultures and avoids the associated demerits. Finally, it has been revealed that the stability nature of corporate culture can be compromised in pursuit of inherent change.**

Keywords- **Corporate culture, change, stability, common values, mind-set**

I. INTRODUCTION

The history of corporate culture backdates to 1951 and had relevance in an industrial community where it was used as a tool for shaping the social life of people in a particular community [1]. Over the years the dynamics and thrust expanded to organisational success through corporate group behaviour [2]. From this perspective corporate culture is viewed as a factor that differentiates successful companies [3]. Empirical studies about the phenomenon concluded that corporate culture is critical to consider when evaluating the success of an entity [4]. Literature however falls short when defining the ideal corporate culture. By definition, corporate culture is a collective programming of the mind-set among members of a particular entity [5]. It can also be defined as a set of shared values and assumptions that reflects the mind-set and unwritten rules working silently to direct organizational decision-making and behaviour [6]. The common way of doing things has to be consistent over time and this can be used as a unique identifier of the entity [7]. In this regard, corporate culture is hard to change because it forms the core of group member beliefs. However, there are some factors that may alter, shift or improve it. From this perspective, corporate culture can be altered through change initiatives. Subsequent sections expound on the dynamics, nature and factors that affects corporate culture. Finally, a critical evaluation of culture rigidity against inevitable change is done.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Characteristics of Corporate Culture

In essence the term organisational culture and corporate culture can be used interchangeably because they literally mean the same [8]. Corporate culture is a pattern of basic assumptions that a particular group has invented, discovered or developed in adapting to a situation. The assumptions should have worked well to be considered valid, perceived as the norm and worthy to be taught to new members [9].

On the business fraternity, corporate culture affects general performance of entities to a greater magnitude than other factors because it strongly relates to the moral being and emotions of a team [10]. High performance is associated with positive corporate cultures and negative corporate culture is associated with poor performance.

The main attributes of corporate culture are that it is purely man-made, generally acceptable among group members, social in nature and that it influences the behaviour of members [11]. Corporate culture is therefore intangible although it can manifest in real objects that can be seen, felt and observed; it is exercised both consciously and unconsciously. The manifestations of corporate culture can be visible or invisible [11].

The Schein and Iceberg corporate culture models focus on two components of culture being visible and invisible [12]. The invisible components are those strong and deep traits not spoken about or openly acknowledged yet they involuntarily direct the behaviour of members. New members may only know and practice these traits through socialisation. Incorporated in these traits are the values, norms, attitudes, feelings, relationships and status. The assumptions resemble the stronger elements which unconsciously shape the behaviour of members in a group. This is the level where the mind-set, 'DNA', heart and blood of an organisation is located. The 'standards and values' are the traits which members consciously practice in their way of doing things. These are the mission statements, visions, dressing, policies and strategies. The related levels are underlying assumptions, 'standards and values' and artefacts [13].

The artefacts are those elements of culture available on the public domain for the world to see. These visible components are those elements of corporate culture open to the public. Products, uniforms, sitting arrangements, hospitality, language, technology, group interaction, hardworking, motivation, disciplinary actions, respect, vision, mission and values, facilities, offices, presentation, attendance, paintings and flags are some of the artefacts [14].

The 7s Model provides the elements of corporate culture in two categories namely; 'soft' and 'hard'. The hard elements are organisational structure, systems and strategy. The soft elements are made up of skills, staff, styles and core values [15].

The effect of corporate culture is that it overrides formal guidelines, procedures and regulation as long as they do not match the corporate culture values. Intensity is determined by length of existence, stability of members and emotional intensity of shared values. Accordingly, corporate culture defines the identity of group members. Using the Competing values model it is clear that there are four main factors on which culture is assessed as follows: 'Stability vs. flexibility' and 'internal vs external' [16].

Flexibility and stability operate in opposite directions. The former requires adopting new ways of doing things while the later puts emphasis on maintaining the same ways overtime. A strong corporate culture is stable and consistent. Ever-changing ways distort the cultural values built over time [17]. On external vs. internal focus, it is notable that there are external forces that act on an organisation, forcing it to adapt accordingly. In contrast, internal forces focus on integration of organisational values. When faced with a dilemma to choose between competing forces, it is the imbedded culture that ultimately influences people to choose direction [18].

External focus is derived from market forces and external stakeholders' needs. To remain competitive on the market, organisations must consider the market needs. The outside world do not mind about other internal commitments that an organisation may have. The strength of influence from external world is so impacting because defiant organisations loose the market share. External competence is achieved through an effective internal system. These opposing objectives act against each other [19]. Specific common traits, values and beliefs among group members form the corporate culture of an entity. Accordingly, various corporate culture types exists.

B. Corporate culture types

1) Tough guy culture: This corporate culture type is characterised by a highly aggressive team. Members forcefully carry out tasks through coercive orders. The system that adopts the 'tough guy' corporate culture has strict hierarchies with accelerated power towards the top [20]. The culture is described as 'the take all or nothing culture' in that members are compelled to take up all instructions in their totality or to completely disregard them in their entirety. The success of the tough guy culture is usually exaggerated because of inadequate scrutiny, checks and balances. The 'tough guy culture' is hyperactive with high risk and fast response rate [21].

2) Work hard/ Play hard culture: Under this culture members are extremists in their conduct. They believe in maximum utilisation of opportunities and resources. There is high team orientation on what they do. On the extreme end of working hard is playing hard. When it is time for play, members socialise to the fullest. Social ties are closely knitted because of unreserved play enjoyed during social time. Entities that adopt the 'work hard/play hard' cultures are low risk takers and swift responders [22].

3) Bet-your-company culture: An entity that adopts this culture is a high risk taker. Members are highly innovative, explorers and game changers [23]. They try new ways of doing business, adventure new markets, products and customers. Members have long term focus and do not wait to solve problems; rather, they foresee challenges beforehand and develop solutions ahead of crisis time. Members of the 'Bet-your-company culture exploit all possible opportunities in the name of securing best deals for future existence of the company [24].

4) Process culture: This type of culture is a direct opposite of the 'Bet-your-company' culture. Members are low risk takers who do not have the appetite to explore any new opportunities. The entity is sceptical to risk. Self-protection is a cause of concern over possible gain in new ventures. Process culture is passive with low risk and slow response rate [25]. High dependency is placed on already established processes and therefore any diversion is not tolerated.

5) Clan Culture: The clan culture is established on the belief of achieving set objectives through cohesion. Members are strongly glued and bound together in their conduct [26]. Social relationships are strong to drive the impetus of members. The principles of success are built on mutual support from group members. The group exists as a social group doing business together, the spirit of belonging and being part of the team cheer members to cling to common objectives. Empowerment and human development are the key tools used to capacitate members in gaining popularity and support from peer members. Clan culture businesses are run like family organization where members are bound together by emotional ties and shared values [27]. They operate as a community and they lack the global perspective of doing business. Members are however committed and loyal to the set ethos. Collective output is achieved other than personal achievement and aggrandisement. The major drawback of the clan culture is cronyism exercised to build social empires on the expense competitiveness [28].

6) Adhocracy Culture: This corporate culture is characterized by creativity, flexibility, risk taking and innovation in the entity. Organisations adopting the adhocracy culture are not rules bound instead they are creative and innovative in nature. Development of new effective ways of achieving entity objectives is their thrust [29]. Businesses run through adhocracy thrive in the ever-changing competitive world. They are flexible in adopting new and advanced ways of business. Risk taking makes them optimistic that new ways are always better than sticking to old redundant processes [30]. The corporate culture for evolving businesses lies in adhocracy quadrant. Dynamic teams with a strategic focus adopt this corporate culture type. Members are highly adaptable to inevitable and necessary change. Leaders prioritise flexibility over stability. Members get satisfaction when they make new discoveries to turnaround the entity towards efficiency [31].

7) Market Culture: The Market culture is oriented in fulfilling the requirements of its market and stakeholders. Its focus is always on establishing market needs and working towards satisfying them. Such organisations are highly productive to ensure that their products and services are always available on the market [32]. They are competition driven and hence always up to date with market trends. When they set goals they work hard to accomplish them in line with meeting market demands. The market culture businesses are highly sensitive to market forces; they focus on results, encourage aggressive competition, defend brands and are concerned about maintaining market share. In overall adhocracy culture is more focused on sustaining and developing the market share over competitors. This market-based culture thrives in fulfilling customer needs [33].

8) Hierarchy Culture: This culture is rules bound and has strict internal controls that respect the chain and line of command. The leader has overriding power over the views of members. Those in charge exercise their power through standardised procedures and routine protocols [34]. It is vehemently an act of misconduct when the hierarchy of command is not complied with. Any decisions done outside the command line are disregarded.The hierarchy culture supports fidelity and honesty in that accountability is prescribed at every level of the command line. This culture also results in similarities and uniformity in management style because it is built on laid strict rules and commands. Hierarchy cultures follow orders through structured lines of authority [35].

9) High integrity Cultures: The high integrity culture focuses on flawlessness and strict adherence. Members are strict followers of internal control guidelines, procedures, rules and laws. They employ experts in interpretation and enforcing the law in view of total compliance [36]. The thrust of the high integrity culture is inclined to compliance than productivity, innovation and the market. Members are cautious not to break the law. Such organisations do not take risks outside the precepts of the stipulated operational guidelines. High integrity organisations are more effective when they are provided with updated, viable and proved guidelines because they will strictly follow them [37]. The drawback of this culture is that redundant laws and guidelines mislead the entity as members thrive to abide with set procedures.

10) Transition Cultures: A transition culture is not static. Most new entities which are still migrating and building their own brand belong to this culture. The initial phases on corporate culture development have many shifts in ideology and work processes [38]. The other cause of the transition culture is high turnover of key leadership positions at the inception and development stage. New members who find out that an entity is still developing culture bring in their experience and interests to shape the unstable and developing culture. Strong cultures are developed through the transition phase [39]. The culture trials ensure that the right culture is adopted at the end. Nevertheless, the transition period must be reasonably short to ensure that a static culture is established.

11) Dysfunctional Cultures: A dysfunctional corporate culture has a disjointed team with diverted focus usually due to distortions in the social orientations. Members are not socially bound and they exercise their social choices in different ways [40]. Extended time in the transition culture phase results in such distortions. The other attribute of this culture is that social orientations are distorted and completely incompatible [41].

12) Hybrid Cultures: A hybrid corporate culture combines the attributes of more than one corporate culture. Individual corporate cultures explained in prior sections have positives to emulate and negatives to avert. In this regard the hybrid corporate culture is ideal because it combines the desired features of many corporate cultures to build a strong one [42]. The adoption of the hybrid is also essential to eliminate the disadvantages of a particular corporate culture by adopting the beneficial features only. The danger of adopting hybrid corporate culture is that it lacks the specific focus hence may result in lack of coherence [43]. This may result in multiple corporate culture objectives that may be unrealistic to achieve.

C. The solidity of corporate culture

The solidity of a corporate culture is the extent of unification among group members towards the common beliefs [44]. When members have full determination to follow and be bound by their values the corporate culture is strong. On the other hand the culture is weak when members hold loosely to their values.

Strong corporate cultures have committed members, value organisational tasks, have concentrated focus, leaders are effective, are responsive to external threats, members hold similar views, have common goals, are loyal, possess sense of ownership, does not need close supervision, have strong and effective communication channels and their members are selfless [45].

Weak corporate cultures have members who are self-centred, with diverted focus, disregard organizational tasks and responsibilities and members' personal behaviour is unorthodox. Cliques that connive to disrupt group goals are common. Strict supervision is thereforerequired. Its members are not inspired; they are rascal and mischievous. Within the group there is poor communication and coordination of members is weak [46].

D. Corporate Culture Change

Corporate culture is made up of the values, norms, behaviours, morals and practices common among members of an entity; developed over time, passed from generation to generation and part of identity. In essence corporate culture has to be stable and rigid to have a perpetual effect on its members [47]. Nevertheless, culture shifts may arise due to changes in factors that influence it [48]. Entities wishing to preserve a certain culture must take guard against these factors. Likewise, entities intending to shift their corporate culture can rely of these variables to foster inevitable change. Accordingly, corporate culture needs to be managed carefully to ensure that drifts and changes are under control and that they will not result in adverse cultures being created.

1) Legislation: The laws of the land determine the conduct of persons, entities and business operations in the particular country [49]. Law abiding is mandatory and accordingly corporate cultures of entities are guided by the regulatory frameworks prevalent in the industry and nation. In compliance to the provisions of the law, entities have to incorporate the requirements of law into their daily operations [50]. The impact of legislation is noticeable when there are inconsistencies and changes in laws. Accordingly, corporate cultures of entities are subjected to the guiding laws.

2) Standards and guidelines: Standards and guidelines relate to the common practices set out to govern the operations within a particular industry. The guidelines offer a basis of business conduct that forms the corporate culture. Standards are precise on quality of products and services. To achieve certain benchmarks there has to be some stipulated common approved practices. The standards therefore have an impact on the conduct and corporate culture of entities [51].

3) Providers of capital: The shareholders are the owners of entities they hold shares for. As owners, shareholders have a say to the affairs of their entities through resolutions made during Annual General Meetings [52]. Shareholder powers are enshrined with voting rights depending with their proportion of shareholding. The shareholders who hold a bigger stack have greater controlling powers in the entity. The influence of shareholders contributes to the overall strategy and culture of their entities. Providers of capital include banks, partners, donors and lenders. These stakeholders have an interest in the success of entities holding their funds. In pursuit of the intended targets, capital providers influence the manner of business conduct and respective cultural values [53].

4) Codes of conduct: A code of conduct is a legal document that gives guidelines on acceptable behaviour on individuals in an organisation. These are legal documents which form part of the contract between the employer and the employee and it is a tool used to set, maintain and develop the culture of employees in an organisation [54]. Information contained on the code of conduct includes ban of illegal activities like drinking alcohol and smoking during work, discrimination, harassments, confidentiality procedures, dress code, sexual orientation rights, conflict management procedures, internet usage policy, entertainment policy, time management guide and company values [55]. Consistent application and enforcement of the code of conduct create a long-lasting impact in shaping the behaviour of employees [56].

5) Company policies: Organisational policies have four main dimensions: role clarity, organisational culture, organisational learning and organisational support [57]. Organisational culture, being one of the dimensions of a company policy has to be clearly defined in the policy document. Clearly defined policies shape the corporate culture by influencing the behaviour and actions of members.

6) Training: Training enhances skills development and knowledge acquisition necessary to mould the behaviour of group members [58]. Training is also a significant element of innovation and the creation of an innovative behaviour within the entity [59]. Training has a psychological effect of mind-set change hence it is a critical element of corporate culture change.

7) Performance and reward system: The reward system in place has an influence to the conduct of employees in an entity [60]. In this regard, remuneration and compensation policies are used as a strategy to enhance employee performance. Employees are remunerated according to their achievements. Employees are highly motivated by achieving targets. The corporate culture developed from this system is goal oriented and target based. Non performers are discouraged through punishment while performers earn extra recognition for their hard work [61].

8) Customer movements: Customer movements, related boycotts and stakeholder protests are instrumental in controlling the conduct of entities offering a service or products [62]. When an entity is highly responsive to the needs of customers it shows its readiness to incline itself to new market trends. Adoption of new tastes may call for major changes in the usual ways of conducting business. When business practices are altered to match customer needs, the corporate culture is expected to shift towards the new demands of customers. Customer movements therefore impact the customer orientation culture of the organisation.

9) Non-governmental organisations (NGOs): When these NGOs dominate the local scenes, foreign culture infiltration on local cultures is inherent. NGOs have an influence in the rebranding of local corporate cultures through the imposition of their own corporate cultures imported from their countries of origin and offering conditions on donated funds [63].

10) Technology incorporation: Technology drives the way of doing things. Efficiency is enhanced in a highly technical environment. Production based cultures are more effective in such highly automated industries [64]. New technology is associated with the young generation of employees who are highly technical. A crop of young employees tend to emulate the social interaction that result from technical skills similarities. Corporate cultures that are developed from a firm technological base result in vast economic benefits ranging from high productivity, reduced costs, high efficiency, accelerated value creation and enhanced decision making [65].

11) Leadership behaviour: Successful corporate cultures rely on their leaders for guidance, they trust their leaders and believe that their vision, behaviour and guidance are the best [66]. Steadiness in upholding the leaders' values over time defines a stable and consistent cultural system. Good leaders are transformative in nature and they set the tone from the top. It is believed that leaders impart the corporate culture of choice to their subordinates.

12) Social diversity: Corporate culture is developed over time and organisations that accept members from various social backgrounds will over time grow into a rich cultural system [67]. The ability of an organisation to create a unified cultural system from multi social orientations is what makes corporate cultures strong. The new approach to corporate culture rides on combining the diversity of members to build a strong hybrid team.

13) Commitment: The success of corporate culture is hinged on the commitment of its members to be socially bound by the developed ethos. Commitment to strengthen a cultural system starts with teamwork among members. Members who work as a team combine their resources towards a common goal. Recognition of member efforts towards achievement of organisational goals strengthens commitment [68]. Committed members require less rules and regulations to guide them. Rather, they are driven to work towards the goals of an organisation from within.

14) Effectiveness of the Board: The success of a corporate culture is hinged on the board [69] and [70]. Board effectiveness is measured on its ability to uphold commitment, team work, motivation, quality management and deciding on the corporate culture objective at strategic level. The strategy shapes the organisation in the long run.

III. DISCUSSION

Literature on corporate culture shows that culture is social in nature, man-made, relates to the values and behaviour of group members, provide a unique identity to an organisation, passed on from one generation to generation and static in nature. Corporate culture exists at varying levels and is itself intangible although it can be revealed through real objects. The invisible components are those deep traits that control the behaviour of members involuntarily. The visible part of corporate culture are real elements which the public can see and associate with an entity.

Corporate culture levels are; 'underlying assumptions', 'standards and values' and 'artefacts.' Underlying assumptions are the strongest and sensitive beliefs that form the 'DNA' of an organisation. The standards and values are those elements practiced by members knowingly. The artefacts are those elements available on the public domain.

The impact of corporate culture in driving the behaviour of group members is so impacting depending on the solidity of the culture. When the common values are strongly shared among members the impact also goes up. Strong cultures are stable over time and its members are committedto teamwork. It has however been established that corporate culture can shift willingly or compulsorily. Accordingly, entities should guard against forced culture shifts.

Desired culture and inherent shifts can be achieved through effective application of standards and guidelines, codes of conduct, company policies, training, performance and reward system, technology incorporation, leadership behaviour, social diversity, commitment and enhanced Board effectiveness. On the other hand, involuntary culture change and culture shifts are influenced by legislation, conditions from providers of capital, pressure from customer movements and influence from non-governmental organisations. Both factors on the other hand threaten the stability, rigidity and long term nature of corporate culture.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

The paper defined corporate culture and revealed its form in terms of visibility, levels, elements, corporate culture types and solidity. It has been established that corporate culture relates to the common values that determine the actions of group members. Against the objectives of the research, it has been concluded that there is no a single ideal corporate culture. Instead, the hybrid culture has been recommended on the basis that it blends the merits of all the other cultures. The discussions made show that corporate culture is highly influential to the extent of controlling the mind-set of group members. Most importantly, corporate culture provides a form of identity to an entity. In this regard, it has to be stable and perpetual. Nevertheless, it has been expounded that culture shifts are inherent posing a threat to stability. Entities can however apply internal culture change drivers if they wish to amend their cultural values.

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The paper is grounded on literature obtained from theoretical and empirical studies relating to the phenomenon of corporate culture. Research made a contribution to literature in that it addresses the possibility of corporate culture shifts against the lucidity of culture stability. It is acknowledged that there are several forms of corporate culture. However, the hybrid one is more dependable because it is built upon the merits of different forms. Future research can build up on current work by conducting empirical studies to examine the essence of culture shifts and the risk of losing corporate culture identity.

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