



The influence of organizational culture on job satisfaction and intention to leave

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ABSTRACT

This investigation examined the impact of organizational culture on job satisfaction and intention to leave the organization through a survey of fitness staff. Organizational culture is commonly known as the values, beliefs and basic assumptions that help guide and coordinate member behaviour. The Cultural Index for Fitness Organizations (CIFO) was developed to measure organizational culture in the fitness industry specifically. Exploratory factor analysis revealed eight factors that represent cultural dimensions common to this context: staff competency, atmosphere, connectedness, formalization, sales, service-equipment, service-programs, and organizational presence. Path analysis was used to examine the relationship among the organizational culture factors, job satisfaction and intention to leave. Results produced a partially mediated model of organizational culture that explained 14.3% of the variance in job satisfaction and 50.3% of the variance with intention to leave the organization. The findings highlight the multidimensionality of organizational culture and its complexity in the fitness industry.

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The study of individual and group behaviour has intrigued scholars for a long time. Exploring complex phenomena such as organizational culture has been an area of particular interest since the seminal work of Pettigrew (1979). Pettigrew demonstrated how the concepts of symbolism, language, and rituals can be used to analyze and understand organizational life, and reveal the rich tapestry of meaning around every day tasks and objectives in the workplace. Hofstede (1980) encouraged management scholars to engage in cross-cultural studies of work-related values to further understand the function of organizational culture from a more global viewpoint. Shortly after, Peters and Waterman (1982) extolled the virtues of studying organizational culture and its influence on company performance. The result of these noteworthy works and others (e.g., Deal & Kennedy, 1999; Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985; Martin, 1992; Schein, 1985) have created an area of organizational theory considered by many to be among the most important concepts for management scholars to comprehend (Alvesson, 2002).

The reported effects of organizational culture on individual attitudes and behaviour as well as overall company performance are what make the phenomenon an attractive area of study. It is contended that organizational culture acts as a system of social control and can influence employees' attitudes and behaviour through the values and beliefs operating in a company (Flynn & Chatman, 2001; Kusluvan & Karamustafa, 2003). Organizational culture has been shown to have a direct influence on staff satisfaction and commitment (e.g., Johnson & McIntyre, 1998; Lok & Crawford, 1999; Lund, 2003; Silverthorne, 2004) and turnover intention (e.g., Egan, Yang, & Bartlett, 2004; MacIntosh & Doherty, 2005; Sheridan, 1992). It

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has also been shown to influence aspects of organizational performance in terms of increased employee involvement, adaptability, positive labor relations, sustained competitive advantage, and sport team win loss record (e.g., Carmeli & Tishler, 2004; Chan, Shaffer, & Snape, 2004; Choi & Scott, 2008; Smart & St. John, 1996; Smart & Wolfe, 2000).

In the fitness industry, satisfying and retaining personnel is an area of particular concern for management (Gerson, 1999; McCarthy, 2004). It is somewhat surprising then that the focus of research in this context has been service quality and client satisfaction (see MacIntosh & Doherty, 2007a). McShane and Steen (2009) noted that job satisfaction is “best viewed as a collection of attitudes about different aspects of the job and work context” (p. 85). According to Ferreira (1988), the degree of interaction with clients demands that fitness club staff have a positive attitude. Any dissatisfaction with the workplace is likely to manifest in resistance to management and lower levels of customer service (Townsend, 2004). Indeed, research has traced the relationship between service industry employees that are satisfied with their jobs and a satisfied consumer base (e.g., Namasivayam, 2005). Hurley (2004) made a similar case for health and fitness organizations specifically. Further, there is consistent evidence that job dissatisfaction drives employee turnover in a variety of settings (Allen, 2006; Hom & Griffeth, 1991; Hom & Kinicki, 2001; Sablynski, Lee, Mitchell, Burton, & Holtom, 2002; Tett & Meyer, 1993). McCarthy (2004) noted that high turnover rates in personnel are problematic for fitness club managers across the industry. Although specific figures on staff retention in North America are considered confidential company information, one of Canada’s largest fitness chains indicated company turnover rates between 44% for personal trainers and 79% for sales staff (Confidential, personal communication, April 14, 2008). One study in the United Kingdom reported turnover rates as high as 70% among fitness instructors across a broad sample of fitness organizations (Lloyd, 2003). Employee attrition creates the need to focus on further recruiting, hiring, and training of staff to fill the void of those leaving; proving costly to the organization in terms of both time and money (Cascio, 2000). Consequently, it is important to understand the factors associated with staff satisfaction and retention in the fitness industry. Research in a variety of settings (e.g., marketing, nursing, transportation) provides evidence to suggest that organizational culture may be a meaningful influence in this regard (e.g., Egan et al., 2004; Lok & Crawford, 1999; Lund, 2003; Silverthorne, 2004).

The purpose of this study was to examine the influence of organizational culture on fitness industry staff job satisfaction and their intention to leave. Behavioural intention is one of the best methods of predicting turnover rates among staff (Egan et al., 2004; Maertz & Campion, 1998; Tett & Meyer, 1993) and thus was examined here. A sub-purpose of the current study was to develop a survey instrument to measure organizational culture in this context. It has been argued, and there is supporting evidence, that organizational culture evolves to fit industry-specific dynamics and demands (Chatman & Jehn, 1994; Colyer, 2000; Lee & Yu, 2004; Ogbonna & Harris, 2002; Smith & Shilbury, 2004; Velliquette & Rapert, 2001). Thus, industry-specific rather than universal measures of organizational culture are required to capture particular features of different environments (cf. Smith & Shilbury, 2004). A brief overview of the fitness industry is provided next to set the context for the study. This is followed by a presentation of the conceptualization of organizational culture, the theoretical framework for the study, and an overview of the measurement of organizational culture.

1. An overview of the fitness industry

In North America exercise and fitness is a multi-billion dollar service industry (McNeil, 2006). In his typology of sport services Chelladurai (2005, p. 34) classified fitness organizations in the category of “participant services,” as distinct from “spectator services.” As such, fitness organizations are characterized by their focus on meeting consumers’ pleasure and/or health and fitness needs; they provide services that meet the basic human needs for skill development, pursuit of excellence, sustenance, and/or healing or restoration (Chelladurai, 2005). The nature of a fitness club and the demands of its clients will determine its focus on one or more of these particular services. The exercise and physical activity aspects of the services provided by fitness organizations are primarily what distinguish them from other types of service organizations, such as hotels, food, banking, beverage providers, financial and tax consultants, and hospitality and tourism services. Indeed, the fitness industry is designed so that customers visit on a more frequent (e.g., several times each week) and prolonged basis than with many other service providers. The nature of the staff–client interface in fitness organizations may be another distinguishing feature, where employees interact directly with clients or club members on a regular basis (Chelladurai, 2005). This interaction can be even closer with the personal training relationship, pilates instruction and other types of fitness coaching. These characteristics may reflect some of the dynamics and demands that contribute to an industry-specific culture.

Industry information indicates that there are over 29,000 clubs operating in the United States, 4700 in Canada and 1200 in Australia (McNeil, 2006). Further, it is also estimated that 15.6% of the population in the United States, 14.6% in Canada and 9.0% in Australia are fitness club members (McNeil, 2006). The fitness industry continues to be in a period of rapid expansion in terms of club growth (Intel International Group, 2006). There are several types of organizations in operation. Intel International Group (2006) categorizes them as commercial facilities (e.g., 24 h fitness, bally total fitness), not-for-profit or charitable organizations (e.g., YMCA, JCC/YMHA, hospital-based, university), miscellaneous for-profit organizations (e.g., corporate facilities, country club, hotel), and “other” fitness organization types (e.g., military facilities, church-based). As noted earlier, one of the more critical issues facing managers of fitness organizations is the high turnover rate of personnel responsible for delivering the service to client members (McCarthy, 2004). Therefore, understanding how to satisfy and retain fitness personnel in order to successfully operate a facility is of the utmost concern and interest in this large and growing industry (Gerson, 1999; McCarthy, 2004).

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