



## **Corporate Culture, Employee Stress, and Leadership Support: En Route Organizational Psychotherapy**

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### **Abstract**

Organizations are increasingly concerned about the level of stress that their workers are under. This is because, a high level of stress has been linked to a faster heart rate, breathing difficulties, hypertension, stroke, and even death. Hence, organizations are becoming mindful of losing employees in this regard. This study is examined the influence of corporate culture for aiding leadership support with the view of eradicating employees' stress in the workplace. The study adopted the sociotechnical systems theory and the work Demand-control, support model to serve as an undergirded theory for this study. Extant literature on corporate culture, employee stress, and leadership support was reviewed, and the link between them was established. It was discovered that withdrawal behaviors such as quit intentions, absence from work, tardiness, and a loss of devotion to organizational operations are detrimental to the organization's existence and survival in any form. It was concluded that organizations are required to induce, establish, facilitate, and integrate a "caring component" into their culture, as a "caring culture" tends to encourage employee commitment to organizational activities that will assist them in achieving established process and result-focused organizational goals, especially through behavioural, cognitive, humanistic, and integrative or holistic therapies.



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### **Introduction**

Employee stress is now a significant source of worry for a huge percentage of stakeholders. This demonstrates that stress is now attracting a lot of attention in academic, social, and industrial

settings. Griffin and Clarke (2010) proved that the general public is becoming more aware of the medical, psychological, and societal ramifications of this condition. This has encouraged researchers (e.g., Meier & Spector, 2013; Beehr, 2014; Giakoumis,

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2012) to investigate, comprehend, and propose feasible strategies for controlling this potentially fatal condition. Employee stress, according to Houdmont *et al.* (2019), is an environment in which employees encounter limits and/or restraints, or a combination of personal, organizational, and societal expectations, the result or effect of which is both unexpected and harsh. This demonstrates how people react to excessive and/or unjustified demands or pressures imposed on or expected of them. Despite this, some academics feel that stress is not necessarily a bad thing. This is because Hargrove *et al.* (2013) feel that stress brings out the best in people, making them clever and inventive. Employee stress, contrary to this proposal, has major negative consequences and is the true cause of absenteeism, or a situation in which workers leave early, flee from large duties and obligations, come late, and so forth. Employee stress causes poor job performance, cribbing, memory loss, and sleep deprivation (Griffin & Clark, 2010; Meier & Spector, 2013; Beehr, 2014).

Indeed, absenteeism and all of its bad effects on the company take an unfavorable turn on organizational leadership, necessitating management intervention to rescue this dreadful scenario via a process-oriented and result-oriented cultural ritual to re-direct the stream of events. This cultural rite would need a strong corporate culture. Corporate culture is a set of beliefs, behaviors, expectations, and practices that guide, inform and contribute to team members' actions and inactions in a specific socio-psychological business context (Ojo, 2015; Poku & Owusu-Ansah, 2013; Yesil & Kaya, 2013). Through a culture alignment framework that allows for flexibility, stability, independence, and interdependence, corporate culture tends to elicit management support. The cultural alignment framework facilitates learning, order, care, safety, outcomes, pleasure, authority, and purpose. This demonstrates the importance of corporate culture in producing less-stressed labour since it is detail-oriented, people-oriented, stable, team-oriented, outcome-oriented, inventive, and aggressive (Flamholtz & Randle, 2011; Flamholtz & Randle, 2014; Hartnell *et al.*, 2011; Selart & Sehei, 2011; Jaques, 2017).

Some of the issues that can bring about stress may include; job losses, excessive workloads, low

salaries, ambiguous performance expectations, less control over job-related decisions, fewer opportunities for growth and advancement, a lack of social support, and conflicting work demands that cause employee stress. Employees' medical issues have been linked to stressful working situations. Employee stress or stressful working conditions, according to Griffin and Clarke (2010), have a high tendency of causing problems that have resulted in significant discomfort for employees. They mentioned sleep disturbances, anxiety, headaches, high blood pressure, a short temper or fuse, a weakened immune system, and other heart-related problems. Beehr (2014) and Griffin and Clarke (2010) identified some stress symptoms that harm organizational performance. Absenteeism, arriving late, leaving early, memory loss, decrease in job performance, more work-related accidents, more error-prone work-outcome, inappropriate eating habits, fighting, worry, being annoyed, insomnia, and so on are some of the symptoms. In light of the foregoing, Zuckerman (2020) observed that the global average of the percentage of stressed employees across 143 countries is around 35%. According to Zuckerman (2020), chronic stress among employees is commonplace at work, with approximately 94 percent of employees reporting a sense of stress at work. According to the findings of this study by Zuckerman (2020), approximately 35% of employees complained that their bosses are the direct causes of their work stress, while approximately 39% of employees between the ages of 18-24 appear to be less stressed than their counter parts between the ages of 45 and above.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Traditionally, studies like these are backed by an underpinning model. The goal is to establish a foundation for the research as well as an explanation for it. As a result, the sociotechnical systems theory and the work Demand-control, support model are used as underpinning theories for corporate culture and employee stress in this research.

To begin, Eric Lansdown Trist, an English scientist, and his colleagues Ken Bamforth and Frederick Edmund Emery invented the phrase sociotechnical system model in 1951 during research at the Tavistock Institute in London

(Bednar & Welch, 2020; Alter, 2015). The sociotechnical theory is an organizational work design strategy that enables people and technology to engage inside an organization's culture (Bednar & Welch, 2020). This technique occurs within the framework of organizational development and allows for the interaction of human behavior with complex societal infrastructure components such as technology or technological appliances/devices. According to Alter (2015), Bednar *et al.* (2020), and Carvajal (2016), the sociotechnical model is oriented on "joint optimization," with a strong emphasis on achieving excellence in technical performance and the quality of employee work life. As stated above, this model posits a link between social and technological components, as well as parts or characteristics of an organization or a society as a whole that increases and improves productivity and wellbeing (Alter, 2015; Carvajal, 2016). The main ideas of socio-technical theory are, in essence, "interaction" and "optimization." Task analysis is used to develop job design, rotation, enrichment, expansion, and process enhancement to accomplish complete interaction and optimization of the social and technical components of organizational operation.

Second, the work-demand-control-support model aims to logically explain how job features might impact employees' psychological well-being. Thus, it attempts to determine the amount to which skill diversity, job identity, task relevance, autonomy, and feedback might impact employee psychological well-being by identifying these scenarios and employee personal traits that will be critical in times of stress (Bakker *et al.*, 2005). It is important to highlight that the job-demand-control-support model was developed by Robert Karasek, an American sociologist. This approach was given in a research in which he sought to measure stress and stress variables in the workplace or business (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). According to Karasek and Theorell (1992), demand and control in this context indicate "height of tension" and "decision latitude," respectively. Height of strain (demands) refers to specific work requirements such as effort and difficulty, work rate, time and pressure, availability, and so on, which manifest as psychological stressors, whereas decision latitude (control) refers to the degree to which employees

are free to "control and organize" their work in general based on their level of competence and decision-making authority. According to Karasek and Theorell (1992), the height of strain (demands) encompasses both high and low work demands, while decision latitude (control) encompasses both active and passive job control.

### **Corporate Culture**

Culture represents the totality of the way of a people that is handed down from generation to generation. It thus consists of everything they do and think, as well as their behavioural disposition which they teach their children who will take over from them when they are no more. Schein (1990) noted that culture connotes a blend or combination of renowned values, firms or sets of behaviours, set standards, and beliefs that seem to provide a direction for a people. On a similar note, Lederach (1995) revealed that culture represents shared knowledge created by perceiving, interpreting, articulating, and responding to social realities within the frame people operate. Lim (1995) explained that a good number of characteristics or features are part of what forms the set standards that are designed to shape the thinking and behaviour of entities or people of similar traditions or beliefs. Schein (1990) revealed that culture gives room for teaching and leaving to enable the younger generation to prepare and face challenges or realities as they happen. Interestingly, culture cannot be said to have been discussed extensively if key elements are not discussed. Schein (1990), Lam (1995), and Lederach (1995) noted that these key elements of culture are as follows: strong culture, weak culture, sub-culture, and counter culture. (1). Strong culture represents a type of culture that holds firmly to its value and beliefs above and beyond any other philosophies, and phenomenon. (2). Weak cultures are those cultures that are largely fragile comparatively in terms of their attitudes, values, beliefs, and norms. (3). Sub-cultures are those cultures that exist within a larger culture. Thus, a fragment of a larger society or organization with its norms, values, and beliefs. (4). Counter culture is that type of culture that is opposed to the standard norm or expected from behaviour within a larger culture. Thus, this represents rebellion and conflicts with the standard form of behaviours. Again, culture can be taught, learned, shared, and transited.

Corporate culture represents values, norms, philosophies, and a set of behaviours shared within a firm and/or an organization. In the light of this, Robbin (2014) noted that the philosophies that tend to create the way of life of the organization are observed, perceived, and noticed in the behavioural disposition of members of such an organization especially as it regarded work activities. For instance, this behavioural disposition could come in form of risk-taking, innovation, people-orientation, customer orientation, attention to details, team aggressiveness, and so on. Interestingly, Yesil and Kaya (2013) think that a good or well-structured corporate culture gives room for the pursuit and attainment of consistency, certainty, and orderliness throughout organizational operational activities as it brings about the interrelationship between all members of the organization and shapes their thought processes towards achieving stated objectives. On this line of thought, Yesil and Kaya (2013) believe that corporate culture cuts across all forms of shared values, principles, collective belief systems, philosophies, and ideologies that shape the organization and contribute to the unique social and emotional atmosphere it tends to create within the organization. Although, Yesil and Kaya (2013) pointed out that the social and emotional conditions or atmosphere felt in organizations are largely determined by several other factors such as; structure, strategy, technology in use, communication, support mechanism, and innovative behaviours. Tende and Alagah (2018) citing Armstrong pointed out that corporate (or organizational) culture are basic attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions that tend to shape behavioural outcomes in an organization. Tende and Alagah (2018) in support of the submission of Armstrong argued that the central focus of corporate culture is to build an organization that will stand the test of time through the principles of "teaching, learning, and sharing", in an organized thought process of the firm. Heine (2015) pointed to similar facts that corporate culture is brought into the organization to introduce cultural psychotherapy into the overall thought processes of the firm in a bid to redefine organizational thinking and decision-making processes that would help achieve organizational mission and visions. In line with the above, Heine (2015) believes that corporate culture brings about a multidimensional set of thinking or philosophies, dogmas, principles, norms, and shared

values to pursue the process of actively piloting operational business activities in a proactively, cost-effective, and timely manner.

de Mooiji and Hotestede (2010) noted that corporate culture when effectively structured into the organization could bring about team cohesiveness, strong organizational alignment towards goal attainment, high employee morale, consistency, competitive edge derived from innovation, professional customer service, and efficient employee performance. Flamholtz and Randle (2011; 2014) noted that cultural leadership is a tool that could be applied to solve problems that could emanate from any form of a counter-culture that can come up as a result of organizational politics. Flamholtz and Randle (2011; 2014) further noted that cultural innovation and cultural maintenance are two basic ingredients for solving problems using leadership support through cultural leadership.

- i. Cultural innovation is perceived as recognizing an old culture, creating and marrying both to chart a new course.
- ii. Cultural maintenance is conceived as recognizing the differences in these cultures, marrying and recognizing it as a new culture that will determine organizational growth.

Corporate culture is relatively a broad concept and its field of study is as old as the concepts of management and/or sociology. In the light of these, corporate culture seems to have several dimensions as proposed by several researchers and scholars in the fields of management and/or society. Several dimensions as proposed by several scholars are as follows; Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) proposed collaboration, control, and competition. Hofstede *et al.* (1990) proposed result-oriented culture, task-oriented culture, process-oriented culture, parochial culture, open system culture, normative culture, and tight culture. Cameron (2004) proposed clan culture, adhocracy culture, hierarchy culture, and market culture, and lastly, Cameron *et al.* (2014) proposed collaboration, control, competition, and creation.

### **Employee Stress**

Employee stress is a reaction to specific stimuli. Workplace-related problems such as excessive



self-confidence, and self-reliant. Individual workers are also advised to participate in regular physical activity, avoid negative individuals, and create social support.

Employee stress, according to Cravens *et al.* (2015), Idris *et al.* (2015), Kohlbacher *et al.* (2011), Lim (1995), and Nikpour (2017), has a negative link with performance. They primarily claimed that employee stress is related to employee performance. According to this submission, more employee stress is likely to result in worse employee performance, whereas lower employee stress is likely to result in better employee performance. However, experience has shown that even a little amount of stress on staff tends to impair overall performance. This might become a reality since even little or insignificant stress on workers can greatly distract those (Todd *et al.*, 2018). According to Ojo (2015), Yesil *et al.* (2016), and Poku and Owusu-Ansah (2013), workers who are under stress are more likely to lose attention, creative capacity, and innovativeness since they don't think clearly. They also noted that such workers are more inclined to focus on unattractive behaviors and bad feelings rather than work. This illustrates the likelihood of a bad consequence on their level of achievement. Based on several arguments on the composition of stressors and stress stimuli, as well as the result of a distress scenario. It is important to remember that stress may either degrade or improve employee performance, depending on the skill composition or skill set of the individuals that are directly engaged in the stressful events (Cravens *et al.*, 2015; Idris *et al.*, 2015). This demonstrates that organizations that develop and maintain an open system that encourages constant communication are more likely to create an environment in which employees are less likely to be or feed distress; this allows employees to put in their best effort in terms of skills and abilities in performing their tasks and responsibilities, thereby increasing the possibility of having a work outcome that is in line with the organization's plans and objectives.

#### **Corporate Culture and Employee Stress**

Corporate culture is a dominant factor that predicts or determines the extent of organizational commitment of employees (Monga *et al.*, 2015). Corporate culture indeed tends to outline the minimum standard of acceptable behaviour within an

organization. This demonstrates that behaviours and attitudes that are displayed by employees or other organization members appear to be guided by the basic assumptions of the cultural pattern inculcated in employees, including their level of commitment to work and organization. Thus, organizations are comprised of people, structure, strategy, and other resources. These components are fused to carve out a management philosophy that determines the culture of the organization. Hence, the people that make up the organization; interact with it and become part of its culture (Olulana, 2015).

As stated above, the culture of the organization determines how committed employees are to their job and the organization. The level of commitment is a direct reflection of the level of stress the employee face per time. For instance, stress has acquired global recognition, and far-reaching implications for businesses and economic life ranging from low organizational commitment to low productivity (Monga *et al.*, 2015) Thus, employees who are committed to their jobs will likely be more productive than those who are not, but may or may not be stressed depending on several other factors they engage themselves. This is somewhat predicted by the kind of culture that is in place in the organization in which they find themselves. Again, Monga *et al.* (2015), and Sabrina zamade and Abede khodai (2010) noted that corporate culture influences could be role stress of employees. This is true because the culture of the organization impacts positively or negatively on role stress. Monga *et al.* (2015) reported that employees at a local Japanese company experienced role stress due to role overload and role incompetence as designed by the culture of their organization. As a result, there has been increased concern and demand for employees to enjoy sound physical and psychological health as an outcome of the corporate culture.

Similarly, Olynick and Li (2020) explained that corporate culture plays a huge role in the health and wellbeing of an organization. They noted that the impact of corporate culture could be assessed using employee illness, absenteeism, and fatigue. Hence, organizational norms capture corporate culture that demonstrates and substantiate the amount of stress variance employees experiences from time to time based on the cultural predictive nature of the job they perform (Olulana, 2015; Olynick &

Li, 2020). On a similar note, Olynic and Li (2020) reported that the feeling of stress by employees are more frequently linked to the neglect of employee rights (organizational injustice), lack of supervisor (or managerial) support, work overload, lack of participation in employee work decisions, perceived job insecurity, elongated or extended work hours, workplace conflict, and competitive, aggressive, and ambitious management skill. Conversely, a conducive work environment could bring about high social connection and interaction among employees.

### **Leadership Support, Corporate Culture, and Employee Stress**

The employer-employee relationship has been an issue of interest to business practitioners, industry players, and business researchers. This relationship has been a source of concern globally, with an obvious decline in support for employees to support the strategy. Thus, a shift from employee focuses to strategy focus (Van Buren *et al.*, 2011; Travaglione *et al.*, 2017). As pointed above, the need for mutual support between management and employees has gained greater attention in recent years (Kurtessis *et al.*, 2017). Although, scholars like Van Buren *et al.* (2011) noted that support between employees and employers is supposed to be mutual. This submission is believed to be true in that mutual dependency is a fundamental factor to all stakeholders, with the intent to address issues surrounding organizational conflict amongst all stakeholders (Van Buren *et al.*, 2011; Travaglione *et al.*, 2017). In the light of these, mutual support breeds mutual benefits and obligations, which is part of an exchange in the psychological agreement that serves as a bond on the employment arrangement.

Leadership support is an appendage of perceived organizational support (POS). Perceived organizational support allows for mutual obligation from both employees and management as part of the employment contract. Although, perceived organizational support lays emphasis also on the leadership of the organization giving their support to employees to enable them to face challenges and surmount the same even when these challenges extend beyond the workplace (Travaglione *et al.*, 2017). This support system is beyond merely providing skills training, opportunities

for promotion and advancement, building a culture of trust and safety, and a secure and safe psychological environment that somewhat motivates employees to be committed and involved in organizational activities (Travaglione *et al.*, 2017). This support system by management is expected to address some of the challenges that the employees encounter at the family level to enable the employee to concentrate on the job and give their best. For instance, employees who are stressed with some personal, social, and organizational demands may not function effectively on the job as they may tend to lose concentration as to what to do at some point in time. This may not be the same with employees who are given support by the management of the organization they are employed. Hence, this set of employees gives in their best to perform on their job and increase organizational outcomes.

Interestingly, leadership support is geared towards catering to the well-being of employees and strongly considering their goals and values. This means organizations are expected to meet and fulfill the socio-emotional needs of employees (Man & Luvison, 2014), through organizational psycho therapy programs such as; behaviour therapy, cognitive therapy, humanistic therapy, and integrative therapy. In a clearer term, organizational leadership needs to support employees because they are being regarded as valuable asset that creates value seamlessly. This is a demonstration that any form of increased effort from employees will be appreciated and rewarded. Consequently, most employees will lean towards being active in their dealings with the employer or organizational leadership (Man & Luvison, 2014; Sok *et al.*, 2014).

### **Conclusion**

Regardless of our regular activities, stress is a part of our life. Whether a person is an employer or an employee. Stressed people are more likely to engage in hazardous behaviors such as withdrawal or sabotage to deal with work-related stress. Withdrawal behaviors such as quit intentions, absence from work, tardiness, and a loss of devotion to organizational operations are detrimental to the organization's existence and survival in any form. Organizations are required to induce, establish, facilitate, and integrate a "caring component" into their culture, as a "caring culture" tends to

encourage employee commitment to organizational activities that will assist them in achieving established process and result-focused organizational goals, especially through behavioural, cognitive, humanistic, and integrative or holistic therapies. Organizations must invest in people and train them to provide great products and services to society. These services enhanced the organization's reputation and goodwill, which is translated as the brand image for such an organization. Lastly, employees' expectations must be satisfied to prevent stress and bad energy.

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