

# Organizational culture and management practices at technical vocational education and training colleges

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## ABSTRACT

Building an effective organizational culture of high performance has proven to be elusive amongst strategic and operational managers of selected public technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges in the Gauteng province in the post-merger period of 2007 to 2010. Poor organizational culture demonstrated by a lack of the Ubuntu principles of humanness and teamwork; management inefficiency and instability undermined the role of public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province, South Africa. The identified knowledge gap is a paucity of information on how the values of Ubuntu are infused into management practices to improve organizational management practices. A mixed methods research approach that adopted multiple case studies, unstructured interviews and survey questionnaires was undertaken to assess an organizational culture and management practices by strategic and operational managers, and lecturers at selected public TVET colleges. Descriptive statistical and thematic analyses were employed to generate, interpret, and analyze the findings from participating managers and lecturers. The findings revealed the need to re-purpose public TVET colleges in South Africa to align with the strategic priorities and goals of the National Development Plan: Vision 2030. Strategic and operational managers should also be capacitated with stakeholder relations building and management skills to create student workplace opportunities with businesses and industries.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Most public technical vocational education and training (TVET) colleges in the Gauteng province are characterized by a serious lack of an organizational culture of teamwork, shared ownership and accountability which impedes effective institutional planning and management [1]. An organizational culture of teamwork, mutual respect and collaboration should interface with the societal values of Ubuntu to improve management efficiency and efficacy in public TVET colleges in Gauteng province, and South Africa in general [2]. Numerous initiatives and efforts are currently being undertaken by policy bureaucrats, as well as strategic and operational managers to re-think public TVET colleges in Gauteng province. This entails building a broader coalition of change amongst stakeholders such as managers, lecturers, students, community members and other relevant public and private sector role players to improve institutional performance at public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province. Strategic and operational managers are

therefore challenged to build an organizational culture of shared ownership and high performance amongst lecturers to improve teaching and learning in public TVET colleges in Gauteng province, as well as to institutionalize effective management practices and performance. South African societal transformation in the post-apartheid democratic dispensation encouraged institutional re-configuration and mergers whereby people from diverse racial backgrounds, cultures and social dispositions converge to work together on a nation-building project [2], [3], [4].

The notion of nation-building and its guiding principles of unity in diversity, social cohesion, forgiveness, reconciliation and 'rainbow nation', underpinned by South Africa's democratic Constitution, is undermined by the perverse apartheid legacy that permeates South Africa's public institutions [5], [6]. The organizational culture of mistrust due to the apartheid ideology of racial separation resulted in some competent and efficient managers from the white population group resigning from public TVET colleges and opting for career opportunities in private sector institutions or emigrating to countries such as Australia and New Zealand [7]. The lack of trust and poor confidence by some white lecturers in the abilities of the new democratic South African government to protect their security of tenure and pensions impacted on organizational culture and management efficacy at public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province. The researchers also observed that at one of the public TVET colleges in 2007, most lecturers and general staff preferred to socialize along racial lines, which hampered shared work practices, institutional knowledge sharing, learning in diversity, performance improvement and growth opportunities. Organizational culture influences management and lecturers' behavioral practices [8]. Furthermore, the intersection between organizational culture and management practices determines the quality of performance within an institution. Positive attributes of organizational culture such as teamwork, commitment, caring and a sense of ownership are critical to confluence with management aspects of effective organizing, motivating, support and technical knowledge, and the ability to strengthen institutional performance.

Irefin and Mechanic [9] concur that amongst the identified attributes, employees' commitment and an organizational culture of caring are important to re-invigorate high performance within public institutions. The novelty of this paper is to interrogate how Ubuntu principles and practices such as humanness, caring, social cohesion and sense of belonging to a clan or group to encourage collaboration and cohesiveness can be infused to current management practices that are mostly imported from western cultures and create silos mentality and unnecessary competition amongst managers [10]. Ubuntu as part of African cultures should not just be spoken of but implemented in practice in all African institutions so that new generation of leaders and managers can embrace such practices and store them in their management toolboxes for institutional improvement in manner that resonate with how they live and do things. Therefore, this study sought to analyze an organizational culture and management practices at selected public Technical Vocational Education and Training colleges in the Gauteng province.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Organizational culture and performance

Longman *et al.* [11] defined organizational culture as the pattern of shared basic assumptions that a group learns as it resolves its difficulties and troubles. Sarhan *et al.* [12] perceived organizational culture as the pattern of beliefs, values and learned ways of dealing effectively with experiences that have expanded during an organization's history, and which tend to be demonstrated in its material arrangements and in the behaviors of its members. Fareed *et al.* [8] described organizational culture as a way a group of people think, which directly impacts the way they behave within their organizations or society. Organizational culture in a society or an institution is established by focusing on symbols, languages, rituals, myth, beliefs and the ideology inherent within a specific context or set-up [13]. This means that organizational culture permeates institutional members' beliefs; as well as shapes thought processes, institutional memory, knowledge management and the actions connected to an organization and its ecosystem.

Cameron and Quinn [10] explicated three purposes of an organizational culture for an institution as defining workplace environment, enhancing employees' cohesiveness and productivity, and guiding personal behaviors like employees' punctuality and setting the tone of communication. From the four categories of organizational cultures (hierarchy, market, clan and adhocracy), clan culture and adhocracy will be aligned with the study to examine how their elements can be infused and contribute to Ubuntu as organizational culture to improve institutional performance at public TVET colleges in South Africa. Clan culture is chosen for its ability to build solid and cohesive collaboration amongst institutional stakeholders, while adhocracy revitalize leaders, managers, and employees to be more creative and innovative in their practices. According to Gardner [14] some important elements of clan adhocracy are their abilities to be flexible and discretionary that create opportunities for adapting to change during organizational transformation process.

Cameron and Quinn [10] designed competing values framework which posits about the significance of aligning personal values of managers and workers characterized by teamwork and employee involvement to values of an organization. Organizational culture can be anchored within an organization when there is an alignment of vision and purpose between leaders, managers and workers share similar values and demonstrate mutual commitment [15]. Cameron and Quinn [10] identified teamwork, employee involvement, loyalty, open participation, and commitment as significant features of clan culture. Based on the analysis of organizational culture, there are major similarities and resonance between clan culture's elements and principles and values of Ubuntu that can be intertwined to improve organizational culture of high performance within public TVET colleges in South Africa. Clan and adhocracy cultures are significant to provide values framework that can be infused with organizational culture of Ubuntu to further contribute on its strengthening through measurable actions rather than only talk.

Needle [16] construed organizational culture as an intersection of organizational strategy and tactics, management styles and practices, employee types and behavioral practices, and national psyche. Some problems and challenges that can be experienced during the institutional merger process at public TVET colleges, which undermine the organizational culture of an institution, are associated with the inability to mediate and integrate external factors, and not be able to adapt to new competition and realities. Pietersen [17] noted that organizational culture can improve performance in an institution when employees are more committed and involved within an organization by sharing practices and having a sense of ownership and motivation. Sharma [18] connected organizational culture to employees' job satisfaction by emphasizing that employees' job satisfaction results in intrinsic motivation and improved work attitudes. Thus, job satisfaction is viewed as the total sum of individuals' stance towards job-related factors, including the work itself, supervisors, colleagues, working conditions, compensation, reward and recognition. Kotter and Heskett [19] emphasized a nexus between organizational culture, employee commitment and organizational performance by postulating that if there is an organizational culture of teamwork, levels of employee commitment will be higher, resulting in higher organizational performance productivity. An influential role of culture in human capital development and management practices at public institutions such as public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province should therefore be explored.

## 2.2. Management practices

Numerous researchers [20], [21] explicated the necessity for institutional managers to craft numerous techniques and develop management toolboxes, such SWOT analysis, Knowledge Management System (KMS), Balanced Scorecard (BS) and Total Quality Management (TQM) to guide institutional processes and practices. These management models are implemented to enhance performance productivity in private and public institutions, in this instance at public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province. Management strategies and tools are also significant to assess institutional performance capabilities by identifying internal strengths and weaknesses, and the external opportunities and threats that an institution should plan for or grapple with during the execution of its strategic functions and mandate. Kay *et al.* [22] described the SWOT analysis as the best and most familiar organizing framework for institutional managers to inform a strategy that guides high performance. The SWOT analysis is one of the most efficient and effective management techniques in the process of decision making [23]. The SWOT Analysis is core to the strategic planning process for public and private institutions to reflect about how they align their vision, values and goals. This approach to strategic planning propels institutions to re-engineer strategic thinking and operational activities; mitigate possible existential threats; and achieve the best possible results.

Madsen [21] further argued that management theories, ideas or toolboxes should be embraced by today's institutional managers to align with the organizational culture in a quest to improve institutional performance. Rovik [24] underscored that management theories and ideas should be defined by four characteristics, namely promises of performance improvement; catchy labels; interpretive space; and universal applicability. Shadfar [25] observed that management ideas should have catchy phrases like SWOT analysis, instead of Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats so that they can be easy to remember and popularized amongst different stakeholders in an institution. The SWOT approach to performance and management improvement can be adopted as a rallying call to coalesce every individual in an institution. This rallying call is also important to build a guiding coalition for performance improvement that can garner momentum for institutional change processes and practices as it reaches a critical mass of adopters [26]. SWOT analysis embodies a move away from complexity to simplicity during institutional engagement, which is more inclusive for every individual within an institution.

Management ideas and theories should re-kindle a culture of performance improvement in an institution that will require early adopters who can serve as change agents in their different departments, sections and units [27]–[29]. In addition, Seidl [30] avers that because institutional managers are constantly very busy dealing with institutional complexities and pressures that demand most of their time, management strategy and tools like SWOT analysis encourage simplicity to remember critical aspects that guide and

create an appealing environment for institutional performance improvement. Madsen [21] agrees that the repetition of phrases and words, without even struggling to define and understand them, will allow managers to control the destiny of their organizations. However, it should be noted that some management practitioners have criticized SWOT activity as being too simplistic, which can have damaging consequences during institutional improvement efforts [31], [32]. Lami and Mecca [33] defend the simplicity of SWOT analysis as a guiding template that allows institutional improvement planners and participants to think about the information at their disposal and utilize it to guide performance improvement processes. Falcone [34] articulates that the SWOT analysis is more effective to clarify a process of institutional improvement planning rather than its destination. SWOT activities should be interpreted within a specific context and aligned with other management toolboxes to achieve intended results [35]. Popular management ideas should also be applicable across the board, from personal to institutional, whereby SWOT activities can be adapted to specific contexts based on its variations, such as TOWS, SOFT and USED [36].

### **2.3. Intersecting the organizational culture of Ubuntu and human capital development during the institutional improvement process**

The organizational culture of Ubuntu is conceptualized as humanistic beliefs and the experience of treating all people with respect and granting them human dignity [37]. Mupedziswa *et al.* [38] postulated about the importance of the spirit of Ubuntu in an institution that builds solidarity and teamwork, which can be amplified to be an effective strategy that drives institutional improvement processes and practices. An organizational culture of Ubuntu is characterized by humanness, respect for human dignity, personal and institutional interdependence [39]. There is a need to align and intertwine the management processes and practices of performance competence, coordination, compassion and competitiveness with an organizational culture of Ubuntu in a quest to build efficient and effective public TVET colleges in South Africa that can be responsive to the goals of the National Development Plan. This will require selfless and compassionate managers who treat subordinates humanely and with the utmost respect; innovate and share new ideas with employees; create a sense of caring, teamwork and belonging which elevates human capital development.

The organizational culture of Ubuntu should be matched with a culture of collaboration which encourages public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province to be agile as they grapple with internal and external environmental challenges, whereby managers and employees should be empowered to manage personal and cultural diversities in a creative fashion that is value-adding. Moreover, an organizational culture of Ubuntu in an institution should be centered on principles such as morality, integrity, interdependence, personal recognition, and continuous improvement [40]. These assumptions about Ubuntu amplify a synthesis of positive virtues inherent in African, Eastern and Western cultural belief systems which can contribute to effective management processes and practices within public institutions.

Swanson [41] defined human capital as the knowledge and skills that people acquire through education and training. Based on this definition, the researcher assumes that every institution should be viewed as a center of life-long learning, training and development, which requires managers to create a conducive climate for employees to improve the knowledge and skills relevant for their job requirements. This further means that investing in workforce development through continuous professional and skills development training derives benefits for an organization to become productive and garner a competitive advantage over its competitors. The effective utilization of a human capital development strategy becomes critical for an institutional improvement approach and the processes to build a competitive advantage for an institution [42]. Institutions compete and become innovative through qualities of their people [43]. Furthermore, Wang and Chen [44] accentuated the importance of strategic human resource management strategies which contribute to the knowledge and skills of employees, resulting in human capital development. Malaolu and Igbuabor [45] alluded to the strategic connection between human capital development and workforce productivity within an institution.

Institutions' strategic objectives should focus more on the human capital development of employees as part of institutionalizing organizational culture through aligning with principles and values of Ubuntu to be institutional driver for high performance. The contribution of Ubuntu as an organizational culture on leadership and management disciplines lies in its ability to build interdependency and interconnectedness amongst leaders, managers, and employees as they start to rely on each other for better management and work approaches thereby creating relationships of teamwork and belonging [46]. Such a value-based approach should drive African Renaissance which requires Africans to shift their paradigm from African pessimism which is a legacy of colonialism and demands of Africans to liberate their thinking and embrace Africa cultural value systems to be part of their development [47]. Values of Ubuntu create an environment for empowerment of employees as leaders and managers develop interests in workers, build relationships of trust and empower them to be creative and exercise own judgement when making decisions that benefit an organization. Ubuntu culture as a value proposition for organizational growth and development emphasizes

collectivism whereby individual coordinate their efforts to work together for the benefit of the whole organization rather than as individuals.

According to Ncube [46], Ubuntu's approach to organizational processes assist to dismantle working in silos but strengthen teamwork in a non-competitive environment. Leaders and managers are challenged to adopt values and principles of Ubuntu in the institutional functions to develop employees to be innovative so that they can build human potential and capabilities through nurturing for growth and mentorship. Mangaliso [47] postulated that Ubuntu principles of management practices is about engendering inclusiveness, and which lead to responsibility about of welfare of others. Huge implication for infusion of Ubuntu on organizational performance is that for employees to perform maximally, they should feel that their humanity is respected, treated with respect and dignity, and viewed as network of partners who have can make immense contribution to organizational growth. The research questions that influenced the study are: i) How do managers develop strategic and operational plans to institutionalize effective management practices at selected public TVET colleges in the Gauteng Province?; ii) What types of organizational cultures inform leadership and managerial practices at public TVET colleges in the Gauteng Province?

### 3. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopted a mixed method approach whereby survey questionnaires were administered to collect data from strata of junior and senior lecturers at selected public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province. In-depth unstructured interviews were also conducted with strategic and operational managers at three selected public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province. The attitudes of senior and junior lecturers towards organizational culture and institutional management within each institution were measured by operationalizing five constructs for organizational culture [44]. Furthermore, five constructs of institutional management practices towards learner employability were also adapted in order to measure the attitudes and behaviors of junior and senior lecturers of the selected public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province. A five-point Likert scale was used to measure these items, where 1 indicated 'strongly agree' and 5 'strongly disagree'. An interview schedule was design for the unstructured interviews with strategic and operational managers to supplement the questionnaire survey with lecturers. A pilot questionnaire was administered to 10 junior and senior lecturers at a non- participating public TVET college in the Gauteng province to improve and validate the data collection tool.

#### 3.1. Population and sampling

Ochs and Jackson [48] advise about generating a sampling frame which is a complete list of all the cases in the population. The research population of this study was 1,100 lecturers, both junior and senior; 40 operational or campus managers; and 8 strategic managers, constituting 1148 at the 8 public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province [49]. In this mixed-methods research study, simple random and purposeful sampling were employed [50]. Two hundred senior and junior lecturers were randomly sampled from three selected public TVET colleges in Gauteng province, out of a target population of 1100 lecturers across the province, to respond to the survey questionnaire. Simple random sampling was adopted to ensure that every lecturer stood a fair chance of being chosen to participate by allocating numbers to their names and putting these in a box and randomly choosing any cards. The researcher also employed purposeful sampling to select strategic and operational managers to participate in the unstructured interview sessions, i.e. the first category is 3 strategic managers at the strategic management level of the public TVET colleges, that included strategic managers (formerly Chief Executive Officers); whilst the second category incorporated 15 operational or managers (5 per public TVET college) who operationalize institutional management practices and processes at campus levels, and who met the criteria for exploring the phenomenon studied [51].

#### 3.2. Data collection

The data collection methods were qualitative interviews, quantitative questionnaire/surveys, and reviewed literature. Self-administered questionnaires were designed for two categories of lecturers to share their attitudes and perspectives on constructs of organizational culture and management practices. Self-administered questionnaires were significant to verify or refute the responses of strategic and operational managers and provide a balanced perspective on the research phenomenon. Through qualitative interviews and the literature review, the researcher allowed for individual variations in participants' information that is in-depth and rich to the research context in order to reflect on the research problem and answer the research questions at hand [52]. In-depth unstructured interviews were conducted with strategic and operational managers to explore their subjective views and experiences on organizational culture and institutional management processes and practices towards learner employability at their specific public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province. Thus, in-depth, unstructured interviews were a useful data collection tool that is objective and systematic to encourage direct interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee.

An interview schedule was developed to interview both strategic and operational managers, which focused on their views and experiences pertaining to organizational culture and institutional management practices in their respective public TVET colleges and different campuses in the Gauteng province. The researchers used the interview schedule to conduct interview sessions in the afternoon after working hours. Both lecturers and managers signed consent forms whereby they agreed to participate in response to the researcher's request for participation. Researcher also sought permission from the three public TVET colleges and the Department of Higher Education and Training to conduct the research inquiry. Data was captured on a tape recorder, and later stored on a computer for transcription.

### 3.3. Reliability and validity in a mixed methods research study

Fielding [53] posited that the mixed methods conceptualization and analysis has crucial elements of data integration that allow for illustration, convergent validation, and the development of analytical richness. Miles and Huberman [54] emphasized the value of combining qualitative and quantitative inquiries through a mixed methods design for a complementary and robust analysis to demonstrate the methodological strength of each inquiry. The researcher validated the mixed methods research study by employing a process of methodological data triangulation. This process of triangulation entails using more than one method or sources of data in the research study [55]. The researcher corroborated the data collected from lecturers' survey questionnaires with themes generated from the qualitative interview sessions with strategic and operational managers in order to ascertain the convergence of ideas, or whether they refute each other. The use of two methodological designs, quantitative and qualitative in a mixed methods study, strengthened validity by capturing the breadth and in-depth understanding of information [53], [54].

The questionnaire survey also strengthened data by giving balanced perspectives from the lecturers. This resulted in comparing information from different samples and sources to analyze contradictions, and check complexities, similarities and differences in their interaction with a phenomenon from their subjective contexts [51]. Reliability was ascertained through member checks or respondents' validation of data transcripts and notes analysis wherein respondents confirmed whether their viewpoints and experiences were correctly captured and reported by the researcher [56]. Validity was strengthened through an audit trail whereby generated themes were validated by participants and the researcher's reflection on how the research process aligned with the questions. Figure 1 shows the study's design depicting the processes used from conceptualization of the study up to the conclusion.

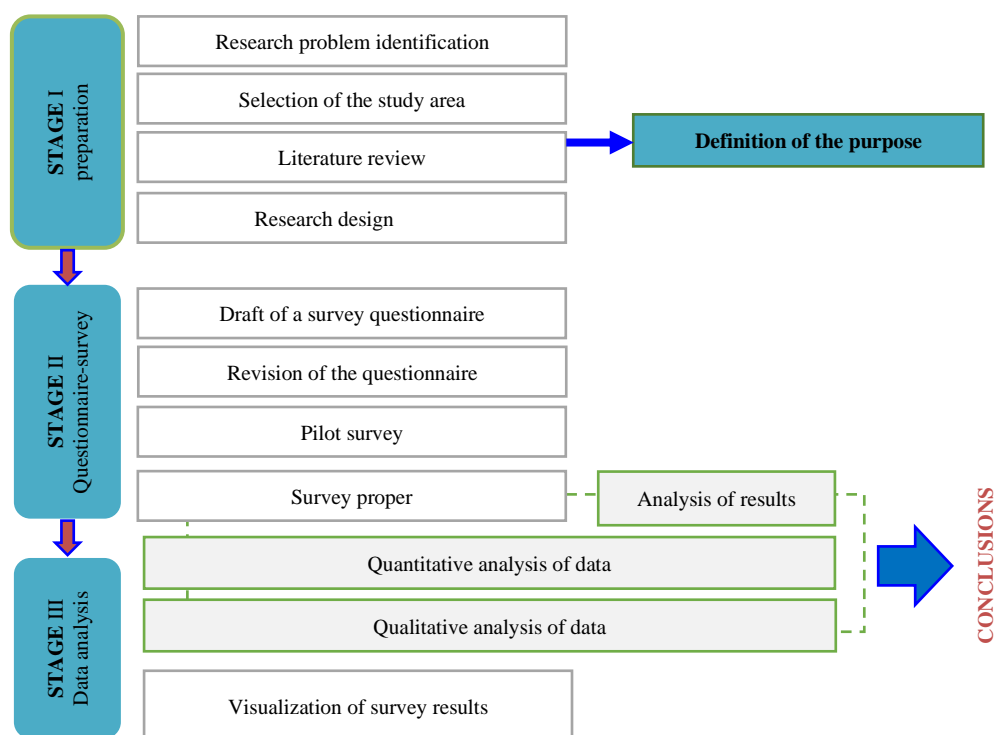


Figure 1. Study's design

#### 4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency distribution tables, graphs and charts were used to display and statistically analyze the frequencies of constructs from the findings on senior and junior lecturers. The frequency distribution table is one of the simplest ways to summarize the frequencies of occurrence from each category of constructs that reflect research questions and objectives [57]. Anderson [58] underscored the relevance of tables, bar graphs or charts to accurately capture statistical representations that are required for providing research reports. Frequency distribution tables and graphs were used to descriptively quantify the numbers of units and compare constructs from respondents to corroborate, confluence and verify or refute data from the questionnaires. Cooksey [59] noted that descriptive statistical analysis using numbers helps the researcher to concisely collect information and describe the situation in a way that people can easily understand. The statistical findings and analysis focused on the following: number of participating lecturers in the study; attitudes of junior and senior lecturers towards organizational culture and work practices at public TVET colleges; and attitudes of junior and senior lecturers towards institutional management practices.

##### 4.1. Number of participating lecturers in the study

From 200 survey questionnaires sent to senior and junior lecturers, 114 responses comprising 67 senior lecturers and 47 junior lecturers from the three selected public TVET colleges were received. The response rate from the questionnaires of lecturers was 47 (41%) at public TVET College 1; 34 (30%) at public TVET College 2; and 33 (29%) at public TVET College 3. Respondents' rates of response per public TVET college are tabulated in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of respondents per public TVET college

	Number of respondents	Mean percentage of respondents per public TVET college
Public TVET College 1	47	41%
Public TVET College 2	34	30%
Public TVET College 3	33	29%
Total	114	100%

##### 4.2. Attitudes of junior lecturers towards organizational culture and work practices at public TVET colleges

In terms of organizational culture and work practices at public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province, the majority of junior lecturers (51%) strongly agreed and agreed that open communication between managers and lecturers was demonstrated to build an organizational culture and climate to improve their work practices, followed by productive relationships (47%) and trust (43%). Another junior lecturer (36%) strongly agreed and agreed that there was a sense of ownership during institutional change in the public TVET colleges, and 34% of respondents strongly agreed and agreed that there was teamwork amongst institutional stakeholders (Table 2). There were 28% of junior lecturers strongly disagreed and disagreed that there was open communication between lecturers and managers, and 36% disagreed concerning trust relationships between lecturers and institutional managers. Lastly, 38% junior lecturers strongly disagreed and disagreed on the spirit of teamwork amongst institutional stakeholders. Table 2 tabulates the statistical data on the attitudes of junior lecturers towards organizational culture and work practices.

Table 2. Attitudes of junior lectures towards organizational culture and work practices

Organizational culture and work practices	SD	D	N	A	SA	% (A+SA)	Total number of respondents
Lecturers and managers' productive relationships	5	8	12	12	10	47	47
Lecturers' trust in institutional managers	5	12	10	15	5	43	47
Teamwork spirit amongst institutional stakeholders	5	13	13	11	5	34	47
Lecturers' sense of ownership during institutional change	0	20	10	17	0	36	47
Open communication channels between lecturers and managers	4	9	10	19	5	51	47

SD=Strongly disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly agree

##### 4.3. Attitudes of senior lecturers towards organizational culture and work practices

A descriptive statistical analysis on the attitudes of senior lecturers towards organizational culture and climate, which influences their work practices and relationships, illustrates that productive relationships, followed by open communication channels, a spirit of teamwork and trust in institutional management, were important indicators of the attitudes of senior lecturers that were prevalent in their public TVET colleges in

the Gauteng province. Table 3 also shows that in order of prominence, senior lecturers strongly agreed and agreed that productive relationships (54%), open communication channels (51%), teamwork spirit (46%), trust in institutional managers (42%) and sense of ownership during institutional change (37%) guided the organizational culture and climate that influenced the attitudes of senior lecturers in their work practices and relationships. Table 3 outlines the attitudes of senior lecturers towards organizational culture and work practices at public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province.

Table 3. Attitudes of senior lectures towards organizational culture and work practices

Organizational culture and practices	SD	D	N	SA	A	% (A+SA)	Total number of respondents
Lecturers and managers productive relationships	7	13	11	10	26	54	67
Lecturers trust in institutional managers	8	19	12	9	19	42	67
A spirit of teamwork amongst institutional stakeholders	9	16	11	9	22	46	67
Lecturers' sense of ownership during institutional change	8	21	13	8	17	37	67
Open communication channels between lecturers and managers	8	19	6	11	23	51	67

SD=Strongly disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly agree

#### 4.4. Attitudes of junior lecturers towards institutional management processes and practices for performance improvement

The attitudes of junior lecturers towards institutional management processes and practices for performance improvement indicate that 47% strongly agreed and agreed that operational plans are aligned to the teaching and assessment activities of lecturers, whereas 23% of them strongly disagreed and agreed (Table 4). It is also important to note that 30% of junior lecturers were neutral, meaning that they were not sure about an alignment between operational plans and teaching and assessment activities. There were 45% of respondents indicated that management set a clear direction by strongly agreeing and agreeing, as opposed to 34% who strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. Around 40% junior lecturers' attitudes indicated that they were involved in strategic planning sessions, whereas 42% strongly disagreed and disagreed. Another 40% of junior lecturers strongly agreed and agreed that managers support lecturers to improve work processes, in contrast to 30% who strongly disagreed and disagreed. Furthermore, 30% of junior lecturers' attitudes were non-committal about whether they are supported by managers in their work processes. Attitudes of junior lecturers about institutional management are captured in Table 4.

Table 4. Junior lecturers' attitudes towards institutional management processes and practices

Institutional management processes and practices for performance improvement	SD	D	N	SA	A	% (A+SA)	Total number of respondents
Managers have set a clear direction for the institution	4	12	10	7	14	45	47
Managers involve lecturers in the strategic planning sessions	5	15	8	6	13	40	47
The operational plan is aligned to the teaching and assessment activities of lecturers	3	8	14	10	12	47	47
Managers support lecturers to improve work processes	3	11	14	8	11	40	47
Public TVET College has effective internal control and accountability mechanisms	4	12	13	7	11	38	47

SD=Strongly disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly agree

#### 4.5. Attitudes of senior lecturers towards institutional management processes and practices for performance improvement

The attitudes of senior lecturers towards institutional management processes and practices to improve performance at public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province indicate that 58% of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed that operational plans are aligned to the teaching and assessment activities of lecturers, in contrast to 31% of respondents who strongly disagreed and disagreed (Table 5). Only 10% of the respondents could not commit themselves on the alignment of operational plans to the teaching and assessment activities of lecturers. There were 54% of senior lecturers strongly agreed and agreed that managers have set a clear institutional direction, as opposed to 37% who strongly disagreed and agreed, while 9% of respondents chose to remain neutral, which means that they could not agree or disagree. Another 49% senior lecturers strongly agreed and agreed that managers support lecturers to improve their work processes, in comparison to 33% who strongly disagreed and disagreed, while 18% of the respondents were non-committal.



In terms of the attitudes of senior lecturers pertaining to public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province having effective internal control and accountability mechanisms, 43% of respondents strongly agreed and agreed, in contrast to 34% who strongly disagreed and disagreed. There were 23% of the senior lecturers chose to remain neutral as to whether public TVET colleges have effective internal control and accountability mechanisms. While, 39% of senior lecturers strongly agreed and agreed that managers involve lecturers in strategic planning sessions, contrary to 46% of senior lecturers who strongly disagreed and disagreed. Senior lecturers who did not commit on managers involving lecturers in strategic planning sessions were at 15%. The attitudes of senior lecturers towards institutional management practices are tabulated in Table 5.

Table 5. Senior lecturers' attitudes towards institutional management processes and practices

Institutional management processes and practices for performance improvement	SD	D	N	SA	A	% (A+SA)	Total number of respondents
Managers have set a clear direction for the institution	8	17	6	9	27	54	67
Managers involve lecturers in the strategic planning sessions	11	20	10	8	18	39	67
The operational plan is aligned to the teaching and assessment activities of lecturers	7	14	7	9	30	58	67
Managers support lecturers to improve work processes	10	12	12	9	24	49	67
Public TVET College has effective internal control and accountability mechanisms	9	14	15	7	22	43	67

SD=Strongly disagree; D=Disagree; N=Neutral; A=Agree; SA=Strongly agree

#### 4.6. Thematic analysis and discussion of the interviews with strategic and operational managers of Public TVET colleges in the Gauteng Province

Thematic analysis was employed to identify codes from interview transcripts through using an inductive process to generate final themes. Inductive coding allowed for the emergence of similarities and differences between separate groups of data that indicated areas of consensus in response to the research questions and areas of potential conflict [51]. The final process of thematic analysis entailed the corroboration of themes by clustering them together to interpret and confirm the research findings [60]. Thematic data analysis became an interactive process of texts, codes and themes which involved iteration resulting in the interpretation of data. The themes generated and discussed from qualitative interviews with operational and strategic managers at public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province to answer questions on organizational culture and institutional management practices for learner employability are: teamwork and continuous improvement; world-class people-centered institutions; institutional practice and a lack of institutional coherence; youth empowerment for industrial participation; professional development and international mentorship for best-practices; trust, integrity and operational performance reviews; departmental directives and compliance; and personal initiatives and knowledge on strategic leadership.

#### 4.7. Teamwork and continuous improvement

From the in-depth interviews with operational managers in response to questions on their understanding of organizational culture and its existence in their institutions, they reflected that the organizational culture in their institutions is characterized by teamwork and continuous improvement on work practices so that they can be effective. Some factors that influence organizational culture in their respective public technical vocational colleges are the learning organization and shared responsibility, caring organizations, recognition of excellent performance, rituals and ceremonies, and people's respect and community engagement. Teamwork is necessary to build and strengthen work collaboration by learning from each other and sharing best practices that can improve institutional management efficacy. Operational manager 1 succinctly summed up the importance of teamwork in this way:

*"Apart from the set rules that are given, one principle will be teamwork; without the principle of teamwork, for me there is no organization. In the second place, that is collaboration amongst all stakeholders, you know you go to business, they will tell you that if you want to grow your business, look into the business that are within the similar industry instead of competing with them, cooperate with them that is how you will grow."* (Operational manager 1)

The lack of proper consultation during merger processes between executive managers and employees' representatives eroded trust in institutional processes, resulting in different stakeholders working in silos. Poor working relationships impacted negatively on teaching and learning, which affected learners' performance outcomes that manifested in the form of learning interruptions due to strikes by lecturers and

learners. Thus, when studying organizational behavioral practices, it is critical to emphasize the importance of team-building for organizational effectiveness, which requires creating an environment of trust, support and commitment [8].

#### 4.8. World-class people-centered institutions

Operational managers explicated about world-class people-centered institutions being a guiding vision of their institutions in response to questions on institutional vision. A world-class people-centered institution means the ability of an institution to empower learners for work and self-employment, continuous improvement and learning for staff members. This further means the appointment of qualified and competent teaching and operational personnel who are efficient and effective in the work processes and practices [61]. A world-class people-centered institution is significant to improve the technical and artisan skills of learners so that they can be entrepreneurs, globally competitive in marketplace, and employable after their studies. Numerous factors identified by operational or campus managers that resonate with a world-class people-centered institution as a guiding vision are ethical practices, nurturing of learners, and the need to develop learners to become responsible citizens. One participant elaborated on the vision of world-class people-centered institution by saying that:

*“For me all that is envisage in terms of the vision and mission of our college is that we are portraying ourselves as a world class institution. What it means is that our focus is on client, we should be in a position to deliver quality to client, we work on ethical practices.”* (Operational manager 4)

It is also interesting to note that despite a majority of participants who identified their institutions as world-class people-centered institutions, they were also quick to mention that there is misalignment between the vision and institutional practices. The major concern is that institutional vision is not institutionalized or practiced but is only stated in official institutional documents.

#### 4.9. Institutional practice and the lack of institutional coherence

The theme generated from qualitative interviews with strategic managers of the public TVET colleges in the Gauteng Province in response to questions on their understanding of organizational culture and its existence in their institutions is: institutional practice and a lack of institutional coherence. Both strategic managers understood organizational culture to be about how they do things in an institution. From the perspectives of strategic managers, organizational culture implies work practices and processes that managers and all stakeholders pursue in their daily work performance. According to them, an institution does not write down these organizational practices formally, but they just develop organically over a certain number of years. While strategic managers were able to explicate their understanding of organizational culture, they insisted that their institutions do not have specific practices that they can identify as part of organizational culture. A major reason for the lack of organizational culture from these participants is that there has been serious management oversight during institutional merger processes which resulted in management failing to inculcate organizational practices that can reflect the organizational culture in their institutions. One strategic manager indicated that:

*“It is how we do things as an institution. What I can say is that we are battling with that. I think there was lack of oversight from management during the merger to establish an organizational culture because each college used to do things its own way and campuses from different colleges merged into one, and unfortunately the management then failed to come up with organizational culture and structure taking whatever used to happen at other colleges and bring it under one umbrella.”* (Strategic manager 1)

Interesting to note during the interview sessions was that the two strategic managers shifted the blame on their principals (executive heads) for the lack of organizational culture, even though they are part of the executive management team. Strategic managers indicated a serious lack of institutional coherence during merger process whereby different colleges that merged failed to unite to be one entity with its own new organizational culture. What can be analyzed from responses of the two strategic managers is that there is lack of shared responsibility because even though these participants are not college principals but deputy principal for academic affairs, and executive managers for corporate services, they were expected to demonstrate the strategic capabilities of providing guidance rather than expecting their principals to inculcate an organizational culture. There was a serious lack of agency amongst the two strategic managers who felt that their superiors rather than them or staff members should craft an organizational culture that will be

specific to their institutions. The top-down bureaucratic management approach inherent at public TVET colleges in South Africa stifled the abilities of some managers to be creative and innovative as they wait for instructions from their superiors.

#### 4.10. Youth empowerment for industrial participation

The theme of youth empowerment for industrial participation is generated from qualitative interviews with strategic managers to respond to questions on the vision of the institution and how it is shared with other stakeholders. Youth empowerment for industrial participation is an important vision for the public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province as they build the capacity of learners to become skilled, employable and access different technical employment opportunities within the South African economy. One factor that was identified as being critical for strengthening youth participation in industries is providing relevant technical skills that are aligned to the country's economic imperatives. Participants reflected on the socio-economic challenges in the country due to unemployment and poverty, especially amongst the youth. They perceive the vision of the public TVET colleges as being to address some of these socio-economic challenges, especially in the poor Black South African society, by reflecting that public TVET colleges should be responsive to the needs of the youth in the country. Participant emphasized the importance of youth empowerment for industrial participation in this way:

*“The vision of the TVET sector is to empower the youth mainly in the technical field and ensure that the transition from where they are in terms of an institution and going into industry is serious because when we as a country can focus on technical skills, we will achieve more than what is happening now.”* (Strategic manager 2)

UNESCO [62] elaborated on the important role of TVETs, which includes aspects of the general education process, occupational and vocational training systems that seek to teach scientific, technological knowledge and skills relating to the different economic and social sectors for human capabilities and development required in a modern society. Kraak, Paterson, and Boka [63] concurred on the alignment of South African TVETs and industries to generate lessons from the Netherlands, where technical training colleges merged senior secondary vocational education and training at mainstream schools so that learning can be monitored by knowledge centers to strengthen the quality of qualifications and respond to the country's training needs, thus making learners employable. Despite youth empowerment being elevated to be a critical priority for public TVET colleges in South Africa, the majority of youth are still not empowered with the technical skills to access workplace opportunities. The lack of technical curricular and critical and scarce skills needed by industries is still a major impediment.

#### 4.11. Professional development and international mentorship for best-practices

Operational managers indicated that their institutions create opportunities for them to be professionally developed through work-based training, international mentorship exposure to learn best practices through job-shadowing and personal resourcefulness. Aspects that cultivated professional development included integrated work-based learning in industrial sites, attendance of professional management courses, and financial management training. However, one of the managers reflected that some of these trainings are more theoretical than practical for their daily operational challenges. She explained her dissatisfaction with some professional development courses in this way:

*“There are quite several trainings that I have done and some of them do not make you feel empowered when you come back. Let's take the one of labor relations where you need to deal with issues of discipline.”* (Operational manager 2)

This view was contrary to that of Operational manager 3 who was satisfied with the international mentorship program that he was exposed to. This operational manager felt that he has benefitted immensely from the mentorship program that he was exposed to by stating that:

*“I went through quite a number of training workshops, I even spent six weeks in China at some stage, they have currently put me on campus manager professional development training which is run by Department of Higher Education and Training, to try and empower us as managers with the daily challenges that we are experiencing and also how to go about them.”* (Operational manager 3)

Noticeable from the different views of operational managers is that each public TVET college has its own approach to how to develop managers in an institution. There is a lack of uniformity around the professional development approach. The lack of clear appointment criteria in managerial positions poses

numerous challenges of inefficiency during the implementation of operational plans and monitoring. The challenge of professional management development in South Africa is also identified by the shortages of professional and highly trained black managers in post-democratic South Africa due to the legacy of Apartheid.

#### 4.12. Trust, integrity and operational performance reviews

The theme of integrity and operational performance reviews was generated from operational managers in response to questions on their management practices, internal monitoring, and reporting mechanisms in their institutions. Most of the managers indicated that they strive to instill trust, demonstrate integrity and provide exemplary leadership on their campuses. They also highlighted that they monitor campus performance by conducting performance reviews with their subordinates on a monthly and quarterly basis. Some of the factors alluded to which indicate trust and integrity as exemplary management practices are effective planning, operational and monitoring checklists, staff consultation and supervision. One manager indicated how he values integrity and instills trust in his subordinates in this manner:

*“Integrity for me is key in the sense that even if people do not see you, you still do the same thing. One must not do it because people see one. That is integrity. Also, an element of trust is key. The issue around planning to say when are you going to class? I know my routine, and I already know what it is I am going to be doing tomorrow and I have all of the notes scribbled down in my book. We need to verify whether what is given to us is credible before we can be able to put it on a system. How do we do that? We do not have to take all the scripts, we just do a sample, just take five or 10% to get a picture of what is happening”* (Operational manager 1).

According to the perceptions of operational managers, trust and integrity demand that they should lead by example whereby they are always the first people to come to the campus and last to leave so that other workers learn from them and can be willing to go the extra mile. Morgan and Zeffane [64] postulate on the importance of trust and integrity for organizational change processes and people management, which requires those in leadership and management positions to model such behavioral practices. Soule [65] further amplifies that trust should be used as a resource by managers to elevate employees' behavior in fostering competitive performance at various organizational levels.

#### 4.13. Departmental directives and compliance

Departmental directives and compliance were serious concerns for strategic managers when responding to planning processes and links with operational plans in their public TVET colleges. Strategic managers complained about the bureaucratic posture that Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) adopted when engaging with public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province by instructing them on how to implement operational plans rather than constructively engaging with institutions. Some of the main factors identified by strategic managers on how DHET imposes its will on public institutions are policy directives; the lack of constructive engagement; and centralization of the decision-making process. Strategic managers felt dis-empowered to adopt innovative approaches when implementing institutional operation plans as they are expected to follow prescripts or instructions from the national department. One strategic manager said:

*“Remember we have to implement what our political principals want to achieve, so it filters down to us. After those engagements senior management will organize strategic Lekgotlas that we all attend at different levels. What happens is that we have and implement strategic documents based on their own operations.”* (Strategic manager 2)

The perceptions of strategic managers on institutional planning and operational plans were also confirmed by operational or campus managers who shared their displeasure with policy prescripts, top-down approaches and irrelevant curricula that failed to take cognizance of new technological advancements and thereby produced unemployable graduates. Their views are that learners are rendered ill-prepared to face the world of work as they acquire skills which are outdated, resulting in higher youth unemployment in the country. Stravreska [66] cautions South African policy-makers to draw lessons from some emerging countries like Botswana and Mauritius on the African continent, and Singapore, South Korea and Thailand in South-east Asia, which aligned technical education and training to human development potential guided by national cultures and geographic realities.

#### 4.14. Personal initiatives and knowledge on strategic leadership

Strategic managers complained that they use their own personal initiatives and knowledge on strategic leadership when responding to questions on in-service training and its impact on their management performance. Participants were critical that their public TVET colleges do not empower them with the required skills for performance management to strategically guide their institutions, but they devise their own personal initiatives to acquire strategic and leadership knowledge. While this indicates an attitude of taking personal initiative toward self-empowerment by strategic managers, institutions should become a site of learning where people can be exposed to new and required skills to meet their performance responsibilities. Strategic managers felt that their institutions should do more to upskill them, which should be regarded as part of the investment in human capital development. The lack of in-service training for strategic managers negatively affected public TVET colleges' leadership in the sense that new development and innovative practices do not happen, which results in inefficiencies in performance. Participants also concur with this view by stating that:

*"I will say none so far. From my side I have been empowering myself. I did my MBL but did not complete it as I am left with the research part. Learning on strategy and leadership also assisted me in ensuring that I am able to do the job that I am doing currently."* (Strategic manager 1).

What can also be analyzed from this particular response of Strategic manager 1 is that personal initiative for professional development does not lead to urgency to complete the study because of a lack of accountability to the institution as they do not support his professional development initiative. This might also result in skills shortages at the strategic level because professional development becomes a personal choice rather than an institutional obligation. This also implies the lack of a culture of learning, and professional development in the long-run has a negative impact on improvement processes and initiatives because of new knowledge not being developed and available within the public TVET colleges. Korejan and Shahbazi [67] posited on the need for transformational leaders to possess an ability to intellectually stimulate an employee to work for organizational objectives over and above personal interests. The lack of in-service training handicapped the intellectual abilities of strategic managers to drive institutional improvement program within the public TVET colleges in the Gauteng province.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The findings revealed that institutional merger processes did not achieve the intended objectives and goals of improving governance, management efficacy, and learner' employability at public TVET colleges in South Africa. The prevailing organizational culture is characterized by mistrust, disgruntlement of staff and managers, and resulted in the lack of a sense of ownership from stakeholders at public TVET colleges. The findings also revealed that operational managers at different campuses of public TVET colleges view strategic planning processes as top-down in order to rubber-stamp decisions already been taken at the executive management level, without conducting needs analysis of campuses. The findings further revealed that strategic and operational managers do not work as a team but in silos, which impacts negatively on their abilities to build industrial partnerships to influence industries to partner with them and open employment opportunities for graduates.

This study recommends that public TVET colleges in Gauteng must design continuous development training program on strategic leadership and management approaches for executive management teams and operational managers. Such an approach to institutional management will inculcate an organizational culture of performance improvement and the building of strategic partnerships that can benefit learners and graduates to access employment opportunities. Furthermore, the executive management teams should constructively engage with stakeholders to synergize top-down and bottom-up approaches during strategic planning processes that accommodate the sharing of input and ownership of decision-making by stakeholders at respective public institutions.

An effective management structure ought to work toward the accomplishment of shared goals and the development of an organizational culture that places a premium on positive relationships in the workplace, prioritizes open lines of communication between management levels, and encourages employee engagement and participation in decision-making prior to arriving at conclusions. This kind of culture should be the result of an efficient management structure. It is necessary to have a management structure for the colleges in order to interact productively with the leadership on issues relating to strategic planning, budget, the execution of policies and procedures, human resources, and student affairs. Finally, executive managers at head-offices should streamline their management structures and devolve some authority to campus or operational managers to make decisions by putting in place internal institutional accountability mechanisms




to guide the decision-making process. Shared responsibility in decision-making processes will improve institutional performance efficiency and efficacy.

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