

Perceptions of organizational culture, leadership effectiveness and personal effectiveness across six countries

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Received 10 October 2005; received in revised form 28 November 2006; accepted 1 December 2006

Available online 7 May 2007

Abstract

Perceptions of which facets of organizational culture are related to leadership and personal effectiveness were examined using archival data from Canada, Hong Kong, New Zealand, South Africa, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Organizational culture was strongly perceived as being related to both leadership effectiveness (explaining 40% of the variance) and personal effectiveness (24% of the variance). Aspects of organizational culture that promote employee fulfillment and satisfaction were uniformly viewed as positively related to leadership and personal effectiveness. The perceived relationship across samples was stronger between organizational culture and leadership effectiveness than between organizational culture and personal effectiveness. The implications of these findings for managers are discussed.

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Keywords: Organizational culture; National differences; Leadership effectiveness; Personal effectiveness

1. Introduction

As economies and industries become more global, employees are increasingly dealing with individuals who are dissimilar to them. Likewise, as organizations increasingly create business alliances with organizations whose cultures are dissimilar, employees may work with others who hold different perceptions of what constitutes effective functioning in an organization, and what relationships exist between organizational factors and workplace effectiveness. While it is recognized that organizational culture encompasses both group and individual-level processes,

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little attention has been paid to the individual-level processes involved in the creation and maintenance of an organizational culture (Harris, 1994), and how those processes and perceptions may be affected by the national cultural context in which organizations operate.

This research project utilized the perspective of organizational culture as essentially an individual perception of an organizational phenomenon (van den Berg & Wilderom, 2004), and focused on the perceptions of relationships between organizational culture and organizational outcomes at the individual level. There is evidence in the literature that organizational culture is directly linked to employee attitudes and behaviour (see for example, O'Driscoll et al., 1998), but also that intervening variables may affect the nature of this relationship (see for example, Williams & Attaway, 1996). A greater understanding of the mechanism of intervening variables in the relationship between organizational culture and organizational outcomes may enhance the degree to which it is possible to understand negative outcomes, and intervene to create more positive organizational outcomes. It has been suggested that the recent interest in organizational culture rests on the fact that organizational leaders have the ability to impact the effectiveness of an organization by exercising control over variables related to organizational culture (Marcoulides & Heck, 1993). Accordingly, this research used social cognition, or sensemaking, as an explanatory framework to examine the effect of national culture on perceived relationships between organizational culture and two outcomes: leadership effectiveness, and personal effectiveness.

2. Organizational culture and individual-level perceptions

Organizational culture has been defined as relatively stable beliefs, attitudes, and values that are held in common among organizational members (Williams, Dobson, & Walters, 1993), shared normative beliefs and shared behavioural expectations (Cooke & Szumal, 1993, 2000), or a particular set of values, beliefs, and behaviours that characterizes the way individuals and groups interact in progressing toward a common goal (Eldridge & Crombie, 1974). As such, these definitions refer to what is basically a group-level phenomenon. However, culture also encompasses individual-level phenomena, and more specifically, reflects how individuals within a given culture try to make sense of how the organization operates (Harris, 1994; van den Berg & Wilderom, 2004). This sensemaking that employees in organizations engage in refers to how individuals within an organization give meaning to what they experience at work (Weick, 1995), and therefore reflects individuals' interpretations of events and situations in organizations (Peterson & Smith, 2000). Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) point out that individuals' perceptions of situations, and the concomitant sensemaking that individuals engage in are central to both individual identity and individual choice of action. Organizational culture, viewed as shared behavioural norms, and built on individual interpretations of experience, may be seen as the result of these cognitive activities — an individual-level phenomenon (Fiske & Taylor, 1991) becoming an organizational-level phenomenon.

2.1. Organizational culture as an individual perceptual phenomenon

Hofstede, Bond, and Luk (1993) point out the necessity of being clear regarding the level of analysis used in measuring and understanding organizational culture. They note that organizational culture is assumed to be an organizational characteristic that is somehow independent of the individuals in the organization, and therefore a construct at the social systems-level. Descriptions of any organizational culture frequently result from gathering information about the organization at the individual level, from employees of the organization, and aggregating to the organization level (see, for example, Hofstede, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990). These means are then assumed to

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