



# THE DYNAMICS OF CORPORATE ACCULTURATION: MANAGING WITHIN A MULTI-CULTURAL MILIEU

**Miebi Ugwuzor**

*Department of Management, Niger Delta University, Wilberforce Island,  
P.M.B. 071, Yenagoa, Bayelsa State, Nigeria.*

## ABSTRACT

*The study of the dynamics of the management of culture within the corporate space of business organisations in a multi-cultural environment was the interest of this work. The environment in which a business operates significantly impacts its performance. All human communities have a culture encompassing common values, habitual inclinations, practices, institutions, and so on. The values, beliefs, and work habits that people bring to the workplace from their upbringing have a significant impact on their motivation, behaviour, and productivity. It is important to build a company culture that acts as a regulatory and controlling framework for employee attitudinal displays and activities within the company. The attitudes, and standards that pervade an organisation are sometimes referred to as its corporate culture. It is no secret that the external environment in which a company works significantly impacts the company's culture. This research explores ways in which internal business culture interacts with its external setting. The objective is to strike a balance that allows an organisation to maximise its efficiency and output. This work contributes to the growing discourse on corporate acculturation management in a multi-diversified ethnocultural and socio-religious environment.*

**KEYWORDS:** *behaviour, culture, ethnicity, management, religion, Nigeria*

## INTRODUCTION

The significance of company culture in illuminating people's actions in the workplace cannot be overemphasized. A people's culture is developed and maintained by shared cultural activities and consists of norms, values, customs, institutions, standards of conduct, ideas, and practices (Bhaduri, 2019; Botelho & Lima, 2020; DiMaggio, 2019; Król, 2021). There are many different ways to define corporate culture, but many people agree that the norms and values of a company's employees have a significant impact on how the company operates (Belias & Rossidis, 2021; Graham, et al.2022). Corporate culture has been defined as an intangible asset and organisational practice that enables employees to learn about the company through their daily interactions with its formal rules and procedures, formal standards of behaviour, rituals, commonly held values, tasks, compensation systems, and other unique practices (Adebayo et al., 2020; Li, et al., 2021)

Corporate culture also termed organisational culture can also be defined as "a pattern of basic assumptions, invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration and that has worked well enough to be considered valuable and therefore to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel " (Graczyk-Kucharska & Erickson, 2020). Without a predetermined set of rules from the firm's leadership, employees can learn to make decisions and act in ways that are consistent with the organisation's values and conventions. The folklore, mythology, and values that have been passed down from generation to generation within a country are often at the heart of its culture, or national culture which is part of an organisation's external environment (Savolainen, 2022; Tse & Li, 2022).

In a multi-diversified ethnocultural and socio-religious environment like Nigeria, the dynamics of managing corporate acculturation could be very intriguing. Thus, the need for this paper to explore the vigorous phenomenon to enable managers to have a vivid understanding of how best to evolve cultures that will maximise firms' potential in the face of competitive threats in their business environment.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Corporate acculturation is an undertaking that enables employees who come into an organisation with their home heritage norms, values and traditions to learn and adopt customs prevailing in the organisation. The



corporate acculturation process has serious implications for workplace behaviour. Hommey, et al. (2020) opine that the beginning of an acculturation exercise is when people attempt to put up good behaviours when they are outside their traditional cultural environment. This work inclines to the beliefs of the acculturation theory (Berry, 1997). The theory posits that individuals have adaptation strategies along two dimensions. On one hand, an individual may choose to retain or reject his/her native culture. The other dimension is that the individual may adopt a strategy of accepting or refusing the host's culture. In course of the interplay of these two dimensions in the minds of the individual involved, the theorist identifies four strategies that emerge. They are assimilation, in which case individuals rather than adopting their native culture adopt the practices of the host's culture; Separation is another strategy which could be adopted. In this situation, individuals choose their native culture over that of the host; Integration, as another strategy occurs when persons adopt both the customs of the host and their native heritage; Marginalization, as yet another strategy aligned, occurs when persons adopt neither hosts culture nor the culture of their origin. All of these strategies have momentous behavioural overtones relevant to this study which managers will need to understand and proffer coping strategies to.

### MANAGING CORPORATE ACCULTURATION

Based on the theoretical inclination of this work, the strategy to be adopted is the individual employees' prerogative which may be at loggerheads with the progressive direction of the firm. For example, a traditional native work ethic may lack the context of time as it pertains to the corporate workplace clocking-in system. Persons with traditional occupational backgrounds in farming or fishing, in Nigeria for instance, may know that they should be at "their workplaces" early but the exact clocking-in time is not specific. In this case, such an employee who may believe that work begins anytime he arrives at the workplace may arrive 'early' but often outside the acceptable clocking-time for workers of the corporate entity. Another instance may be in a situation where persons with religious beliefs that have specific periods for prayers or other religious ordinances may take several breaks in the course of work to perform such activities at the expense of the organisation. The attitude of some employees to work may also be a challenge. Some persons with traditional titles or who feel they come from a privileged group in society may tend to put up a laissez-faire attitude to work and feel untouchable to the extent that corporate rules and disciplinary measures should not apply to them. Instances abound where firms failed because their employees decided to stick to native work habits and ethics (Akinlade, et al., 2022; Onah, et al., 2022; Ugwuzor, 2021). It thus becomes imperative for managers to develop corporate cultures that individuals should adopt for the furtherance of the progress of the organisation. Highlighted below are organisational contexts on which managers may leverage to evolve progressive corporate cultures which employees may adopt for firms' success.

### CORPORATE STRUCTURE

A company's corporate structure is how its employees are grouped and assigned responsibilities. It is important to establish clear lines of authority and accountability between managers and their subordinates while designing an effective organisational structure. When there is a clear framework in place, employees may better understand their roles within the larger business (Cunningham, et al., 2022). Humans, influenced by their histories and surroundings, are the ones responsible for shaping the cultural leanings of their firms. Managers from countries with a history of innovation and a high value placed on creativity are more inclined to seek out an organic organisational structure in which authority is distributed evenly and employees are encouraged to work together to solve challenges (Kiss, et al., 2022). An organisation with a strong tradition of innovation may find the product-term structure to be ideal. Managers with conservative cultures, on the other hand, are more likely to establish clear reporting connections and a clearly defined chain of command for their staff so that they always know whom to go to with questions or concerns. It is important to state that corporate structures should be designed in line with the doctrine of *uberrimae fidei*. In other words, it must be done in utmost good faith and for the general acceptance of any person or group of persons that work in the organisation to the extent that there should be no perception in any quarter that the corporate structure benefits some parochial interests against others. Willems (2020) has submitted that some structures deny persons access to certain privileges. If the firms' unique structure follows a particular pattern over time, it becomes part of the firms' culture. Note should be taken that the environment also has a role in shaping the structures of organisations. Managers need to be aware of market trends including globalization and hyper-growth in the business, as well as the constant changes in consumers' tastes, and individualization of services. The need of keeping up with technical developments becomes apparent. Organisational systems that are too rigid to adapt to changing conditions will fail. Long-lasting organisational structures are ingrained in the psyche of its members.

### CORPORATE LEADERSHIP

There are several pathways via which an organisation's culture may evolve. However, a firm's leadership could foster high-performing culture. Xenikou (2022) suggests "that leaders have at their disposal to formulate,



reinforce, and change their organisation's culture depending on its developmental stage". In some small startups, where, the entrepreneur often acts as both manager and founder, the beliefs and opinions of a firm's founder are highly correlated with the corporate values and customs that form over time in the organisation. The prevailing culture of an organisation is the product of a multitude of internal and external forces, as well as the aims and tactics of the firm's founders (Aisyah, 2022). In this view, the founders' desired culture is enacted through the organisation's stated mission and goals. It is reasonable to assume that leaders will choose successors who share their passion for the company's goals which are further propagated in the policies that future leaders will implement. It is possible that a group's history may begin to take shape when its members work together to achieve goals. In order to achieve the original founders' vision, all new employees get training on the company's core values and standards of conduct. Over time, such behaviours shape an organisation's culture. It follows from the foregoing that leaders are powerful sources for the evolution of corporate cultures. If the firm's culture is such that allows the firm to optimise its resources and attain its goals with satisfied employees it is applaudable. However, studies have shown that poor leadership has not only increased the rate of employee turnover and damaged organisational processes but has stifled employee citizenship behaviours and creativity as well (Khan, et al., 2020; Soomro & Shah, 2019).

### **CORPORATE CLIMATE**

A work climate is how people feel when they work. The feeling of warmth, trust and acceptance could define a corporate climate. Byrnes, et al. (2022) define corporate climate as the shared perception and meaning given by employees to organisational policies, procedures and practices. Significant evidence suggests that the climate of an organisation has an empirical bearing on its culture and, in fact, has much to do with whether or not its personnel embrace that culture (Xenikou, 2022). Managers' relationships with employees and outsiders are shaped by the atmosphere that may be observed and felt throughout an organisation. When accepting a position at a company, it is important for an individual to evaluate the organisation's pace of progress, amount of risk-taking, and level of warmth, support, and control. Employees are less productive when they feel threatened at work, whereas those in supportive environments are more likely to be motivated to take initiative and find creative solutions to difficulties. In a multi-diversified ethnocultural and socio-religious work setting, there could be an interplay of several forces pulling in different directions, depicting the dispositions of their unique differences. This situation may escalate issues of group interests, rivalry, discontentment, perceived bias and inequity, out of proportion. The resultant effect on behaviour could adversely level of warmth and voluntary support. There are several other characteristics unique to the company which contribute to its climate. They include its size, level of structure, technological dominance, and level of autonomy norms and practices.

### **MICRO--CULTURE VS MACRO-CULTURE**

Managers must understand the changes in the culture in their business environment and make necessary adjustments. The potential for an intergroup culture clash and the possibility of an intragroup culture crisis are the two most significant influences on a group's culture which emphasize the need for the understanding of a corporate micro-culture within a national macro-cultural Milieu

### **THE CULTURE CLASH**

A company's culture is not an isolated phenomenon. There is a distinct culture in the country where the business is domiciled. Thus, it is evident that the corporate culture is a micro or subculture within the context of a broader cultural environment. While the macro-culture may not have directly influenced the development of the organisational culture, it undoubtedly presents obstacles and pressures. If the culture of the organisation, or at least a portion of it, diverges significantly from the macro-culture, it will face persistent resistance from its host communities. Culture clashes occasionally occur between a corporate micro-culture and the national macro-culture. In this instance, a segment of an organisation's culture may be headed for a head-on collision with the prevailing macro culture as a whole. A typical illustration of a cultural divide was the use of "just Mr." to address persons as a policy in the Guardian daily newspaper in Nigeria, which has since been discontinued. In Nigeria, where titles are highly valued to the point that they are occasionally purchased for exorbitant sums, it was clear that the daily paper firm would not have lasted long if it continued to refer to people as simply "Mr." or "Mrs.". Apart from the verbal castigation and physical assault, lack of patronage could have made the firm close shop. Organisations should avoid culture clashes, especially those that will have a substantial influence on their ability to function effectively and efficiently. One is unlikely to form a meaningful mental picture of a people or civilization that does not have its predominant defining cultural traits. Managers who work and live overseas in today's interconnected global economy will inevitably have interactions with people from a variety of cultural backgrounds. Managers who succeed take into account cultural norms and adapt their actions accordingly.



## THE CULTURE CRISIS

There are significant ramifications for a company's culture at each of its developmental stages. This is because it is possible for values and preexisting standards to change in tandem with each developmental stage. At some point, the shift is as simple as a new idea, a more refined set of ideals, or a clearer understanding of the future. It is not uncommon for a brand-new value system to form. In Nigeria nearly two decades ago, a tidal wave of mergers and acquisitions was seen, a trend that is likely to continue as businesses make such choices voluntarily or involuntarily. Managers believe they can transfer their management expertise, reverse the company's fortunes, and boost performance through a merger or acquisition, hence increasing the company's worth. What they do not anticipate is the cultural crisis that would arise as a result of the effect of the crises of the various collaborating entities which may have incompatible values. The Central Bank of Nigeria's mandate for bank recapitalization in December 2005, which resulted in several bank mergers and acquisitions, was not without its share of cultural difficulties. A culture crisis might be said to have occurred with the consolidation of Platinum Bank and Habib Bank into Bank PHB (Platinum Habib Bank PLC). Habib Bank, with its Islamic focus, did not feel the need to report big profits at the expense of its clients and society, in contrast to the rapidly expanding Platinum Bank, which placed a premium on bottom-line success. For harmony in the novel corporate culture, there would have been the need for a serious rethinking of the various divergent ethnocultural and socio-religious positions. By August 2011, the Central Bank of Nigeria revoked the operating licence and declared it insolvent. Another example is how General Electric Medical Europe merged with the French medical equipment manufacturer Compagnie Generale de Radiologie (CGR) in 1988 to form General Electric CGR Medical Systems, (although it changed in 1994 to General Electric Medical Systems and GE HealthCare by 2023 ) in order to strengthen its position in the European market. As the seemingly conservative approach of the government-owned company was juxtaposed with GE's hard-driven culture of hard effort, self-reliance, and profit orientation, a cultural crisis may have loomed. The wearing of GE shirts with English slogans might have been seen as demeaning and insulting by the French workers. New financial and compensation methods may have also been greeted with hostility, as was the exhibition of the business motto in English. Culture management in the workplace may be arduous at best. A merger or purchase may seem like a clever strategic decision at the time, but it might backfire if drastic and broad changes are made without first comprehending the existing culture and then carefully modifying values, symbols, and behaviour.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Corporate culture develops and persists over time, and it will be to the benefit of all parties for systems to avoid disruptions in order to optimise processes and attain set targets. To be successful and efficient, businesses must recognise the significance of their surroundings in shaping their own culture, and cultivate a mutually beneficial connection with the greater cultural milieu in which they operate. Firms will have to understand the national cultures in which they operate and if possible, alter their culture if they want to thrive in the present market. Likewise, it may not be enough to merely respond to environmental shifts; many businesses need a culture that actively seeks out and adapts to new information. It is ideal to foster a culture that can adapt to new circumstances. Predictable roadblocks include ingrained knowledge, personnel, connections, roles, and institutions that promote long-standing cultural norms that make them unique. The ethnocultural and socio-religious exigencies will have to be understood and properly managed. Cultures may be controlled and transformed over time despite the substantial challenges and opposition to change. Firms may involve workers in the process of cultural transformation, especially when modifying policies and procedures; anticipating challenges, and firmly taking action in upholding corporate culture

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