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Influence of Organisational DNA on Innovation Performance
and its application within WaterAid Ghana

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Contents

Introduction 2

Organizational DNA Code 2

Innovation Performance 4

Innovation Performance in WaterAid Ghana 5

Conclusion 6

References 7

Introduction

The biological term DNA, is the molecule that encodes the genetic instructions in living organisms. Thus, everything that a cell is and does comes from its DNA. The DNA informs and directs everything that happens to each cell in our bodies and through these cells directs what happens to the entire organism. Organizations behave like organisms. Every single organization has a DNA that determines its function, direction and everything it does within a constantly changing environment. Organizational DNA is defined as the underlying factors that together define an organization's "personality" and help explain its function and performance. Just as the biological DNA is constant, the organizational DNA must remain fairly constant even when times and circumstances are changing as the DNA is the organization's purpose, calling, core beliefs and values that bind it together.

Organizational DNA Code

Hamilton (2005) defined organizations in terms of four organizational dimensions-organizational structure, decision rights, motivators, and information. These dimensions, when combined in myriad ways, define what we call an organizational DNA code. These four dimensions or building blocks defines the DNA of a 'living' organization. They determine how an organization looks and behaves internally and externally. The following paragraphs will define the constructions with which many writers view these four dimensions:

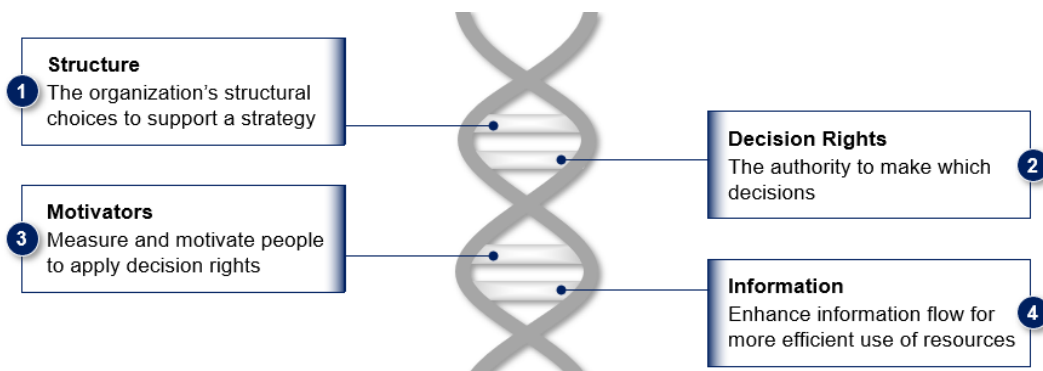


Fig. 1: The four building blocks of organizational DNA

- a) **Organizational Structure:** It is the sum of the ways in which the organization divides its labour into distinct tasks to ensure effective communication, coordination, and integration of efforts across departments (Hodge & Anthony, 1991:290; Daft, 2001: 86). Whatever the structure, multiple organization layers and narrow span of control often result in excess bureaucracy and bottlenecked decision-making. Executions must draw attention toward two remedies. Firstly, rooting out and eliminating or re-deploying shadow staff (people performing duplicated elsewhere in organization) is key to improving, organizational performance, and secondly, managing the career path and ensuring rotations in different geographies, functions, and roles (Bordia et al., 2005:7-8).
- b) **Decision rights:** It is the underlying mechanism of how decisions are truly made (Hamilton, 2005:2). This means making decisions authorities and responsibilities as black and white as possible, as well as appointing 'process owners', i.e. business unit or functional managers who lead the revitalization of business processes and who will be accountable for its success- and empower them (Bordia et al., 2005:6).
- c) **Motivators:** It shapes behaviour and influences work performance in organizations. Motivators include more than money; they also include non-financial aspects like goals, preference, and accomplishment (Ivancevich & Matteson, 2002:151). Balancing between positive (financial and non-financial) and negative (punishment) motivational considerations is one of the critical issues that managers must focus on (Thompson and Strickland, 2003:409). From the employee's point of view, motivation is a powerful tool for furthering the organization's strategic goals. Awards has a major impact on employee

attitudes. However, employee compensation is typically a significant organizational cost and thus requires close scrutiny (Noe et al,1994:545).

- d) Information: Decisions require information that is timely and accurate. Information play critical roles in organizations, i.e. organizational response to business pressures (Turban et al.,1999:13), and enhancing key business functions (Wheelen &Hunger, 2004:100). Information explains the metrics used to measuring performance, coordination of activities, knowledge transfer, expectations, etc. (Neilson et al., 2005:6).

Innovation Performance

The concept of innovation is viewed in several respects. Jones (1995:405) depicts it as the process by which an organization uses its resources to create new goods, process, or services. McElroy (2000:1-2) considers innovation as the process by which new knowledge is embraced into practice. It points to new things or ideas (Macmillan & Tampoe, 2000:248), or creating a commercial product from an invention (Hitt et al., 2001: 526). Thus, the health of an organization's innovation can be directly linked to its ability to create value and growth.

Innovation performance has been measured by many metrics. Hitt et al (2001) used time to market, product quality, and creation of customer value. Robbins (2003) considered flexibility, continual improvement in quality, and speed. Wheelen & Hunger (2004) illustrated three areas: new product, product quality, and faster distribution. Of all the many organizational characteristics that are needed to create and sustain successful innovation, three are among the most important - speed, transparency, and accountability.

- a) Speed: This means innovating faster than other competitors. Speed in decision-making enable organizations to mobilize against new opportunities to capture

first-to-market advantages as well as to respond quickly to changes in customer environment or to the actions of competitors.

- b) **Transparency:** It allows direction and actions to be made visible throughout the organization. It ensures that development priorities and efforts are aligned with strategic priorities. Thus, lack of transparency can have very detrimental effects on innovation performance.
- c) **Accountability:** It is the mechanism that ensures cross-functional commitments are taken seriously, and it establishes personal ownership for performance and outcomes. It is said that accountability is the sole glue that hold organizations together and ties commitment to results.

Innovation Performance in WaterAid Ghana

WaterAid is an International non-governmental organization (INGO). Its vision is of a world where everyone has access to safe water and sanitation. Its core values are accountability, courage, collaboration, respect, innovation and integrity. In Ghana, the WaterAid country programme (since 1985) has contributed to transforming lives of the poorest and most marginalized people by improving access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH). Funds for programmes and projects are sought from international funding agencies, in-country funding organizations (restricted funding) as well as unrestricted funding support from its headquarters in the United Kingdom.

WaterAid Ghana (WAG) had effectively utilized its strong presence via its influencing, advocacy and WASH service delivery mechanisms at the national and sub-national levels to create new services and approaches by integrating WASH in health, education and in communities. This innovation has attracted funding to ongoing projects like WASH for Public Health (WASH4PH), WASH in Schools

(SWASH), and Community WASH (CoWASH) with the Sector Strengthening Project cutting across all projects. The key shift from providing boreholes and latrines in deprived communities to WASH integration continue to make WaterAid Ghana more and more attractive to funding agencies with interest in addressing WASH poverty and systems strengthening.

The application of the concepts of speed, transparency and accountability had played a central role in the organization's innovation performance and transformation over the last two years. WAG's funding sources had virtually dried out at year-end 2020, leaning on only one. However, the speed at which proposals were finalized for new funding opportunities (even in the face of COVID), the transparency in procurement and project execution/service delivery, robust accountability mechanisms (internal and external) coupled with heightened WASH advocacy are testimonies of WAG's current success story. The organisation now boasts of six strong funding sources with three others currently at their finalizations stages.

Conclusion

The current success story of WaterAid Ghana supports literature in the sense that, the total organizational DNA variables of structure, decision rights, motivators, and information contribute to over 80% in increasing the level of innovative performance in international organizations. WaterAid global has out-dooed its new strategy focussing on four aims: universal and sustainable WASH, WASH to improve public health, climate change resilience, and financing, with systems strengthening as the main approach.

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