

Chapter 9

Post-Pandemic Organizational Culture in South Africa

Mampilo Phahlane

University of South Africa, South Africa

ABSTRACT

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted personal, societal, and professional lives in a variety of ways. Disruptions include changes in work settings, such as moving from physically collocated workplaces to remote settings. This change was enabled by advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs) to slow down the spread of the virus when the pandemic started. This sudden disruption affected the organizational culture and changed the way in which people do things. However, researchers are still trying to understand how the pandemic affected the organizational culture, especially in a developing country such as South Africa. The study's objective is to uncover and understand how organizational culture in a typical South African organization has been transformed by the pandemic and how these changes influence the organization overall.

INTRODUCTION

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted personal, societal, and professional lives in a variety of ways. Disruptions include changes in work settings such as moving from physically collocated workplaces to remote settings, this change was enabled by advanced information and communication technologies (ICTs). This was to slow down the spread of the virus when the pandemic started. This sudden disruption affected the organizational culture and changed the way people do things.

The global pandemic due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has brought about a new paradigm shift with large scale social and economic shock which has already profoundly transformed organisational cultures, the underlying values and assumptions of many organisations seem to have shifted from exploration and creativity towards safety and resilience during the pandemic (Spicer, 2020). Organizational culture takes on special importance in times of crisis and becomes a sphere of salvation for employees, managers, and the organization (Zarnadze and Kasradze, 2020). The significant jolts in the environment

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such as an economic crisis require an organisation to re-adjust its culture to fit with new environmental realities (Meyer, 1982). The same is articulated for COVID-19 as it can be classified as a significant environmental jolt and for organizations to readjust their culture to fit the post pandemic environment.

Organizational culture is a complex phenomenon (De Witte and Van Muijjen, 1999). Schein (2010) define organizational culture as a form of shared basic norms that members within an organization learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. Organizational culture is noticed through behavioural norms, values, artifacts, creations, hidden assumptions, and human nature (Kilmann et al., 1985; Schein, 1985). The importance of culture cannot be overlooked as it guides individual actions to the extent that organizational members are not aware they are influenced by it (De Witte and Van Muijen, 1999). Tharp (2009) classified organizational culture into four categories; control (hierarchy), compete (market), collaborate (clan), and create (adhocracy). Depending on the type of environment and leadership style, an organization could fall into one or more of these classifications.

The changes caused by the pandemic will continue happening in the next three to five years. According to Brown et al. (2021), there are several cultural attributes that changed in organizations during pandemic. Flexible, transparent, supportive, decisive, and confronting conflict are five attributes that were emphasized during the pandemic. In contrast, customer orientation, individualism, detail-oriented, result-oriented, and collaborative were deemphasized during the pandemic. Organizational culture was forced to shift in different ways, that the leadership team in the organizations cannot afford to overlook.

Further, the pandemic brought about transformation in organizations in the following ways: the adoption of technology, the development of new business models and the implementation of new ways of working, with employees working remotely (Dey et al., 2020). Overall, based on all these changes in the environment, organizations should start to think about how to adjust their organizational cultures during the post-pandemic phase and for management to include the effect of this change in their plans and strategic objectives and guide employees accordingly.

Organizations that survived the effects of the pandemic had to transform and adopt new ways of doing business. A majority had to go aboard a digital transformation while others had to completely reconsider their plans and goals (Conforto et al., 2020). Technology was at the centre of most organizations as employees continued to work remotely and collaborate on their tasks to meet their specific objectives.

The pandemic shocked many organisations into unplanned changes which had to be implemented unwillingly to continue operating (Bosso, 2020). For many organisations, these changes were not even under consideration before the pandemic. The pandemic sped up the pace in implementing some of these changes. Organisational change, even under a stable environment is difficult and many organisations have systems designed to maintain the status quo reinforced by enduring cultures (Raptis, 2019). The changes that organizations go through are often thought out and planned for in advance with an extensive buy in from those affected by the planned change.

Fear of change within organisations is heightened by significant and public change failures which have led some managers to lose their jobs and other forms of social isolation that one can suffer if there's change failure (Christensen et al., 2016). This is one of the ways in which the status quo prevails and change within organizations is slow to implement. Lewin (1951) field force analysis proposes that the status quo is maintained by opposing forces, namely driving and restraining forces (Burnes, 2019). They assert that change happens in the force field which is at the forefront of the lived reality to be transformed

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