How to Integrate Strategy and Culture for Transformative Change

Allan D. M. Bukusi

AJP

How to Integrate Strategy and Culture for Transformative Change

Allan D. M. Bukusi[1]
Adjunct Lecturer, Humanities and Social Sciences, Ashesi University, Ghana

Abstract

Purpose: This paper demonstrates that strategy and culture are important collaborators in the successful design and implementation of transformative change for sustainable corporate transformation and ethical institutional development.

Materials and Methods: The researcher explores select, classic, contemporary and current scholarly literature on the theory of change. The research reviews theory articulated by Kurt Lewin on change management, systems theory, theory U and complexity in relation to their efficacy in facilitating organization change in global and local contexts. The study draws from ubuntu philosophy and the African business experience to propose a conceptual framework for the integration of strategy and culture to establish transformative change.

Findings: The study finds a distinction in the context in which the theory of change is applied at the global and local levels. Business leaders need to use different approaches to change initiatives in the two contexts. The study also shows why culture has the power to frustrate transformative change and the implementation of new strategy. Subsequently, the paper proposes that sensitivies to culture should be built into strategy design in order to mitigate its inertial power during strategy implementation. The study submits that global change theory presumes the stability of the macro-operating environments in which strategy is developed. It also assumes the existence of supportive institutional culture, predictable environmental forces and the availability of well-developed macroeconomic infrastructure to underwrite desirable change initiatives. Conventional models suggest that the only intervening agency to establish change is the design and implementation of a new strategy. However, continental business microenvironments are made up of unstable, diverse, complex and volatile microeconomic disparities and cultural undercurrents that resist the implementation of

change. In other words, the outcomes of strategy implementation in microenvironments, do not always mirror the predictive designs of global change theory. The study suggests that while global contexts may also benefit from the proposed model, culture should be integrated into the design and implementation of corporate strategy, in local contexts, to facilitate sustainable change.

Implications to Theory, Practice and Policy: This paper recommends that; 1) Business and institutional leaders should carefully evaluate the strategic initiatives and development models they adopt and establish whether they indeed have the capacity to create and sustain transformative change within their operating environment, 2) Because proposed change always invites a response from culture, businesses must put in place mitigating measures to ensure that undue cultural inertia does not hinder ethical institutional advance, 3) Business leaders must remain alive to the fact that strategists, however brilliant, are not in control of the environmental forces in the ecosystem they seek to navigate. Hence the need to take pre-emptive measures, design strategic alternatives and employ dynamic approaches to successfully implement strategic plans, 4) Successful strategy implementation depends on the supportive confluence of multiple, complex and dynamic environmental factors beyond the designers of a good strategic plan. Thus, business leaders need to protect good strategy from being disoriented by fluctuating environmental change, 5) The perceived conflict of culture and strategy can be resolved by incorporating the ends of both in the design of crafting transformative change, 6) Ubuntu provides a powerful ethical lens to evaluate the acceptability, suitability and sustainability of strategic business initiatives in the continental business experience.

Keywords: *Strategy, Culture, Change, Ubuntu, Emotional Intelligence*

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Peter Drucker is famously quoted as having said, "culture eats strategy for breakfast" (Whitzman, 2016). The finality of this statement suggests that strategy and culture are incompatible or that, at best, they countermand each other. Indeed, it would appear that culture is the enemy of progress. However, this may not be the case entirely. Rather, Drucker's statement may actually be taken as a call not to ignore the influence of culture when designing and implementing corporate strategy. The statement challenges us to examine the role of strategy in the context of culture and the interconnectedness of the two (Tallman et al., 2021). Corporate business around the world is fascinated with strategy as a solution to all its short- and long-term problems. Indeed, there is no shortage of academic journal articles (Okumus, 2001), (Olson et al., 2005), (Becker & Schmid, 2020) and books (Newman et al., 1989), (Mintzberg et al., 1998), (Kim & Mauborgne, 2005), (Rumelt, 2013) on how to go about designing and implementing effective strategy. Strategy is designed with goals and outcomes in mind. No strategy is seen as complete without an outsized, audacious goal as its guiding star (Collins & Porras, 2005). But this focus on goals and outcomes ignores the role of process, context, community participation and culture in the accomplishment of those goals. Nonetheless, strategy discussions emerge when there is a need or a desire to change "the way we do things around here." (Mukhopadhyay, & Mukhopadhyay, B K, 2021). A careful reading of this last sentence indicates that, by default, strategy draws the battle lines against culture from its inception. But this does not have to remain so through to strategy implementation. Strategy and culture can be collaborators as two sides of the same coin.

Very little attention is paid to the differences between international and regional cultures and the relationships between these cultures and strategy (Hitt et al., 2006). The assumption of the global homogeneity of cultures leads to the failure of strategy implementation in different contexts. The success of strategy in one culture does not automatically translate to the success of the same strategy in another culture. Global strategic theory is often presented as superior to local strategy, yet time and time again international corporations are forced to bow to the unique cultural dynamics of the regions in which they operate (Weihrich & Koontz, 1993). It would appear there is no such thing as a universal standard culture and that strategy must respect the cultural context in which it seeks to engage. An appreciation of the differences between global and local applications of strategy or "glocal" strategy, has been a reality since the turn of the century, but the same understanding does not seem to have filtered into general business practice (Dumitrescu & Vinerean, 2010). In the continental business experience, the phenomenon of failed strategy abounds where foreign strategy is adopted, without contextual societal engagement. Only for local culture to rise up and stall, well intended, development projects that become "white elephants" dotted across the economic landscape (Robinson & Torvik, 2005). In this paper we argue that transformative change begins with, is sustained by and ends with an appreciation, incorporation and advancement of local culture. We discuss the topic with reference to ubuntu as a societal culture operational in the African business experience. Ubuntu is an African social philosophy or "way of life and living" that values humanity, humanness or *humaneness* in all aspects of socio-economic intercourse. Its core principles, as articulated by Mbigi, 1997 are respect, dignity, solidarity, compassion and survival. It is best represented by the phrase, "I am because we are" (Poovan, 2005). The implied inclusivity of this statement suggests that even a good strategy can only be sustainable if the process is inclusive. However, this complicates the implementation of local (national) development programs and commercial undertakings which are developed with good intentions, but without social or organization wide consultation.

Evidence that strategy design and culture are not speaking to each other can be seen in community-industry conflict where local communities are not involved in the commercialization of ventures such as wildlife reserves set up within the community (Kolinski & Milich, 2021). The conflict is manifest in the extraction of local minerals such as gold in Ghana, oil in Nigeria and diamonds in South Africa with little, if any, benefit accruing to the custodial communities (Christensen, 2019). The same conflict is manifest in the adoption of modern education systems where local cultures are simply ignored as governments implement western models and philosophies of pedagogy (Mutekwe, 2015). The non-integration of strategy and culture is evident in business mergers, partnerships, collaborations and intra-organization change initiatives that fail to acknowledge the contribution of culture to secure transformative institutional change (Jumbe & Gerwel Proches, 2016). Indeed, popular corporate business practice is known to isolate strategy design to the boardroom closet, to be rolled out to the rest of the organization at an opportune time (Montgomery, 2013). In all of these examples it is clear that local culture is a secondary consideration when it comes to designing corporate strategy. However, in practice culture is the first hurdle strategy meets when it is time for implementation.

Problem Statement

The challenge presented by effective strategy formulation is that no one design fits all cultures. Each context requires its own unique approach. A good idea is only a good idea in one, or some, but not every culture. If that idea does not sit well within a culture, even if it is a good idea – that culture will eat the idea for breakfast. But Peter Drucker's pithy statement is not and end in itself. Read backwards, it means any successful strategy must embrace or take into account the values, particularity, peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of the existing culture in which it seeks implementation. This major oversight has cost governments, businesses and organizations around the world dearly in terms of failed strategy, miserable business performance and incomplete development projects. Many strategy designers, implementers and change leaders have failed to recognize the informal authority and power of organization culture to resist change (Cacciattolo, 2015). Many development projects have been suspended or abandoned because the local community did not approve or participate in the design and/or approval of the project (Ozguler, 2016). In order to secure business transformation, there is need to move from transactional strategy to transformative strategy (Shields, 2011). The problem is that corporate cultures formulate traditions, customs and, most important, unwritten norms that become part of the institution's social identity, brand and operational architecture. This unwritten software supports the current operations, but will also be needed to sustain transformative change.

When a new strategy is announced, the existing cultural architecture may need to be dismantled to accommodate the change. This process is not easily embraced, but can also be costly to execute or rebuild new culture infrastructure to support the new strategy design. Indeed, sometimes culture simply refuses to budge. Culture, it would appear, never really dies, it is simply reformulated, revived or revised. Hence the need to integrate strategy with culture or rope culture into strategy to support desired transformative change initiatives. Nonetheless, the picture can be further complicated by organizations having pre-existing *regressive*, as opposed to *progressive*, institutional cultures before new strategy is implemented (Bush, 1987). While lessons on the mis-match of organization culture and strategy can be drawn from operational losses in mergers such as between Daimler-Chrysler and Sprint-Nextel (Bouwman, 2013), empirical studies show that culture has a direct bearing on strategy execution (Reddy & Scheepers, 2019). Indeed, the high occurrence of "rework" has been attributed to poor organization culture on the continent (Oyewobi et al., 2016). Nonetheless, ubuntu has been put

forward as a concept that could energize employee relations, performance, teamwork and project work (Sarpong et al., 2016). These studies raise several organizational leadership problems in the form of questions and topics for further research including; what is the interconnectedness between organization culture and strategy? What is the ideal formulation of an organization culture that supports corporate strategy and facilitates transformative change? Would the observation of ubuntu cultural values improve the quality of strategy design and implementation on the continent? What are the tensions that exist between local community values, ubuntu, formal and informal institutional values and corporate strategy? How does the consideration of culture, as an ethical construct, improve the uptake of any strategy? While these questions warrant further study, the problem addressed by this paper is how can business leaders integrate corporate strategy and organization culture to facilitate transformative institutional change with specific reference to ubuntu values.

Theoretical Review

The study draws from the theory of change as a model to facilitate sustainable transformative institutional change (Bush, 1987) through strategic initiatives including the design and implementation of suitable policy, programs and development plans advancing ethical institutional growth and navigating the complex nature of social change (Serrat, 2017).

2.0 MATERIALS AND METHODS

The researcher explores select, classic, contemporary and current scholarly literature on the theory of change articulated by Kurt Lewin, systems theory, theory-U and complexity in relation to their efficacy in facilitating change in global and local contexts. The study draws from ubuntu philosophy and the African business experience to propose a conceptual framework for the integration of strategy and culture to establish transformative change.

3.0 FINDINGS

Kurt Lewin's freeze, unfreeze, freeze change management theory provides a framework to support the design of a transformative strategy implementation model to create enduring or at least facilitate a planned approach to change (Burnes, 2004). Nonetheless, Kurt Lewin's theory of change presumes that the fundamental forces of environmental dynamics can be "frozen", "unfrozen" and "refrozen". It presumes periods of continuously stable states punctured by the incursion of a strategic change initiative. However, if the environment is unstable then any strategic change initiative must also successfully navigate the dynamic of a volatile, unstable, complex and ambiguous environment that does not "freeze" or "hold still" to allow for a transformative operation to take place within it (Hanine & Dinar, 2022). Nonetheless, western nations have, over time, developed advanced socio-economic infrastructure that has created a relatively stable operating environment. These nations have developed stable predictive indices like functional transport systems, stable currencies, single digit interest rates and social security programs that ensure most people enjoyed a sense of socio-economic stability (Chang, 2002). However, in Africa, the continental disparity of conditions of people living in a single city are not only huge, but diverse and volatile.

Hostile inflation rates, bulging unemployment, fluctuating currencies and sparse physical infrastructure in terms of roads, internet connectivity and access to electricity. This dynamic state of existence does not lend itself to the smooth application of Kurt Lewin's change model. Global models of change draw on the support of largely stable macro economic factors such as stable interest rates, guaranteed service infrastructure, road networks, electricity and available financial credit systems that enable long term planning. However, continental operating

environments are made up of dynamic, diverse and an interelated mishmash of microeconomic factors including; major fluctuations in interest rates, punitive tax regimes, political tensions and cultural disparities. Even without arguing why western change models may not work on the continent, it is important for strategy managers on the continent to be astutely aware of the multiple complex nature of micro socio-economic factors that affect strategic planning and the design of effective strategy.

Systems

Systems theory argues for systemic change to create a new operating environment. The challenge is to find out which are the most influential nexus points that can be motivated to drive transformative change in a business; is it the people, the structure, the culture, the policy, the process, the programming or other influential environmental factor? Systems theory calls for a wholistic review of business organization in terms of its intra-active and interactive engagement within its ecosystem (Thelen, 2005). This model lends itself to designing transformative strategy that constantly evolves as conditions change in a complex integrated environment (Mele et al., 2010). This approach is probably better suited to the local continental business experience where operating environments are affected by myriad interconnected changes in socio-political equations, changing weather patterns, economic instability and unstable fiscal policy driven by hard currency adjustments among others. Crafting a transformative strategy, anchored in this theory, suggests that business leaders need to identify, map and monitor a basket of critical factors or success indicators that accurately reflect the movement of volatile local socio-economic conditions and use them to create dynamic strategy to effectively pursue long term goals.

Strategists should be able and ready to change emphasis and direction today, based on the realities of yesterday and projections of tomorrow, to securely position the business to accomplish its mission (Bukusi, 2023). Systems theory suggests that dynamic change can be driven by any one or combination of factors contributing to balance in the ecosystem. Similarly, systemic imbalance can be caused by one or a number of factors affecting or causing disruption within the ecosystem. One of the contributors to intra- organizational balance is culture. It should not be ignored if transformative change is to be sustained in volatile operating environments. Nonetheless, the principles of systems theory appear to work as effectively in both global and local contexts in helping business leaders successfully navigate complex environmental conditions.

Theory -U

Theory-U designs transformative change through a seven-stage reflective journey. An organization is transformed through a process of symbolic submersion (death of the old) and emergence (birth of the new) to a new paradigm of existence. Theory-U involves; 1) *downloading* or reflecting on past patterns, 2) *seeing* or reviewing those patterns to generate learnings, 3) *sensing* the need for help and letting go before, 4) *presencing* and realigning to new more productive directions, 5) *crystalizing* this direction through visioning of the future, 6) *prototyping* and testing before, 7) performing in a new cycle of existence (Briciu, 2024). While theory-U engages a core seven step change process that can be experienced by an individual or taken through by an organization, it essentially reflects Kurt Lewin's freeze, unfreeze and refreeze model. Nonetheless, the model does not require reliance on environmental stability or instability. As an introspective process, it demands individual commitment and organizational resolve to effect change in spite of prevailing environmental conditions. This model can therefore be implemented in global, local and individual environments. It is driven by the institutional determination to a achieve a new aspirational

state of existence. This model also fuels the entrepreneurial drive of transformative business leaders on the continent (Awuah, 2007). When leader drive is combined with institutional commitment, the result is achievement well beyond the unexpected, even in unfavorable conditions (Bukusi, 2020) Thus, transformative change can be driven by institutional resolve, personal drive and leader commitment. This suggests that transformative change can be achieved through the alignment of social and cultural competencies as opposed to the acquisition of advanced technology.

Culture

Organization culture, described by Kreitner and Kinicki, 2010 has four major concentrations; Clan culture; driven by collaboration and teamwork, Adhocracy cultures; driven by creativity and innovation, Hierarchy or bureaucratic cultures; driven by authority and procedure and Market cultures; driven by competition (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2010). It is not hard to see that the chances of success of a transformative change in each of these cultural environments will depend, in part, on the extent to which the strategy is aligned to the institutional culture. Designing a competitive market driven strategy in a hierarchical organization will suffer bureaucratic inertia that will slow down its design phase to the pace of the administrative process. By the time strategy implementation is approved (two years later) market trends may have moved on to the next best thing. However, introducing new strategy in a market driven organization could lead to the launch of policy changes overnight. While organization culture colors strategy design and implementation, the main challenge is that individual organizations are not so neatly boxed in the four models offered above. Some organizations are a blend of two or more cultures.

An organization may have a market driven production department, a bureaucratic accounting process and a clan-oriented sales team. These departments do not move at the same pace with respect to pursuing corporate goals. Nonetheless, two organizations in the same industry may have very different cultures. Two organizations collaborating in a "business merger" to accomplish a mutually strategic goal, may experience such a frustrating clash of cultures that the project breaks down and the goal abandoned. Ideally, an organization seeking to introduce transformative change would have to inspire the formulation of a suitable culture to facilitate desired change. Nonetheless, from observation, an organization can only survive and thrive in an eco-system if its intra-organization culture is compatible with, or serves the interests of, the extra-organization culture. The "white elephants" discussed earlier occur when a society rejects an imposed development project in its midst without due consultation or collaboration. The power of extra-organization culture is also manifest when an unpopular government is voted out of office by its own citizens. The same is also evident what a company closes down because its products are rejected by the market. But it is also evident when intra-organization transformative change initiatives collapse because strategy movers fail to engage the prevailing institutional culture.

Ubuntu

The five values of ubuntu or *humanness* articulated by Mbigi 1997, are; Respect, Dignity, Solidarity, Compassion and Survival (Poovan, 2005). Each of these values both individually and severally qualify as a social intelligence governing interpersonal relations, community collaboration and corporate success. They are mirrored by the five emotional intelligence competencies; self-awareness (dignity), self-regulation (respect), self-motivation (survival), empathy (compassion) and effective relationships (solidarity) that have been extensively used to interpret effective approaches to leadership practice in the global context (Goleman, 2000). Ubuntu is therefore a natural mechanism of social intelligence, well understood in local

contexts, and foundational to emotional intelligence. The Global Leadership and Organizational Behavior Effectiveness research program shows broad differences in regional cultures that require leaders to remain sensitive to social norms when conducting business in different regions (Northouse, 2016). Ubuntu stands out as a regional cultural framework to which many communities and southern Africa subscribe. It would seem natural that ubuntu, as a societal competence, makes a moderating contribution to business organization, strategy and effective institutional leadership in local environments. Nonetheless, ubuntu has been put forward as both a transformative philosophy (Ncube, 2010) and a societal transformative strategy (Omodan & Ige, 2021). This perspective makes it a germane choice as a cultural model that supports transformative change.

The statement, "I am because we are" interpreted in the context of change, suggests that, "there can be no real change, unless we all change" and that, "proposed change must be beneficial and accessible to all". Given this frame of reference it is easy to see why (local) culture appears to resist change. Invariably, change often favors a privileged few, and if poorly managed, change comes at the expense of the voiceless many. In this regard, cultural resistance is merely a self-preserving response to issues it does not understand or is against, akin to a tortoise simply withdrawing into its shell at the sign of danger, leaving you (the leader) with the responsibility of carry it (the tortoise) to where you want it to be. Notice too, that moving the tortoise does not change its culture! Similarly, providing (new) organization infrastructure does not necessarily change the institutional culture. Strategists need to think about how to ensure that strategy is inclusive and duly engaged in the desired transformation process. Culture in an organization is a learned self-preservation competence that needs to be engaged if meaningful change is going to take place. With respect to ubuntu, no lasting organization change can take place without its sanction. It needs to be integrated into the design of corporate strategy in the continental business experience (Khomba & Kangaude-Ulaya, 2013).

Strategy

It is widely believed that strategy is the key to organizational success (Rumelt, 2013). Nonetheless, strategy can be described as, "how to get from here to there". Transformative strategy can be described as, "how to get from here to an aspirational, sustainable, ethical better there". Strategy design and implementors draw on visions, dreams, goals and objectives to create plans and road maps to those visions, dreams and goals. An underlying principle of effective strategy design, is to remain cognizant, appreciative, careful and clear about what relevant issues inform the design. Is the strategy informed by policy, profit, market forces politics or ethical outcomes? The pool of conditions, circumstances and concerns informing the design of strategy strait jackets and pre-casts the outcome of strategy implementation. However, effective strategy implementation, should speak back to the design and the circumstances surrounding the adoption of the strategy.

Nonetheless, strategy implementation is routinely carried out without sensitivities to surrounding issues on the ground. Nonetheless, strategist cannot ignore "the importance of contextual variables in implementation" (Okumus, 2001). These contextual issues on the ground, found during implementation, affect the effectiveness, efficiency and transformative outcome of the strategy. Herein lies the argument for employing a dynamic strategy to achieve organization ends. Nonetheless, the blame for failure of a strategy is frequently placed on poor implementation. However, critical reflection counters this logic. Just because the strategy has been successfully implemented does not mean the strategy is good or beneficial. A badly designed strategy can be successfully implemented. But even a good strategy can devolve into a bad strategy with the passage of time and change of circumstances (Bremmer, 2023). Care

should therefore be taken to design and implement transformative strategy within a limited window period in which it can be effective in a dynamic and changing environment. In practice, it is very hard to change the design of a strategy once it moves to implementation, therefore every care should be taken to ensure the adopted strategy is ethically the best crafted design. However, while successful business leaders and organization strategists are hailed as beacons of organization success Mintzberg, 1993 warns of the," Illusion of control" (Mintzberg, 1993) in which designers of strategic initiatives approach tasks with the assumption that they are in control of the environment. Business leaders presume that if they take a specific action, the organization and the environment will respond according to their predictions. This, of course, is misleading. Global VUCA conditions offer no such comfort (Woodson, 2013). It is consistently the strategist, not the environment, that must be ready to change course. Nonetheless, the public generally believe the illusion that the strategist is in control of the operating environment.

While substantive confidence in the strategist is needed for optimizing team engagement during project implementation, it would be wise for strategists to take their designs through preemptive screening of their assumptions, predictions and vision of change to refine and perfect implementation plans. However, at the same time, strategists are called upon to be bold and act with independent determination and courage as suggested by the principles of theory-U driven change. Strategists must have the courage to engage the paraphrased version of Newtons first law of motion; the status quo will not change unless acted upon by a net force. Indeed, Rudd et al, 2007 advise that "Although strategic planning is a process for anticipating environmental turbulence, the logical sequential process often prescribed in the literature, is not enough to influence performance" (Rudd et al., 2007). Strategy design and implementation is therefore a high stakes science requiring flexibility and predictive expertise in decision making and dynamic action on the ground. Strategy must describe a broad plan to be implemented in the context of cultural and environmental issues on the ground. In the African business experience, the many volatile micro factors that buffet the smooth implementation of strategy, call for business leaders to employ tacit, tactical methods to overcome operational challenges guided by the overarching strategic intent of the business. This may be termed as dynamic strategy.

While conventional strategy designs depend on predictive trends in stable environments, turbulent environments disobey trends, are characterized by unpredictability and test the realms of possibility rather than probability. Effective strategy design in these two environments is therefore decidedly different. Nonetheless, because strategy attains permanency in the formulation of policy, the *unflexibilies* of policies can lead to their becoming irrelevant and insensitive to dynamic change in turbulent environments (Stiglitz, 1998). Continental businesses should take time to examine the sustainability of well-meaning policy that, with time, may derail institutional transformation in changing conditions. Adopting global policy and conventions without contextualizing their interpretation may turn out to be unsustainable in practice. Much literature on strategy focuses on the importance of implementation and intra-organization alignment of hard factors such as structure and systems and soft factors including relationships and consensus (Yang et al., 2010). But while strategy implementation factors are important, an effective strategy design preempts the cultural road blocks of sustainable implementation (Meroni, 2008). This prompts the debate; which is more important strategy, structure, systems or culture in facilitating transformative change?

Discussion

Change, in a dynamic environment, is measured by different metrics than change in stable environments. In stable environments, change can be measured in terms of linear advancement. In dynamic environments, change must be measured in terms of net progress with respect to multiple indices. Taking two steps forward and one step sideways can be frustrating to the linear school of strategy implementation, nonetheless it still qualifies as progress or quantum change.

Many national development and business strategy models focus on goals, vision and outcomes. Culture is simply not considered in strategy design. The assumption is perhaps that culture will catch up with strategy and take a lead from newly introduced structure. It is hoped that a new outlook, better vision or technology will somehow address the "retrogressive" elements of culture and presumably give birth to "positive" or "progressive" change. But as discussed earlier, many non-culture-friendly development projects and business plans end up as "white elephants" or unoptimized strategic business initiatives planted in non-absorbent socio-economic ecosystems. Nonetheless, the integration of strategy and culture demonstrates a social intelligence necessary to establish transformative change in an institution. The advantages of integrating culture and strategy include; a) access to the heart of the implementing community, and b) access to its vast institutional memory of what has, and what hasn't worked before, and why. This knowledge not only ensures that strategists avoid past mistakes, but also ensures that strategy implementation becomes a meaningful, ethical, collaborative progress is owned and appreciated by the institutional community and its surrounding environmental contexts.

Culture, has the capacity to eat strategy for breakfast, lunch and dinner, because it controls human resources attitudes, employee behavior, community norms, formal and informal communication systems and productivity ethics that guarantee institutional performance. Nonetheless, culture is also a community self-preserving instrument that creates a cautious, but powerful inertial force when a community comes under the threat of change. In view of the preceding literature review and this discussion, we propose the following process integrating strategy and culture to facilitate transformative change (see Figure 1).
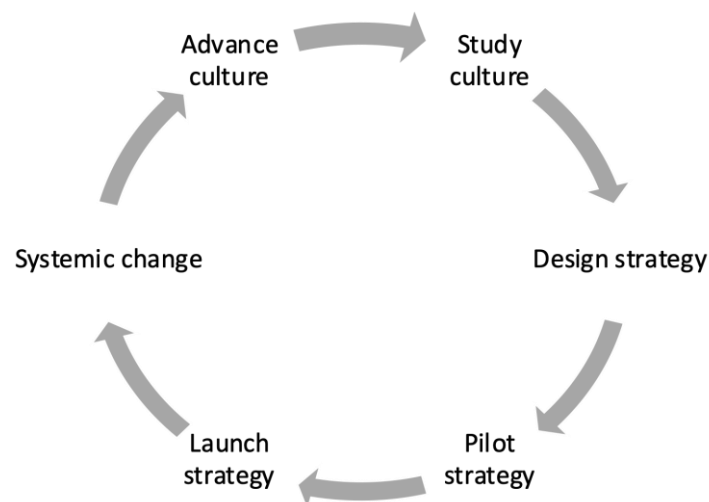

Figure 1: Facilitating Transformative Change

To begin with, culture plays a formative role in the past, the development, the success and the future of a surviving institution. Before leaders set about designing a strategic future for a business they will need to work through the following steps; 1) Study existing culture, with a

view to validating its foundations and the institutional success it has enabled to date. Avoid criticizing or blaming culture as a reason for institutional failure. Consider that culture is a collectively owned ethical frame and social commodity. Vilifying it would simply fuel subterranean resentment and build inertia to the implementation of new directions. Reflect on the strategic framework that housed the organization culture in the past. Identify any prevailing cultural paradigms that may come under attack with the implementation of a new strategy and design mitigating measures that may need to be incorporated if a new strategy is to be accepted, 2) Strategy design; evaluate strategic options available in the local context. Examine the broad pillars, underpinning the goals of the proposed new strategy. Consider what informs these goals and the underlying culture framework that will enable the success and sustainability of the new directions. This will help in designing a suitable bridge between the current and the revised (desirable new) culture.

Avoid reactionary and transactional strategy design unless the change needs to be immediate without any long-term impact on organization development. Transformative strategy design incorporates not only the sustainable advancement or competitive aspects of strategy, but also the ethical dimensions of culture. In the African business experience the observance of the ubuntu cultural lens of respect, dignity, solidarity, compassion and survival in the design will add value to its contextual acceptability, making it safe for people to embrace new strategic directions, 3) Pilot the strategy; This will help identify and avoid assumptions and oversights in the design, and facilitate understanding of the strategy's projected benefits and shortcomings. Pilot studies will serve to unearth and formulate solutions to known and unknown implementation problems. Piloting the strategy will also provide opportunities for correction of errors, assumption and removal of obstacles, before the final commitment of major resources to the enterprise are made, 4) Launch strategy; implementing strategic initiatives in cautious phases allows for the short-term celebration of value creation. The launch phase also provides for vigorous monitoring and measuring of strategy performance in the context of organization learning in turbulent conditions.

This will allow for periodic progressive dynamic strategy responses to ecosystem changes and course correction measures to ensure the business strategic intent is maintained and transformative change is advanced, 5) Systemic change: should only be implemented after a socially (culturally) acceptable foundation has been laid by the first four stages of this cycle, otherwise institutional inertia is likely to raise objections of exclusion and lack of knowledge about the project. Systemic change in policy, procedure and technology anchor transformative change and become evidence institutional development over the medium term. But, systemic changes need to be sold to the people for their ethical value rather than technical superiority. In other words, the benefits of systemic change can only accrue to the organization if the people accept and embrace the new directions, 6) Advancing culture: while a culture is a function of accumulated organization experience and learnings, establishing a new culture is a process of allowing an institution to settle into a new way of doing things. Since culture is a social construct, the new culture must emerge from within the organization. This means that the business leader can only inspire the institution to change, but must eventually hand over the implementation of the new strategy to the ownership of the institutions culture. If the business leader is not able to do this, the strategy will collapse once the business leader, investor or donor withdraws from the project or when funds run out. If a new strategy is not handed over to an emergent revised culture, the organization will "eat the new strategy for lunch" and revert to its old culture in the face of change.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The process of integrating culture and strategy to facilitate transformative change may not follow strict administrative time lines or adhere to rules of controlled budgetary expenditure and completion dates. There will have to be flexibility in the whole process of establishing transformative change, because it requires cultural adoption, alignment and socialization of new strategy initiatives.

Recommendations

This paper recommends that; 1) Businesses should carefully evaluate the strategic initiatives and development models they adopt to establish whether they indeed have the capacity to create and sustain transformative change within their operating environment, 2) Because proposed change always invites a response from culture, businesses must put in place mitigating measures to ensure that undue cultural inertia does not hinder ethical institutional advance, 3) Business leaders must remain alive to the fact that strategists, however brilliant, are not in control of the environmental forces in the ecosystem they seek to navigate. Hence the need to take pre-emptive measures, design strategic alternatives and employ dynamic approaches to successfully implement strategic plans, 4) Successful strategy implementation depends on the supportive confluence of multiple, complex and dynamic environmental factors beyond the designers of a good strategic plan. Thus, business leaders need to protect good strategy from being disoriented by fluctuating environmental change, 5) The perceived conflict of culture and strategy can be resolved by incorporating the ends of both in the design of crafting transformative change, 6) Ubuntu provides a powerful ethical lens to evaluate the acceptability, suitability and sustainability of strategic business initiatives in the continental business experience.

Contribution to Theory, Policy and Practice

This study contributes to the knowledge base of organization change theory highlighting the role of culture in formulating and implementing sustainable transformative change. It also highlights the intervening contribution of ubuntu, as a social intelligence, to the lived experience of formal and informal institutional cultures. The study empowers policy makers, strategists and practicing business leaders to harness the salient, yet powerful resource, role that culture plays in the design of vibrant, ethical, sustainable corporate strategy and business enterprise.

www.ajpojournals.org

REFERENCES

Awuah, P. (Director). (2007). Educating a new generation of African leaders. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J-KfKxCaDVA&t=70s

Becker, W., & Schmid, O. (2020). The right digital strategy for your business: An empirical analysis of the design and implementation of digital strategies in SMEs and LSEs. Business Research, 13(3), 985–1005. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40685-020-00124-y

Bouwman, C. H. (2013). The Role of Corporate Culture in Mergers & Acquisitions. , NOVA science publishers. In E. Perrault (Ed.), Mergers and acquisitions: Practices, performance and perspectives. NOVA Science.

Bremmer, I. (Director). (2023). Think Strategically: The Art of Reasoning for a Rapidly Changing World. Big Think. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkgsYA-LYxo&list=PPSV

Briciu, B. (2024). Theory U as case study of integral transformative learning for spiritual development in higher education. Journal for the Study of Spirituality, 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/20440243.2024.2322423

Bukusi, A. D. M. (2020). What Transformative Leaders do: Emerging Perspectives in the 21st Century. International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology, 12(4), 85–93. https://doi.org/10.5897/IJSA2020.0871

Bukusi, A. D. M. (2023). Six Things Transformative Leaders Do. Open Journal of Social Sciences, 11(08), 415–423. https://doi.org/10.4236/jss.2023.118029

Burnes, B. (2004). Kurt Lewin and the Planned Approach to Change: A Re-appraisal. Journal of Management Studies, 41(6).

Bush, P. D. (1987). The theory of institutional change. Journal of Economic issues. Journal of Economic Issues, 21(3), 1075–1116.

Cacciattolo, K. (2015). Organizational Politics: The Positive & Negative Sides. European Scientific Journal, 11(1).

Chang, H. (2002). Kicking Away the Ladder; Development Strategy in Historical Perspective. Anthem Press.

Christensen, D. (2019). Concession Stands: How Mining Investments Incite Protest in Africa. International Organization, 73(1), 65–101. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818318000413

Collins, J., & Porras, J. (2005). Built to Last. Randon.

Dumitrescu, L., & Vinerean, S. (2010). The Glocal Strategy of Global Brands. Studies in Business and Economics, 5(3), 147–155.

Goleman, D. (2000). Leadership that Gets Results. Harvard Business Review.

Hanine, S., & Dinar, B. (2022). The Challenges of Human Capital Management in the VUCA Era. Journal of Human Resource and Sustainability Studies, 10(03), 503–514. https://doi.org/10.4236/jhrss.2022.103030

Hitt, M. A., Franklin, V., & Zhu, H. (2006). Culture, institutions and international strategy. Journal of International Management, 12, 222–234.

Jumbe, M., & Gerwel Proches, C. N. (2016). The impact of institutional culture on change initiatives in an electric utility company in Africa. African Journal of Economic and Management Studies, 7(3), 295–313. https://doi.org/10.1108/AJEMS-08-2015-0093

Khomba, J. K., & Kangaude-Ulaya, E. (2013). Indigenisation of Corporate Strategies in Africa: Lessons from the African Ubuntu Philosophy. China-USA Business Review, 12(7), 672–689.

Kim, W. C., & Mauborgne, R. (2005). Blue Ocean Strategy: How to Create Uncontested Market Space and Make the Competition Irrelevant. Harvard Business School Press.

Kolinski, L., & Milich, K. M. (2021). Human-Wildlife Conflict Mitigation Impacts Community Perceptions around Kibale National Park, Uganda. Diversity, 13(4), 145. https://doi.org/10.3390/d13040145

Kreitner, R., & Kinicki, A. (2010). Organizational Behavior (9th ed.). McGraw Hill.

Mele, C., Pels, J., & Polese, F. (2010). A Brief Review of Systems Theories and Their Managerial Applications. Service Science, 2(1–2), 126–135. https://doi.org/10.1287/serv.2.1_2.126

Meroni, A. (2008). Strategic design: Where are we now? Reflection around the foundations of a recent discipline. Strategic Design Research Journal, 1(1), 31–38. https://doi.org/10.4013/sdrj.20081.05

Mintzberg, H. (1993). The Pitfalls of Strategic Planning. California Management Review36, 36(1).

Mintzberg, H., Ahlstrand, B., & Lampel, J. (1998). Strategy Safari: A guided tour through the wilds of strategic management. Free Press.

Montgomery, C. A. (2013). The Strategist. Collins.

Mukhopadhyay, B. R., & Mukhopadhyay, B K. (2021). Organization culture is, "the way we do things around here." North East Colors, Editorial.

Mutekwe, E. (2015). Towards an Africa Philosophy of Education for Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Africa. Creative Education, 06(12), 1294–1305. https://doi.org/10.4236/ce.2015.612129

Ncube, L. B. (2010). Ubuntu: A Transformative Leadership Philosophy. Journal of Leadership Studies, 4(3), 77–82. https://doi.org/1.1002/jls.20182

Newman, W. H., Logan, J. P., & Hegarty, W. H. (1989). Strategy: A Multi-level, Integrative Approach. South-Western Publishing Company. https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=O8HMBI0LhkwC

Northouse, P. G. (2016). Leadership (Seven). Sage.

Okumus. (2001). Towards a strategy implementation framework. International Journal of Hospitality Management, 13(7), 327–338.

Olson, E. M., Slater, S. F., & Hult, G. T. M. (2005). The importance of structure and process to strategy implementation. Business Horizons, 48(1), 47–54. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.bushor.2004.10.002

Omodan, B., & Ige, O. A. (2021). Analysis of Ubuntu as a Transformative Strategy to Mitigate Social Unrest in the University system. Journal of Studies in Social Sciences and Humanities, 7(2), 76–86.

Oyewobi, L. O., Abiola-Falemu, O., & Ibironke, O. T. (2016). The impact of rework and organisational culture on project delivery. Journal of Engineering, Design and Technology, 14(2), 214–237. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEDT-05-2013-0038

Ozguler, I. S. (2016). Increase the Projects' Success Rate through Developing Multi-cultural Project Management Process. Procedia- Social and Behavioural Sciences, 226, 236–242. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2016.06.184

Poovan, N. (2005). The Impact of the Social Values of Ubuntu on Team Effectiveness [University of Stellenbosch]. https://scholar.sun.ac.za/bitstream/handle/10019.1/2292/poovan_impact_2006.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y

Reddy, M., & Scheepers, C. B. (2019). Influence of Organisational Culture on Strategy Execution in a South African Organisation.

Robinson, J. A., & Torvik, R. (2005). White elephants. Journal of Public Economics, 89(2–3), 197–210. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jpubeco.2004.05.004

Rudd, J. M., Greenley, G. E., Beatson, A. T., & Lings, I. N. (2007). Strategic planning and performance: Extending the debate. Journal of Business Research, 61, 99-108doi:10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.06.014. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jbusres.2007.06.014

Rumelt, R. (2013). Good Strategy, Bad Strategy: The difference and why it matters. Profile Books.

Sarpong, D., Bi, J., & Amankwah-Amoah, J. (2016). On the nurturing of strategic foresight: The Ubuntu perspective. Futures, 75, 14–23. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.futures.2015.10.007

Serrat, O. (2017). Theories of Change. In O. Serrat, Knowledge Solutions (pp. 237–243). Springer Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-0983-9_24

Shields, C. M. (Ed.). (2011). Transformative Leadership: A reader. Peter Lang.

Stiglitz, J. E. (1998). Towards a New Paradigm for Development: Strategies, Policies, and Processes. https://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/document?repid=rep1&type=pdf&doi=a0b93b3aeeb17cfce3c8c4f2bd67beb8562f195a

Tallman, S. B., Shenkar, O., & Wu, J. (2021). Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast: Use and Abuse of Culture in International Strategy Research. Strategic Management Review.

Thelen, E. (2005). Dynamic Systems Theory and the Complexity of Change. Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 15(2), 255–283. https://doi.org/10.1080/10481881509348831

Weihrich, H., & Koontz, H. (1993). Management: A Global Perspective (Issue v. 1). McGraw-Hill. https://books.google.co.ke/books?id=MuMbAQAAMAAJ

Whitzman, C. (2016). 'Culture eats strategy for breakfast': The powers and limitations of urban design education. Journal of Urban Design, 21(5), 574–576. https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809.2016.1220157

Woodson, J. (2013). Strategic Leadership in a VUCA World: Jonathan Woodson | Decision-Making: Voices from the Field [Interview]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=72AzCY45fKU&t=12s

Yang, L., Sun, G. H., & Eppler, M. J. (2010). Yang, L., Sun, G. H., & Eppler, M. J. (2010). Making strategy work: A literature review on the factors influencing strategy implementation. Handbook of research on strategy process. Handbook of Research on Strategy Process.