What is the relationship between organisational culture and employee engagement in the NHS?

Jenny Millard, Education and Training Project Manager for UK Chocolate Manufacturing at Mondelēz International

An Engaging Clan

Engrossed by the overwhelming focus on culture within the NHS and captivated by the recognised importance of employee engagement; I embraced the challenge of conducting a national research study on such contemporary and headline-grabbing subject matter with equal parts enthusiasm and determination. Enthusiastic to approach this study from a quantitative perspective, applying a new methodology never previously explored and determined to discover something worthy of further discussion and debate.

Background

Conceptually, organisational culture and employee engagement are often linked by language with phrases such as ‘engaging cultures’ and ‘cultures of engagement’ frequently appearing in the literature, seldom with any accompanying description. Thus your average reader would naturally conclude that the two concepts are linked or connected in some way, although the precise nature of the relationship between the two concepts remains elusive. My fundamental vision behind this research was to make this relationship a little less so, to bring it out of the shadows into the light.

Methodology

Essentially, I set out to define and measure organisational culture in NHS organisations and quantitatively correlate this with a measure of employee engagement. For the later I used the calculated ‘overall engagement score’ (OES) from the routinely collected NHS annual staff survey. The former, required significantly more research. Ultimately, I used a tool called the Organisational Culture Assessment Indicator (OCAI) based on the Competing Values Framework (CVF). I was largely swayed by that fact that this tool was easy to use and had previously been used in research to measure culture in the NHS using populations of managers. A great feature of the OCAI is that it generates quantitative data that maps onto the four quadrants of the CVF, effectively giving you a score for each cultural type: Clan, Adhocracy, Hierarchy and Market (see below). Under the OCAI methodology, the highest score corresponds to the dominant culture type for the organisation.

The Clan Culture: A very friendly place to work where people share a lot of themselves. Success is defined in terms of sensitivity to customers and concern for people.
The Adhocracy Culture: A dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative place to work. People stick their necks out and take risks. Success means gaining unique and new products or services.

The Hierarchy Culture: A very formalised and structured place to work. Procedures govern what people do. Success is defined in terms of dependable delivery, smooth scheduling and low cost.

The Market Culture: A results-orientated organisation. People are competitive and goal orientated. Success is defined in terms of market share and penetration.

I was particularly keen to learn whether there was a statistically significant relationship between one of the four cultural types and OES as this may indicate a predictor relationship between cultural type and employee engagement within the NHS.

Data Collection & Analysis

Data was collected from individual participants via an online OCAI survey, a minimum of three individual responses were averaged to generate mean culture scores from which a dominant culture type was identified. The mean scores for each culture type were then correlated with the OES score for that particular NHS organisation.

Results

During the six weeks that the online survey remained 'live' for data collection from September to October 2013, over 220 individual responses were submitted and data from 18 NHS organisations was subject to statistical analysis.

- The dominant culture type was found to be Clan 42 per cent (n=8 organisations), closely followed by Hierarchy 37 per cent (n=7 organisations), then Market 16 per cent (n=3 organisations).
- Clan mean culture score was positively correlated with OES; specifically, clan culture score increases significantly with increasing OES score.
- Hierarchy mean culture score was negatively correlated with OES, specifically, hierarchy culture score declines significantly with increasing OES score.

Implications

This research study introduces a new OD methodology, potentially linking organisational culture to employee engagement.

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Further Reading


