(RESEARCH ARTICLE)

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Organisational culture and construction employee safety

Zakari Mustapha *, Benjamin Boahene Akomah and Chris Kurbom Tieru

Department of Construction Technology and Management, School of Built and Natural Environment, Cape Coast Technical University, Cape Coast, Ghana.

Abstract

Organisational culture plays a critical role in the functioning and identity of an organisation. The study examined Schein's model based on artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions to determine the level of influence on construction employees' safety. Online questionnaire administration among medium-sized construction firms in the Central Region of Ghana was employed for the data collection. The designed questionnaire was used to gather the opinions of supervisors, foremen, and workers in the construction industry. Descriptive statistics and the Relative Importance Index (RII) were utilised to analyse the findings. The results reveal that work environment design and workplace cleanliness were the most influential artifacts impacting employee safety. Regarding espoused values, the organisation's strategies and employee safety played a significant role in ensuring a safe workplace. Additionally, variables related to self-awareness and freedom of expression had substantial importance in the realm of basic underlying assumptions. Understanding the relationship between organisational culture and employee safety is crucial for creating safe work environments and fostering a safety culture. Construction firms can enhance employee safety and achieve corporate goals by addressing artifacts, espoused values, and assumptions. The results of this study are beneficial to construction project managers, contractors, and construction management researchers, as they offer insights into creating safer work environments and improving employee well-being through organisational culture.

1. Introduction

Organisational culture is an essential element that distinguishes one organisation from another. It encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and assumptions adopted or developed by an organisation to guide decision-making, activities, and employee behaviour (Chartered Management Institute, 2015). An organisation's culture influences individual actions, leading to effective communication, collaboration, and improved organisational performance (Ehtesham et al., 2011; Manetje, 2009; Tharp, 2009). Organisational culture is essential because it gives an organisation a clear direction and a unique identity (Tanase, 2015). Both employees and management play a crucial role in ensuring safety on construction sites (Health and Safety Executive, 2022; Ivensky, 2016). Organisational culture offers various benefits, including providing a clear path for employee training, identifying organisational problems, planning directives, motivating employees, shaping behaviour patterns, and cultivating loyalty towards the organisation (Kumar, 2016; Tanase, 2015). Schein's model is widely recognised and adopted in organisational research (Aleixandre, 2019). The study examined Schein's model based on artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions to determine the level of influence on construction employees' safety.

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* Corresponding author: Zakari Mustapha

1.1. Organisational culture and types

Organisational culture comprises an organisation's philosophy, values, expectations, and experiences, collectively shaping its self-image, internal workings, and interactions with the external world (Kumar, 2016). Organisations adopt various types of organisational culture, shaping their identity and functioning. Acar and Acar (2014) proposed four main types of corporate culture such as hierarchy (control), market (competitiveness), clan (collaboration), and adhocracy (creativity) culture. Hierarchy culture focuses on creating a fixed organisational structure through processes, rules, and power levels (Hart, 2022). It ensures clarity of roles, efficiency, coordination, stability, and direction but may hinder collaboration and innovation (Gaille, 2018). The market culture emphasises competitiveness and external partnerships, aiming for profit maximization and rapid goal achievement (Heinz, 2022). It fosters ambition but may create an unpleasant work environment (Benstead, 2019). The clan culture promotes collaboration and group consensus, fostering trust, solidarity, and flexibility (Wigmore, 2014). It facilitates communication, idea development, and a healthy working environment but may lack focus and direction (Down, 2019). Adhocracy culture values creativity, adaptability, and individuality, encouraging problem-solving, adaptability to change, and thriving in diverse environments (Down, 2019). It offers flexibility but comes with risks and a competitive environment (Heinz, 2022).

Schein posits that organisational culture is developed through lessons from past experiences and its collective application in the daily activities of an organisation. Schein outlined three levels of culture as artifacts, espoused values, and basic underlying assumptions, which are interconnected, with assumptions shaping values and values shaping practices and behaviours (Tutor2u, 2021; Aleixandre, 2019). Schein defined artifacts as the visible or physical aspects of an organisation's culture, such as the physical work environment, language, dress code, and technology. Espoused values are the adopted or developed ways of operating, reflecting an organisation's values, mission, and vision. Basic assumptions are the unconscious, deeply ingrained beliefs and ideals that shape employee behaviours and interactions (Cuofano, 2021). Satyendra (2019) and Sarode and Shirsath (2014) believed that artifacts are the visible aspects of organisational culture, with variables such as work environment design, cleanliness, equipment availability, and workstation setup contributing to employee safety. Poor environmental layout and overcrowding can negatively affect employee safety (Bushiri, 2014). Workspace size, emergency measures, lighting, ventilation, and communication systems influence employee safety (Edem et al., 2017; Fithri et al., 2019). Management's contribution towards employee safety is crucial under the espoused values in reactive, static, active, and dynamic approaches that influence employee safety (G&A Partners, 2017). Managerial actions, including forced, protective, involved, and integral approaches, also shape employee safety culture (Valent Group, 2017). The integral approach, involving comprehensive safety training for employees and management, promotes a well-integrated safety culture (Valent Group, 2017). Worker expectations include compliance with safety policies, hazard assessment, and active participation, while management expectations involve risk assessment and information provision (Ivensky, 2016; Health and Safety Executive, 2022). Basic assumptions within an organisational culture include beliefs held by management and employees, such as responsibility for safety, a perceived trade-off between safety and productivity, and the myth of optimism bias, which influences safety outcomes (Martin, 2019; Furst, 2016). According to Matei (2021), the beliefs that accidents happen to bad people, safety is the sole responsibility of the safety department, and safety programs solve all safety issues are illogical.

1.2. Employee safety

Employee safety is an essential aspect of organisational culture and ensures employees' physical health and well-being (Martic, 2022). It is crucial as employees are the most valuable resources in an organisation (Kaviarasu et al., 2015). Achieving employee safety requires the collective effort of employees and management (Jonathan and Mbogo, 2016). Construction firm management plays a significant role in establishing and enforcing safety approaches aligned with the organisational culture (Jonathan and Mbogo, 2016). Different safety approaches can be adopted, classified as response approaches (reactive, static, active, and dynamic) and managerial action approaches (forced, protective, involved, and integral) (OSH Academy, 2022; Valent Group, 2017). Employees' expectations include compliance with safety policies, hazard assessment, and reporting accidents, while management expectations involve risk assessment and information provision (Ivensky, 2016; Health and Safety Executive, 2022).

2. Methodology

The research was conducted within the Central Region of Ghana. The population for the study consisted of medium-sized firms with 20-99 workers and staff (De Kok et al., 2013). The study targeted the total staff (supervisors, foremen, and workers) of all the construction firms in operation during the fieldwork. Primary data was collected through an online questionnaire, and secondary data was gathered from existing works relevant to the study. The designed questionnaire was used to obtain the opinions of the employees. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement based on a five-point Likert scale, where the indications were; 1: Strongly Disagree (SD), 2: Disagree (D), 3: Neutral (N), 4: Agree, (A) 5: Strongly Agree (SA). Respondents answered the questionnaire based on the technology and

method of work adopted in their respective organisations, principles, department values, ways of communication and self-awareness, and freedom of expression on how these variables impact employee safety. Five (5) firms were in operation during the pilot study in December 2022. Only three (3) firms were fully engaged during the fieldwork in March 2023. See Fig. 3.1.

Table 1 Population of the Study

Firm	Supervisors	Foremen	Workmen	Total staff
A	-	-	-	-
B	4	6	65	75
C	-	-	-	-
D	4	5	70	79
E	2	4	18	24
	17	13	148	178

The sample size for the study was determined using the Yamane (1967) formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + Ne \wedge 2}$$

$$n = \frac{178}{1 + (178 \, x \, 0.05) \wedge 2}$$

$$n = \frac{178}{1.445}$$

$$n = 123.18 \simeq 124$$

Where n = sample size

$e \wedge 2$ = limit of error

N = Population (178)

Therefore, the required sample size for the study was determined to be 124 small-scale contractors with a confidence level of 95% and a limit of error of 5%.

3. Results

This section discusses the results of the data obtained from the field work. It begins with the soci-demographic characteristics of respondents based on gender, age distribution, highest educational education, range of years of organisations, range of years in organisation, position in organisation, range of years organization has been in existence and owner of the organistaion This is followed by the impact of artefacts, espoused values and basic assumptions on construction employee safety.

Majority of the respondents were within the age range of 36-40years (28 – 22.58%) and were dominated by males (81 – 65.32%). Most of the respondents had master's degree and bachelor's degree (28.23%) respectively and have spent between 2-5 years and 26 – 30 years (21.77%) respectively. The respondents were mostly health and environmental officers (29 – 12.90) who have spent 31 years or more (28.13%) with their respective firms. The firms were owned by private organisations (60-48%).

Table 2 Socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents

Age Distribution	Frequency	Percent (%)
Less than 20 years	5	4.03
20 – 25 years	15	12.10
26 – 30 years	18	14.52
31 – 35 years	27	21.77
36 – 40 years	28	22.58
41 – 45 years	16	12.90
46 years and above	15	12.10
Gender Characteristics		
Male	81	65.32
Female	43	34.68
Highest Educational Qualification		
Senior School Certificate	5	4.03
Higher National Diploma	34	27.42
Bachelor's Degree	35	28.23
Master's Degree	35	28.23
Doctorate Degree	15	12.10
Range of years the organization		
2 – 5	27	21.77
6 – 10	15	12.10
11 – 15	7	5.65
16 – 20	14	11.29
21 – 25	15	15.32
26 – 30	27	21.77
31 and above	19	12.10
Position in th organization		
Senior Manager	13	10.48
Middle Manager	6	4.84
Supervisor	25	20.16
Site Worker	25	23.39
Safety, Health and Environmental Officer	29	12.90
Contractor	16	8.06
Any other (specified)	10	10.48
Range of years organization has been in existence		
5 – 9	25	20.16
10 – 14	18	14.52

15 – 20	23	18.55
21 – 30	23	18.55
31 years and above	35	28.23
Owner of the Organization		
Private Organization	60	48
Public Liability	39	32
Sole Proprietorship	25	20

Table 3 shows that respondents ranked "work environment design" as the most influential variable (RII=0.938), followed by "cleanliness of workplace" (RII=0.911). Variables such as "Rank and status" (RII=0.833) and "logos and banners" (RII=0.843) were ranked as less influential.

Table 3 Artifacts (A) – Technology, method of work

	Frequency					RII	Rank
	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)		
Work environment design	-	1	2	31	90	0.938	1st
Cleanliness of workplace	-	-	9	37	78	0.911	2nd
Availability of Personal Protective Equipment	-	2	3	48	71	0.903	3rd
Technology	-	2	1	53	68	0.901	4th
Building Design	-	-	3	57	64	0.898	4th
Quality of equipment	-	-	4	56	64	0.896	6th
Safety guarantee against external threats	-	2	3	52	67	0.896	6th
Safety of work equipment and materials	-	1	3	56	64	0.895	8th
Method of work	-	2	2	57	63	0.891	9th
Safety programs	-	1	4	57	62	0.890	10th
Lighting systems	-	-	7	55	62	0.888	10th
Good workplace communication system	-	2	3	58	61	0.887	12th
Workstation design	1	3	-	57	63	0.887	12th
Emergency safety measures	1	2	3	55	63	0.885	14h
Appropriate lighting systems	4	4	4	56	62	0.885	14th
Ventilation systems	1	-	6	57	60	0.882	16th
Workstation setup	1	1	4	59	59	0.880	17th
Frequency of vibrations	-	1	11	51	61	0.877	18th
Availability of essential equipment	-	1	2	70	51	0.875	19th
Design and orientation of office accessories and furniture	1	2	5	58	58	0.874	20th
Availability of cleaning facilities	2	2	6	52	62	0.874	20th
Noise generation controls	-	4	9	49	62	0.872	22th

Size of the workspace	-	2	7	59	56	0.872	22th
Cleanliness of the workspace	-	4	8	52	60	0.870	24nd
Air quality	-	2	7	60	55	0.870	24nd
Suitability of furniture	1	3	7	53	60	0.870	24nd
Temperature in the work environment	1	4	6	53	60	0.869	27th
Work environment layout	-	2	2	71	49	0.869	28th
Safety signs	2	2	11	48	61	0.864	29th
Temperature levels	-	2	10	59	53	0.862	30th
Dress codes	4	2	5	53	60	0.862	30th
Noise and ventilation levels	1	2	8	60	53	0.861	32th
Atmospheric conditions (temperature and humidity)	-	3	8	62	51	0.859	33st
Vibrations and radiations	-	5	11	51	57	0.858	34nd
Predominant workplace colours	3	3	7	54	57	0.856	35rd
Noise generation levels	1	2	10	60	51	0.854	36th
Colour of the workroom	-	5	8	61	50	0.851	37th
Gratitude	3	4	9	51	57	0.850	38th
Logos and banners	6	7	3	46	62	0.843	39th
Rank and status	5	5	6	56	52	0.833	40th

Relative Important Index (RII)

Table 4 shows that the "strategies of an organisation" have a great role to play, considering its RII of 0.920. "Employee safety" was ranked second with (RII=0.901), suggesting its significant influence on espoused values. According to the responses, "team contracts" was considered the least of all the variables, with a Relative Importance Index of 0.824. Right before this is the variable stating "principles of the organisation" also having an RII of 0.856.

Table 4 Espoused Values (EV) – Principles, department values, ways of communication

	Frequency					RII	Rank
	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)		
Strategies of the organisation	-	2	4	35	83	0.920	1st
Employee safety	-	1	2	54	67	0.901	2nd
Strategies and tactics of work	-	1	3	55	65	0.896	3rd
Department values	2	3	3	51	65	0.893	4th
Organisational value and behaviours	-	1	4	56	63	0.891	5th
Compliance and procedures of work	3	1	3	61	56	0.888	6th
Way of communication	2	1	3	59	59	0.887	7th
Workshop practices	1	1	3	60	59	0.885	8th
Beliefs and values instilled by the management	1	-	4	61	58	0.885	8th
Instructions issued by the authority	-	3	3	56	62	0.885	8th
Standard task	-	1	4	61	58	0.883	11th

						RII	Rank
Norms of the organisation	1	1	4	64	54	0.879	12th
Shared perceptions	-	3	8	51	62	0.877	13th
Goals of the organisation	-	1	2	70	51	0.875	14th
Vigorous training	1	3	5	58	57	0.874	15th
Decision making	-	4	6	54	60	0.874	15th
Management commitment style	-	1	5	52	61	0.874	15th
Vision and mission statements		2	6	61	55	0.872	18th
Types of information promoted through newspapers	-	1	8	60	54	0.872	18th
Philosophies assumptions	1	4	7	53	59	0.870	20th
Company or employee charters	1	-	12	56	55	0.869	21st
Products significance	-	2	6	63	53	0.869	21st
Discussion among peers	-	3	8	57	56	0.867	23rd
Relations with the external world	1	1	9	55	56	0.866	24th
Shared values	1	1	3	73	46	0.864	25th
Employee's investment	3	5	9	49	57	0.858	27th
Principles of the organisation	1	2	6	70	45	0.856	28th
Team contracts	1	6	12	54	49	0.824	29th
Organisational learning principles	-	5	8	56	55	0.859	26th

RII: Relative Important Index

Table 5 shows that the variable "thinking or planning of task without interference," was the most significant variable with a Relative Importance Index of 0.898. This was followed by "freedom of expression" and "appropriate ways of resolving conflicts and making decisions" all with a Relative Importance Index of 0.892. "Safety does not need to be incorporated into work strategies" (RII=0.532) was ranked the least variable.

Table 5 Basic Underlying Assumptions (BUA) – Self-awareness, freedom of expression

	Frequency					RII	Rank
	1 (SD)	2 (D)	3 (N)	4 (A)	5 (SA)		
Thinking or planning of task without interference	-	-	5	53	66	0.898	1st
Appropriate ways of resolving conflicts and making decisions	1	-	3	57	63	0.892	2nd
Freedom of expression	1		5	53	65	0.892	2nd
Taken for granted	2	2	4	48	68	0.887	4th
How to deal with confrontations at workplace	-	1	6	55	62	0.887	4th
How reality and truth are determined about job done	-	1	8	53	62	0.884	6th
Theories in use for various tasks	-	1	5	61	57	0.881	7th
Nature of activity that should be appropriate for a day's work	1	1	6	52	62	0.876	8th
How spaces should be allocated around people	1	1	7	54	60	0.876	8th
Everyone is highly motivated and competent	-	-	10	58	56	0.874	10th
How time sis to be defined and measured for assigned tasks	-	2	7	59	56	0.873	11th

Mismatch between an employee and the job assignment	2	1	4	60	56	0.869	12th
Deeply-embedded	2	4	10	41	66	0.868	13th
Deep reflection of on previous task carried out	1	-	8	63	52	0.866	14th
How truth is to be revealed and discovered during the raining season for task done	1	2	6	61	54	0.866	14th
Importance of time in a group work	-	1	8	64	51	0.866	16th
Accidents happen to lazy people	17	29	10	31	36	0.665	17th
Organisational goals should be treated separately	-	2	6	67	49	0.863	18th
The organisation's relationship with its environment	1	1	8	63	51	0.861	19th
Employees are sometimes careless	1	3	6	59	54	0.861	19th
Boundaries between intimacy and privacy during work	1	3	4	64	51	0.858	21st
Solution of safety issues is in the introduction of new technologies	1	1	6	69	47	0.858	21st
Feelings	3	4	7	48	60	0.855	23rd
Self-awareness	1	1	8	67	47	0.855	23rd
Whether human nature is fundamentally good or bad, and whether it can be perfected	1	1	7	65	48	0.848	25th
Perception	1	4	11	57	49	0.837	26th
Thoughts	3	5	7	60	49	0.837	26th
Incentive programs produce permanent changes of safety behaviours among employees	1	2	16	61	44	0.834	28th
What is the 'truth' in physical and social matter	3	3	8	62	46	0.827	29th
Unconscious	1	8	11	67	37	0.811	30th
Safety is a sole responsibility of the organisation's safety department	8	10	6	54	44	0.787	31st
Safety programs will solve all safety problems	5	5	23	64	27	0.766	32nd
Absolute safety at the workplace is achievable	3	25	28	42	25	0.702	33rd
Safety is just a single activity	12	32	28	28	23	0.632	34th
Safety does not need to be incorporated into work strategies	35	37	7	25	19	0.532	35th

Relative Important Index (RII)

4. Discussion

Most of the respondents were males and were within the age range of 36-40 years with either Master's or Bachelor's degree and were safety, health, and environmental officers who have been with private firms. "Work environment design" and "cleanliness of workplace" were ranked by respondents as the most influential artifacts variables, while "rank and status" and "logos and banners" were ranked among the least influential variable on construction employee safety. "Strategies of the organisation" and "employee safety" played a significant role under espoused values. While "team contracts" and "principles of the organisation" were ranked among the least influential variable under espoused values. Respondents ranked "thinking or planning of task without interference," "freedom of expression" and "appropriate ways of resolving conflicts and making decisions" were among the highest influential variables under basic underlying assumptions. While "safety does not need to be incorporated into work strategies" was considered the least influential variable under basic underlying assumptions.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

The study examined Schein's model based on artifacts, espoused values, and basic assumptions to determine the level of influence on construction employees' safety. The study shows that most employees were safety, health, and environmental officers. The "work environment design" and "cleanliness of workplace" were the most influential variables on construction employee safety. "Strategies of the organisation" and "employee safety" were key among the firms. It is recommended that firms focus on improving the design of their work environments to enhance employee safety. In addition, safety programmes should be integrated into the core strategies of the organisation. Reference should be given to all tasks to be executed, and promotion of culture should be introduced to open communication and freedom of expression to assist in conflict resolution within the firm.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest exists.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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