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THE IMPACT OF ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE ON PUBLIC SECTOR PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ZIMBABWE

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ABSTRACT

Local authorities play an important role in the national development of any country as they are the vehicle for basic municipal service delivery. They are the interface of government and its citizenry at the local level meaning that local authorities represent government in action. As such, the same are expected to proffer sustainable services in the right amount and at the right time. Local authorities therefore provide the backbone for a country's socio-economic development. However, the recent history of the local authority sector suggests that councils have fallen way behind in terms of delivering on their mandate due a number of factors. The Ministry responsible for Local Government in Zimbabwe notes that the peak year where councils were optimally functional was 1996 and this is the level that has been benchmarked. In the main, it may be noted, that councils in Zimbabwe rank among the most liquid organisations; their revenues are guaranteed in the Constitution and in some way in the relevant Acts of Parliament. As such, it is within the rights of the public to expect local authorities to offer more than they have done since the turn of the millennium. It may be argued that the set-up of local authorities in Zimbabwe is not aligned to the objective of delivering optimal services to communities with the same not responding to the demands of the people as well the operating environment. To significantly alter this negative spiral of performance, it is imperative that local authorities deal decisively with issues surrounding organisational culture in order to focus members (councillors and employees), policies and processes towards the achievement of both local and national goals and priorities. This study reviews the literature already proffered on the subject matter in conjunction with primary research to add to the body of knowledge in this area of study.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing literature in the field of organizational culture and service delivery in the public sector. Research has been carried out on the private sector's organizational culture in developed countries. There is limited literature on organizational culture in the public sector in the developing world. The study used qualitative research methods that present a practical way of establishing the organisational culture's norms, values and belief systems that can't be measured quantitatively.

1. INTRODUCTION

Sound organisational performance is an aggregate result of mutually co-existing factors. Daft (2000) describes organisational performance as the entity's capability to accomplish goals effectively and efficiently using resources. It is therefore common knowledge that for an organisation to be successful, it has to find the right mix and balance between and amongst some of the following key variables: capital and financing, core competencies, leadership and leadership style, plant and equipment, information communication technology, markets and marketing initiatives and the right products for the right markets. Important to note is that the factors as mentioned above consist of tangible and non- tangible factors wherein some can be assigned costs while for some their values are implied. Culture falls into the non-tangible category as its value cannot be readily determined in monetary terms as other investments can be such as in recapitalisation of plant and equipment. When Lundy and Cowling (1996) say that culture simply represents "the way we do things around here", they may as well be emphasising the point that culture in any organisation is priceless and cannot be attached to any monetary value terms.

Many researchers have attempted to examine the relationship between organisational culture and performance. The fascination with the area stems from the underlying need to fully account for the performance of an entity. Within an organization, culture is the one artefact that influences and affects every single member of the workforce, no matter their position, experience or seniority. However, its impact on the net performance of an organisation cannot be understated vis a vis other critical organisational success factors. Dennison (1990) affirms this view when he alludes to a number of academics and management practitioners who have agreed that positive organisational performance can be attributed to how culture in an organisation is shared and inculcated among organisational members.

Organisational culture as a concept to enhance operational efficiency has not been afforded any significant importance in Zimbabwe public institutions. It may not be a far-fetched assertion that the local authorities lack a critical identity that can be attached to them outside the provisions that give rise to their operations captured in the relevant pieces of legislation (Urban Councils Act Cap 29:15 and the Rural District Councils Act Cap 29:13). At its core, it is important to note that organizational culture is critical in sustaining an entity due to its ability to impact on overall financial performance and productivity. Dennison (1990) states rather authoritatively that organisational culture is manifested in the typical characteristics of the organization. Critically, he contends that organisational culture should be regarded as the right way in which things are done or problems should be understood in the organization.

In spite of having access to requisite resources such as finance, human capital, equipment, external technical and financial support and legislative back-up, local authorities continue to disappoint stakeholders with the level of service delivery they are providing. However, the need for a paradigm shift in service delivery is pertinent as is asserted by Parker and Bradley (2000) when they contend management focus in the public sector has remained focused on bureaucratic hierarchical culture that does not allow the entity to achieve optimal performance. The UNDP sponsored Capacity Building Programme for Local Government and Service Delivery document (2012-2015) states that: this challenge (of service delivery) is most poignant in the recent cases of diminished provisions of water, sewage reticulation and sanitation that resulted in outbreaks of cholera and typhoid in 2008/9. This experience generally typifies the malaise faced by a significant number of cities in the country.

The main aim of the study is to assess the impact of organisational culture on organisational performance.

Other objectives of the research are to:

1. explore organisational culture in local authorities,
2. establish whether the current poor service delivery standard by local authorities can be attributed to the culture prevalent in the same, and
3. establish whether improving culture can improve internal cohesion thereby enhancing service delivery by local authorities.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Terms

2.1.1. Organisational Culture

Brown (1998) brings in a comprehensive definition of culture wherein he says as that,: "Organisational culture refers to the patterns of beliefs, values and learned ways of coping with experience that have developed during the course of an organisation's history, and which tend to be manifested in its material arrangements and in the behaviors of its members".

2.2. Government

Government consists of a governing body with a defined territorial authority. Governments include all departments, ministries or branches of the Government that are integral parts of the structure and are accountable to and report directly to the central authority – the Legislature, Council and Cabinet or executive head.

2.3. Local Authority

A local authority is defined in terms of the Rural District Councils Act [29: 13] and the Urban Councils Act [29:15] as a municipal council, town council, local board, or rural district council that oversees the administration of a defined geographical area (Government of Zimbabwe, 2013).

2.4. Public Sector

UNDP (2009) defines the public sector as the part of an economy that consists of state-owned institutions, including nationalized industries and services provided by local authorities. The Institute of Internal Auditors says the public sector consists of Governments and all publicly controlled or publicly funded agencies, enterprises and other entities that deliver public programs, goods, or services.

2.5. Public Enterprises/ Institutions

Brown (1998) says public institutions are agencies that deliver public programs, goods, or services, but operate independently of government and often have their sources of revenue in addition to direct public funding. The Institute also says that the same may also compete in private markets and may also make profits.

2.6. The Concept of Organisational Culture

Schein (2004) brings up an interesting take on the concept of culture when he implies that, the most intriguing aspect of culture as a concept is that it points to a phenomenon that may not be visible to the naked eye: that is so powerful in its impact. In that sense he says, culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual. We can observe resultant behaviour but more often than not none can see the underlying forces behind certain kinds of behaviour. Schein (1985) contends that culture consists of three basic dimensions: assumptions, values and artefacts. Drennan (1992) brings a simplistic view on culture wherein he says, it is "how things are done around here". This view is strongly supported by Zammuto and Krakower (1991) who believe that the value dimension of culture is reflected in the cultural artefacts found in an entity. Many scholars are of the view that there is an invariable link between culture and change at an organisational level. Martin and Frost (1996) offer an important assertion to the subject of culture wherein they bring in the integration and differentiation perspective to culture and change. The former occurs where a set of values replace previously held organisation-wide values while the later rejects the concept of "an organisation wide consensus" instead rooting for the importance of sub cultures. Nelson and Quick (2011) further identify four functions of organisational culture: giving members a sense of identity, increasing their commitment, reinforcing organisational values, and serving as a control mechanism for shaping behaviour.

The fourth function, referred to above, means that organisations can use culture as a means to subject members to the desired ideals and it becomes clearer for members to know exactly what is expected of them in the course of carrying out their duties.

Organisational culture also has different characteristics. Some of these were identified as:; artefacts, language, behaviour patterns, norms of behaviour, beliefs, organisational history etc. Robbins (2005) continues with this line of thought where he asserts that the characteristics of a culture determine the behaviour of employees. Schein (2004) also considered culture to be an outcome of a number of variables. However, while acknowledging that these characteristics do not attempt to establish a linkage between one variable and the next, Senior and Fleming (2006) agree that the same are critical in getting an understanding of an organisation's culture. Watson (2006) emphasises that the concept of culture originally derived from a metaphor of the organisation as 'something cultivated'. Over time, a number of authorities in the study of organisations have suggested that the concept of culture is the climate and practices that organisations develop and manifest around their handling of people, or the promoted values and statement of beliefs of an organisation (Schein, 2004). He further highlights that 'the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture; that the unique talent of leaders is their ability to understand and work with culture; and that it is an ultimate act of leadership to destroy culture when it is viewed as dysfunctional'.

Culture therefore affords organisations to foster a sense of identity and determines, through such variables as the organisation's legends, rituals, beliefs, meanings, values, norms and language, the way in which 'things are done around here'. An organisations' culture reflects what it has been good at and what has worked in the past. Often, these practices can be accepted without question by long-serving members of the entity. It is generally agreed that one of the first things a new employee learns is some of the organisation's legends. Legends can stay with an organisation and become part of the established way of doing things. They usually instil a sense of the expected into new staff. Over time the organisation will develop 'norms' i.e. established (normal) expected behaviour patterns within the organisation. Schein (2004) suggests that the most intriguing aspect of culture as a concept is that it directs people to matters and issues that are below the surface, that are powerful in their impact but mostly invisible and to a considerable degree unconscious. Schein (2004) makes use of an analogy where he says that culture is to a group what personality or character is to an individual. Schein (1990) adds that there are visible and invisible levels of corporate culture (the 'culture iceberg' analogy in Figure 1 below – the visible levels (surface manifestations) of the 'culture iceberg' incorporate observable symbols, ceremonies, stories, slogans, behaviours, dress and physical settings).
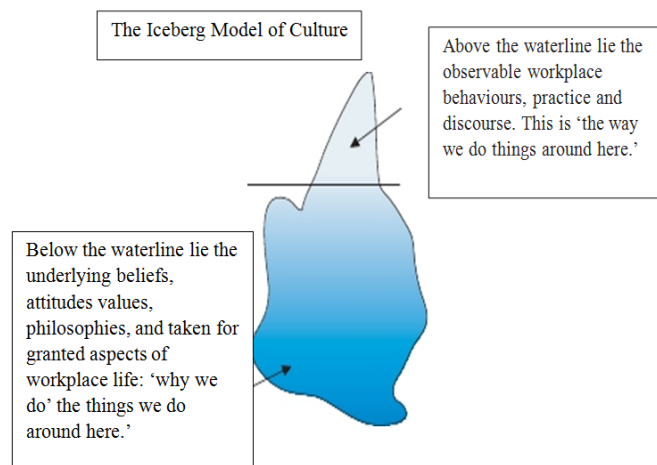

The Iceberg Model of Culture

Above the waterline lie the observable workplace behaviours, practice and discourse. This is 'the way we do things around here.'

Below the waterline lie the underlying beliefs, attitudes values, philosophies, and taken for granted aspects of workplace life: 'why we do' the things we do around here.'

Figure-1. Adopted from Schein (2004).
Source: Schein (2004).

2.7. Underlying Themes of Culture

Brown and Cliffe (2001) identified four themes of organizational culture which are explained further below.

The first theme is that culture is a learned entity where it is used as the basis of inducting new employees into the system of any organisation. This theme supports the view by Lundy and Cowling (1996) where culture is "the way we do things around here". Sun (2008) believes that by studying definitions of culture, management should be able to comprehend the general trend apparent in their organisations such as behaviours, attitudes and the way of thinking.

The second theme is that culture is viewed as a belief system where it provides the context for the belief system in the day to day life of the organisation. Brown and Cliffe (2001) proffer that guiding beliefs give direction to daily beliefs where the former rarely change since they are in the realm of the 'universal truth' while the later are part of the company culture manifesting daily. However, Sun (2008) believes that daily beliefs are dynamic and very situational as they respond to the context obtaining at that particular time.

The third theme is that culture is viewed as strategy as per Sun (2008). It relates to the point that any cultural changes should be taken to also mean strategic changes. He also states that in fairness all culture programmes take place within formal and informal strategic planning processes.

The fourth theme is that culture is seen as mental programming. Sun (2008) extensively quotes Hofstede (1980) as saying culture is the "collective programming of the mind, which distinguishes the members of one category of people from another".

2.8. Models of Organisational Culture

a) Schein's Model of Organisational Culture

One of the most popular models of organisational culture was developed by Schein (1985); Schein (1992) Figure 2. The framework he proposed has been widely used to analyse organisational culture. Schein believes that culture needs to be looked at on three basic levels:

- artefacts – these are materialised expressions of the values and assumptions,
- espoused values, and,
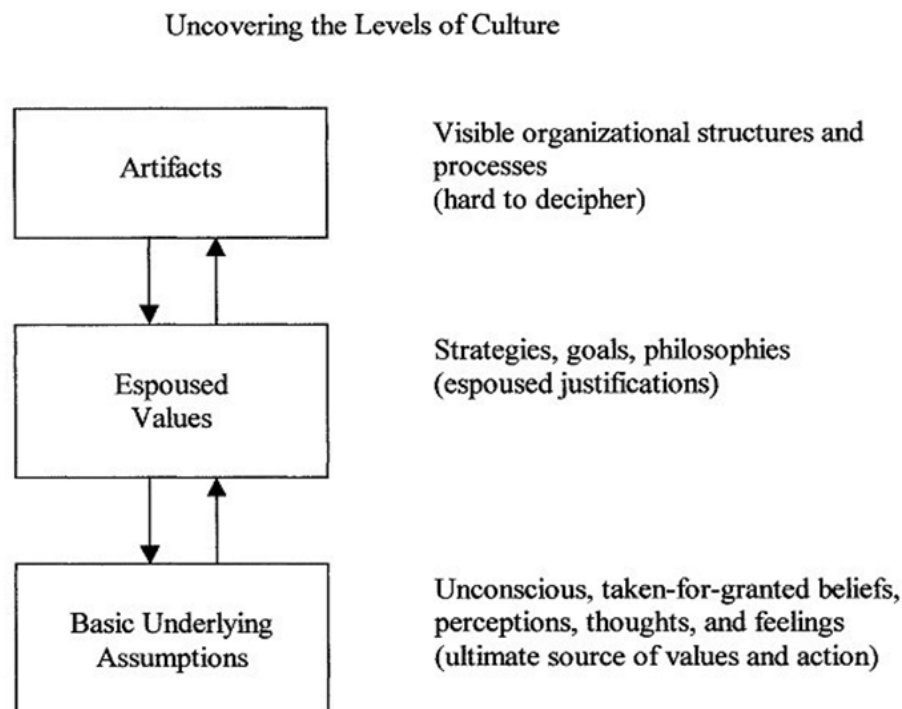- basic assumptions – shared by group members.

Figure-2. Schein's model of organisational culture.
Adapted from Schein (1999).

Assumptions represent the taken-for-granted beliefs about reality and human nature. Values are the social principles, philosophies, goals and standards that have intrinsic value. The artefacts represent the visible often tangible results of those things hinged in the values and assumptions. He also includes as artefacts the organizational processes by which such behaviour is made routine, and structural elements such as charters, formal descriptions of how the organization works, and organization charts. Schein (1985) further argues that, it is the basic assumptions that hold the key to understanding culture. A comprehensive summation of the three levels will lead to an analysis where one can deduce an organisation's culture. Schein (1985) proposes that the structure of organizational culture could best be thought of as consisting of different layers.

Schein (1999) characterizes organizational culture as consisting of three levels. The first lever, the behaviour and artifacts level represents the most visible level, which is characterized by our behaviour and artifacts around us. This observable level of culture consists of behaviour patterns and outward manifestations of culture. These cultural characteristics can be observed in the physical layout of work environments and dress.

The second level is where the espoused values of an organization to a large extent determine behaviour (Schein, 1999). Schein (2004) says that, all group learning ultimately reflects someone's original beliefs and values, their sense of what ought to be, as distinct from what is. He says that when a group is first created or when it faces a new task, issue, or problem, the first solution proposed to deal with it reflects some individual's own assumptions about what is right or wrong, what will work or not work. These values are not observable as our physical behaviours and artefacts. These values are the difference between stated values and operating values. For example, "this company values quality" or "we value our customers". The operating value on the other hand is the actual manifestation of value that is truly in force. It may be intimated strongly that most people in the organization will attribute their behaviour to the stated value.

The third level of getting an understanding of culture according to Schein (1999) involves the deepest level of assumptions and beliefs. The essence of culture is in the learned values, beliefs, and assumptions that become shared. Literature is awash with concern that usually over the course of time these are taken for granted as the organization continues to be successful. These components are relegated in importance as long as the members of the organization agree that these values, beliefs and assumptions of their founders and leaders led the organization to continued success and are therefore correct.

2.9. Denison's Model

Another captivating model of organisational culture was proposed by Denison (2000). The model is based on Schein (1985). At the cornerstone of the model are the beliefs and assumptions that are a reflection of the deepest levels of organisational culture. Denison (2000) states that 'the assumptions provide the foundation from which: (1) more surface level cultural components such as values and observable artefacts – symbols, heroes, rituals etc - are derived, and (2) behaviour actions spring" and his model is based on four distinct cultural traits which he believed had a strong influence on organisational culture:

- involvement where the emphasis lay on the importance of empowering members and building around teams andenerally the level of commitment to the cause is ostensibly high as a result;
- consistency, where the effectiveness of organisations is dependent on strong cultures that are highly consistent, well-coordinated and well integrated and Denison believed that consistency was a powerful source of stability in firms;
- adaptability where as Denison contended that adaptable organisations are driven by customers, are not risk averse and learn from mistakes and that they are learning organisations and this stood a better chance of survival in the harsh operating environment; and,
- Mission or that having a well-defined purpose in life is critical for any organisation as it set a future direction for the setting of organisational goals and strategic objectives that would be a recipe for success.

2.10. Types of Organisational Culture

Because organisations are different, it follows that even their organisational cultures differ in manifestation, form, level and extent. It can also follow that in any organisation; there could be sub-cultures that feed into the main organisation-wide culture. Bradley and Parker (2006) proposed a classification under the Competing Values Framework. The CVF is a tool that looks at the internal and external environments of an organisation juxtaposed with its competing demands on one hand and between its control and flexibility on the other. These conflicting demands constitute the two axes of the competing values model.

Organisations with an internal focus emphasise integration, information management and communication, whereas organisations with an external focus emphasise growth, resource acquisition and interaction with the external environment. On the second dimension of conflicting demands, organisations with a focus on control emphasise stability and cohesion while organisations with a focus on flexibility emphasise adaptability and spontaneity.

Combined, these two dimensions of competing values map out four major 'types' of organisational culture revealed in theoretical analyses of organisations (Zammuto et al., 1999). These four are listed below:

a) The internal process model involves a control/internal focus in which information management and communication are utilised in order to achieve stability and control. This model has also been referred to as 'hierarchical culture' because it involves the enforcement of rules, conformity, and attention to technical matters (Dennison and Spreitzer, 1991). The internal process model is reflective of bureaucratic organisations particularly in resembling the system of administration and management existent in public institutions the world over where there is reliance on formal rules and procedures to exercise control over organisational activities and members, Bradley and Parker (2000)

b) The open systems model involves a flexibility/external focus in which readiness and adaptability are the lifeblood of the organisation in its bid to realise growth, resource acquisition and external support. The model has also been referred to as a 'developmental culture' because it is associated with creative leaders with a vision that is cognisant of the dictates of the external environment (Dennison and Spreitzer, 1991). Organisations in this kind of situation display dynamism and entrepreneurial tendencies and their leaders are risk-takers, while rewards are linked to individual initiative, Bradley and Parker (2000).

c) The human relations model involves a flexibility/internal focus in which training and the broader development of human resources are utilised to achieve cohesion and employee morale. This model of organisational culture has also been referred to as 'group culture'. It is associated with trust and participation through teamwork. Members of the organisation are incorporated intrinsically into the affairs of the organisation. Managers in organisations of this type seek to encourage and mentor employees on the expectations and duties to the overall good of the enterprise, Bradley and Parker (2000).

d) The rational goal model involves a control/external focus in which planning and goal setting are utilised to achieve productivity and efficiency. This model of organisational culture is referred to as a rational culture because of its emphasis on outcomes and goal fulfilment, Dennison (1990). Organisations of this type are production oriented, and managers organise employees in the pursuit of designated goals and objectives, and rewards are linked to outcomes, Bradley and Parker (2000).

As a result of these competing demands constitute the two axes of the competing values model as depicted in Figure 3 below.

Figure-3. Competing Values Model.

Bradley and Parker (2006) further claim that "organisations with an internal focus emphasise integration, information management and communication, whereas organisations with an external focus emphasise growth, resource acquisition and interaction with the external environment." On the second dimension of conflicting demands, organisations with a focus on control emphasise stability and cohesion while organisations with a focus on flexibility emphasise adaptability and spontaneity.

2.11. Organisational Culture and Public Institutions

Bradley and Parker (2006) contend that for a long time public organisations have revealed a common set of characteristics. These include systems of rationale rules, structural hierarchies, and formalised decision making processes among other characteristics. This rings true for the Zimbabwe's parastatals and other quasi Government institutions. Furthermore, they argue that public institutions are known to be subject to political rather than market controls. Dahl and Lindblom in Bradley and Parker (2006) support this view by stressing that these institutions are constrained by political authority and political activities.

Could this view explain the nature of the performance of public organisations particularly in the Zimbabwe context where performance is usually linked to political authority? Bradley and Parker (2006) are of the view that public institutions have "traditionally under-emphasised developmental and rational aspects of organisational culture because there is little focus on adaptability and risk taking". These have tended to negatively affect progress towards outcomes such as productivity and efficiency. Literature suggests that traditional organisational cultures in the public sector are likely to impede public service modernisation unless they themselves are changed to become aligned with the modern role of Government as an engine of economic growth.

Christensen and Lægreid (2001) reveal that one of the common characteristics of organisational culture in public institutions concerns the informal norms and values that determine the balance between loyalty and neutrality in the relationship between the political leadership and the administrative apparatus. An underlying norm here is that non-elected public administration staff must at all times be loyal to the political leadership in power but simultaneously maintain a neutral attitude. They also noted that too much loyalty creates difficulties when the political leadership changes. Individuals in a public organization will have a certain amount of freedom to choose between different identities and rules. Although this will presumably weaken their chances of influencing common cultural norms, they themselves will still be influenced by such norms.

More importantly, Christensen and Lægreid (2001) add that administrative culture must strike a balance between loyalty and professional norms, meaning that a civil servant must be politically loyal to the political

leadership but simultaneously make decisions based on a solid professional foundation. At the same time, too much emphasis on one's own professional field may lead to an undesired management by professionals. Also noted is that public managers must strike a workable balance between premises of professional value and premises of fact, meaning that they must take into account professional values that would have evolved over time. Other common features of organizational culture, they contend, in public organizations may be procedural conditions, such as due process, predictability, equal treatment, transparency and information.

2.12. Managing Performance

Jones *et al.* (2005) are in agreement when they contend that with today's ever-changing workplace and the impact of the globalised economy, the development of organisational performance is associated with the development personal performance, skills, knowledge and experience. Cascio (2006) states that performance refers to the degree of achievement of the goals of the organisation while Schein (2005) similarly implies that achieving organisational goals is the same as organisational performance. Performance management is an approach aimed at delivering sustained success to organisations by improving the performance of the people who work in them and by developing the capabilities of teams and individual contributors, Armstrong and Baron (1998). This view is strongly supported by Reynolds and Ablett (1998) who indicate that it is not the capital per se that gives organisations the edge in the markets they compete but the people (human capital) working in them. Given the above assertion, it is therefore imperative that the focus on transforming organisational effectiveness and efficiency in any sector for that matter is directed to the people who drive organisational activities. Competitive capacity of organisations can be increased by building strong people and effectively managing and developing them.

Power (2000) contend that the increased attention to performance assessment in the public sector coincided with the rise of administrative reform. While Hood (1999) says that in the 1980s, economic decline and increased international competition triggered such reform in many countries. The rise of the *New Public Management* could also be credited to this period. The objective of the paradigm shift was twofold: to cut budgets and to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of government bureaucracy.

To achieve the latter objective, market-type mechanisms such as privatization, competitive tendering, and vouchers were introduced in the public sector, and departmental units were bundled into quasi-government institutions. What emerged during this period was that politicians should stick to their core business, which is, developing new policies to realize (political) goals. Osborne and Gaebler (1992) had a catchphrase that summarised this notion where they said "steering not rowing." The duo emphasised that policy implementation should be left to the market or, and if that was not possible, to semi-autonomous organizations operating in a quasi-market environment.

This separation of policy and administration is facilitated through contracts being drawn up between the government and the organization that implements the policy. The contracts articulate which task has to be carried out and what the executive agent will receive as a "reward." The agent's performance is expressed in terms of performance indicators, such as the number of goods or services rendered. Input management is thus replaced by a results-based orientation. This is the type of change in the management of public organisations that is being instituted in Zimbabwe as part of public sector performance reform. All local authorities are now required to convert their management to the results based management principle. The adoption of several private sector techniques to measure and improve performance, such as performance indicators, is central to this objective. Using indicators enables politicians to measure and evaluate the performance of public and private policy-implementing

This section explored literature surrounding the study in terms of organisational culture and its underpinnings on organisational performance. There has been an attempt to magnify the role of organisational culture in organisational life and to deduce whether solutions for the public sector could be drawn out from the available data. Based on the available literature, yes there has been research highlighting the essence of organisational culture.

However, there was not enough information to ascertain whether there is a cultural impact on local authority performance.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

According to Zikmund (2003) research design is a blueprint that allows for total control over all other variables that may affect the validity of the research findings. Zikmund (2003) supports this view when he says that a research design serves as a master plan that clearly specifies the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing the required information. This study is an attempt to determine the impact of organisational culture on local authority performance in Zimbabwe. It is important to note that research must adopt either a qualitative or quantitative approach. Qualitative research therefore is deductive while quantitative is inductive.

It is critical to note is that there are three common types of research design which are explained below.

Exploratory research embodies one or more objectives in its quest for knowledge: mainly to develop insights that will assist in defining the situation confronting the researcher. Similarly, this type of research is undertaken when very little is known about the subject area with very little research haven taken place prior. The rationale is to unravel ideas or issues that can be used as the basis of future research in a particular area. It is critical to note is that this research is not about defining the problem of non-performance by local authorities and indeed the public sector as this is already widely known in Zimbabwe. This therefore rules out this type of research design for the purposes of this study.

The second type of research design is causal research. Zikmund (2003) states that causal research is used to collect data that allows decision makers to determine the cause and effect relationship between two or more variables. Principally, causal research design explores the effect that one thing has on another. This type of research is appropriate where there is an absolute need to understand the relationship between two variables. Critical to the research is the testing of hypotheses about cause and effect. Bearing this issue in mind, this study does not call for this type of research design. Descriptive research attempts to give a picture of a situation as it occurs. In some instances it is used to justify current practice and make judgments and to develop theories. It involves observing and describing the behaviour of a particular subject without necessarily influencing its state or function. Descriptive research involves gathering data that describes events and then organizes, tabulates, depicts, and describes the data collection. The underlying objective is to bring out an accurate picture of a population, institution or phenomena and not measure the effect of a variable.

This study employed the descriptive research design approach due to a number of reasons including the fact that the subject is not controlled or influenced in any shape or form but that the study seeks to describe the phenomenon as it is. This is paramount in the attempt to explain the poor performance being experienced by public sector organisations in Zimbabwe.

3.2. Research Strategy

Often, qualitative research follows an inductive process. Generally, there are two approaches to reasoning which may result in the acquisition of new knowledge: the inductive – which starts with observation of specific instances and seeks to infer generalisations and the deductive – which starts from generalisations and apply the same to specific situations. Research strategy is a plan defining the main study goals to be achieved as well as the measure to reach those goals, while observing the research paradigm. The researcher needs to understand the research philosophy, as it involves the assumptions about the way the researcher views the subject matter (Buchanan and Bryman, 2009).

These perceived assumptions will determine the choice of research strategy and methods. Keeping the current research paradigm and methods of the current study which favours a descriptive research in mind, it required the researcher to find existing or past data on public sector organisational performance in Zimbabwe. This research employed the inductive approach. The aim of inductive research is to describe social characteristics and the nature of regularities in social life and then potentially introduce models at the data analysis stage where they represent patterns in the data in a simplified form.

3.3. Sampling Approach

3.3.1. Population

Hair *et al.* (2010) defines a population as an identifiable group of elements of interest to the researcher. A population is a group of individuals that have one or more characteristics in common that are of interest to the researcher. Taking into account that Zimbabwe has 92 local authorities, superintended by government which is decentralised to sub national structures, provinces and districts and that the country has a population of over twelve million people with a vested interest in local authorities, the researcher took the sampling approach in order to manage the process accordingly. Since the sample had to be representative of the population to afford generalisation of the findings, a sampling plan was designed.

3.4. Sampling Plan

A sample is a sub-set of the population and Saunders *et al.* (2012) says that sampling is a practical way of studying people and activities, thoughts, attitudes etc. in relation to business. The sampling plan can either be a probability or non-probability. It is important to note that non probability limits the generalisabilty of findings and makes it difficult to measure sampling error. Given this, the probability approach was therefore used to avoid the shortcomings that arise from using the non-probability approach.

3.5. Sampling Techniques

Saunders *et al.* (2012) asserts that a sample is a portion of the population selected by some clearly defined procedures or a set of respondents selected from a larger population. The sample thus is taken to represent the entire population in order to gain data and insights on the matter under study.

3.6. Sampling Procedures – Probability and Non-Probability Sampling

There are two sampling procedures that a researcher can utilise: probability and non-probability. Zikmund (2003) defines probability sampling as an approach in which each element has a known chance of being selected. Probability sampling consists of stratified, systematic and random sampling. It relies on statistical theories of probability with the underlying question, 'What are the chances'?.

Zikmund (2003) says that this type of sampling uses carefully defined procedures which are designed to ensure that each member of the target population has a known non-zero chance of being selected into the sample. As such, the approach allows one to generalise the results from the sample to the whole population. Similarly, Saunders *et al.* (2012) defines non-probability sampling as an approach in which observations are carefully selected on the basis of judgment, convenience, quota and snow ball samples.

Since in probability sampling every unit in the target population has a known chance of being selected, it meant that all stated segments had a chance of being interviewed through the questionnaire. The study took on the stratified sampling method in which the population was divided basing on the socio status of the target population: government officials, local authority officials, the private sector and the general citizenry in Manyame, Ruwa and Bindura. The rationale for this approach was motivated by the fact that the country is vast and cosmopolitan and is

too large to be analysed hence it was apparent that stratifying the population in question would yield representative results.

3.7. Data Collection Plan
3.7.1. Cross Sectional Survey

Saunders *et al.* (2012) contend that a cross-sectional survey takes on board the measuring of a phenomenon at a point in time. It represents an affordable way to collect data particularly under conditions where time and budget resources are severely limited. The cross-sectional survey was carried out through a self-administered questionnaire so that all the information was gathered at the same time. The advantages for using this approach are the applicability and the broad coverage that can be achieved for an extensive study of this nature.

3.8. Longitudinal Survey

Under this approach, the behaviour of a phenomenon is captured throughout all its phases, Saunders *et al.* (2012). The difficulty of using this approach lies in the fact that the area under study cannot be easily compressed and is a highly volatile sector depending on the political environment prevailing at the time of the study. Zimbabwe has witnessed a surge in interest by the public in the operations of public utilities given the controversies that these bodies have been embroiled in. In the survey the cross-sectional approach was selected as it is easier to manage on a tight budget, score and code for data analysis purposes. It also provides a credible and objective way of studying and comparing responses of varying groups of people to facilitate generalisation for the entire population.

3.9. Types of Data
3.9.1. Secondary Data

Saunders *et al.* (2012) described secondary data as records previously collected for other research purposes. This may however, address issues of the current research study. However, secondary data has its own shortfalls. This is because secondary data seldom fits the purpose at hand and there is difficulty in assessing the quality the data. Hence for the purpose of this study the researcher mainly utilised primary data to qualify the secondary data on organisational performance. Caution should always be used when using secondary data so it is advisable for researchers to check the validity and reliability of the collected data. The use of non-academic, unfamiliar and unknown data sources, is not advisable. Secondary data was used only to validate the trends in performance from local authority reports, budgets, systems audits and council and committee minutes.

3.9.2. Primary Data

According to Collins and Hussey (2009) primary data is information collected from original source through questionnaires, interviews or focus groups for the purpose of completing a current research project. This means the researcher involves himself in devising the data collection method, turning data into knowledge, analysis of data and data interpretation.

3.10. Data Collection Instruments
3.10.1. Interviews

A number of sources can be used to collect data and these include interviews as the best and most convenient source for the researcher. Saunders *et al.* (2012) regards interviews as a face to face interaction between two people or more on a topic of mutual interest. Structured interviews are regarded as the best way to gather information.

Interviewing varies in terms of structure and in the latitude the interviewee has in answering the questions. Patton (2002) categorises interviews into three general forms: the informal, conversational interview; the general interview guide approach; and the standardized, open-ended interview. Interviews typically are much more like

conversations than formal events with predetermined response categories. The researcher asks a few general topics to help uncover the participant's views on the subject matter but otherwise respects how the participant frames and structures the responses. This method is based on an assumption fundamental to qualitative research: that the participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the participant views it, not as the researcher views it. A degree of systematization in questioning may be necessary in, for example, a multisite case study or when many participants are interviewed, or at the analysis and interpretation stage when the researcher is testing findings in more focused and structured questioning. The most important aspect of the interviewer's approach is relaying the attitude that the participant's views are valuable and useful. The interviewer's success will depend on how well he has anticipated and practiced his role in ethical issues.

An interview yields data in quantity quickly. When more than one person participates (focus group interviews), the process takes in a wider variety of information than if there were fewer participants—the familiar trade-off between breadth and depth. Immediate follow-up and clarification are possible. Combined with observation, interviews allow the researcher to understand the meanings that everyday activities hold for people.

They also have their drawbacks in terms administrative efficacy for the researcher. Interviews involve personal interaction; cooperation is essential. Interviewees may be unwilling or may be uncomfortable sharing all that the interviewer hopes to explore, or they may be unaware of recurring patterns in their lives. The interviewer may not ask questions that evoke long narratives from participants because of a lack of expertise or familiarity with the local language or because of a lack of skill and for this reason the researcher decided against using interviews as a research instrument for this study. White (2002) supports the researcher's disregard for their use by stating that interviews are time consuming and consideration has to be made on the length of interview, travelling time and transcription of notes or tapes.

3.10.2. Observation

Observations can be one of the least obstructive research instruments, according to Zikmund (2003) along with interviews they are the most common used methods of qualitative research. According to O'Hara (2011) observations are a very important source of data collection in ethnography, action research and phenomenology, however to get the best of results they are often combined with other methods for data comparison purposes.

Participant observation demands first hand involvement in the social world chosen for study. Immersion in the setting permits the researcher to hear, to see, and to begin to experience reality as the participants do. Ideally, the researcher spends a considerable amount of time in the setting, learning about daily life there. This immersion offers the researcher the opportunity to learn directly from his own experience. Personal reflections are integral to the emerging analysis of a cultural group, because they provide the researcher with new vantage points and with opportunities to make the strange familiar and the familiar strange.

However, one of the drawbacks and the reason the researcher did not use observation as a data collection method for this study is one highlighted by O'Hara (2011): the impact of the observer's biases, cultural connotations and general beliefs on the research target.

3.11. Questionnaires

The questionnaire was used extensively to collect data for the purposes of this research. According to Brown (2001) questionnaires are any written instrument that present participants with a sequence of questions or accounts to which they are to react either by choosing among the existing answers or writing their own. Openheim (1992) opines that questionnaires are any data collection instruments encompassing checklists, attitude scales, projective techniques etc. It is the most convenient and widely used data collection instrument as large amounts of data can be collected from a large population in a short period of time and at relatively less cost than the other methods. The

results using this method are collected easily and quickly quantified and used to compare and contrast with previous research done on the subject.

3.11.1. Advantages of Questionnaires

The main advantages of questionnaires are that:

- they are relatively easy to analyse,
- they are familiar to library staff and managers,
- a large sample of the given population can be contacted at relatively low cost,
- they are simple to administer,
- the format is familiar to most respondents,
- they should be simple and quick for the respondent to complete,
- the information is collected in a standardised way,
- they are usually straightforward to analyse,
- they can be used for sensitive topics which users may feel uncomfortable speaking to an interviewer about, and
- respondents have time to think about their answers and they are not usually required to reply immediately.

3.11.2. Disadvantages of Questionnaires

The main disadvantages of questionnaires are that:

- if you forget to ask a question, you cannot usually go back to respondents, especially if they are anonymous,
- it is sometimes difficult to obtain a sufficient number of responses, especially from postal questionnaires,
- those who have an interest in the subject may be more likely to respond, skewing the sample,
- respondents may ignore certain questions,
- questionnaires may appear impersonal,
- questions may be incorrectly completed,
- they are not suitable for investigating long, complex issues,
- respondents may misunderstand questions because of poor design and ambiguous language,
- questionnaires are unsuitable for some kinds of respondents, e.g. visually impaired students,
- there is the danger of questionnaire fatigue if surveys are carried out too frequently, and
- They may require follow up research to investigate issues in greater depth and identify ways to solve problems highlighted.

The advent of cyber communication channels has made administration of the questionnaires manageable as some were distributed via email particularly to local authority officials and government officials. In touching base with the citizenry, a few were distributed over the internet while a sizeable number were personally administered.

3.12. Data Analysis

According to Thomas (2003) there is wide range of academic literature that documents the fundamental expectations and processes associated with analysis of qualitative and quantitative data. Strauss and Corbin (1990) noted that many are associated with specific approaches such as grounded theory, discourse analysis Potter and Wetherell (1994) and narrative analysis. However the research used the 'generic inductive approach', as highlighted by Zikmund (2003) and it is not labelled within one specific tradition of qualitative approaches. The purpose and justification for using the above approach in this analysis as supported by Thomas (2003) was in line with the aim and objective of this research as there was need to condense varied raw data into a summarised format. Tables and graphs were utilised to clearly depict and summarise the views gathered from the questionnaires. Clear links

between the research objective and the summary were derived from the raw data gathered. The research questions were answered through the analysed collected data from multiple readings and survey findings. Based on the information obtained in the literature review the researcher managed to distinguish between the importance of information based on the dominance of themes and findings in secondary data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Introduction

This section will focus on data presentation and analysis. Graphical presentations in the form of charts, graphs and tables were used to give a much clearer view of trends and perceptions. The researcher read and analysed all data, identified and defined all key categories. Most of the general categories in this chapter were derived from the research questions, while some specifics were derived from trends in secondary and primary data collected. The researcher is certain these key categories will be able to provide answers to the research questions while providing new information on the subject matter of which future studies could be based on. All statistical analyses and descriptive statistics for the study were carried out using SPSS and computed.

4.2. Response Rate

In research Zikmund (2003) a sample of 30 is considered statistically significant if it is representative of the population. Zikmund (2003) insists that a research sample of 30 individuals will always be representative of the entire population if the research is carried out in an appropriate and structured manner.

A total of 90 questionnaires were distributed equally to residents in, Bindura, Ruwa and Manyame (Beatrice). Of the total number of 90 questionnaires administered to participants in the form of interviews, 59 were returned constituting a 65% response rate from the total sample. Those distributed to the Ministry responsible for local government were distributed equally at both the district and provincial level for the areas concerned. It is important to note that the Ministry plays supervisory role from the centres with the district level reporting directly to the province who in turn report to head office in Harare. Table 1 below shows the province and district that each local authority under study fall under:

Table-1. Table showing District and Province for each Local Authority.

Local Authority	District Name	Province
Manyame RDC	Seke	Mashonaland East
Bindura Municipality	Bindura	Mashonaland Central
Ruwa Local Board	Goromonzi	Harare Metropolitan

The nature of the research required that the views of all stakeholders in local government issues needed to be heard in order to come up with a balanced analysis. In each district area of study each sector/ stakeholder identified had ten questionnaires distributed as follows;

Table-2. Distribution table showing retention of questionnaires to the researcher.

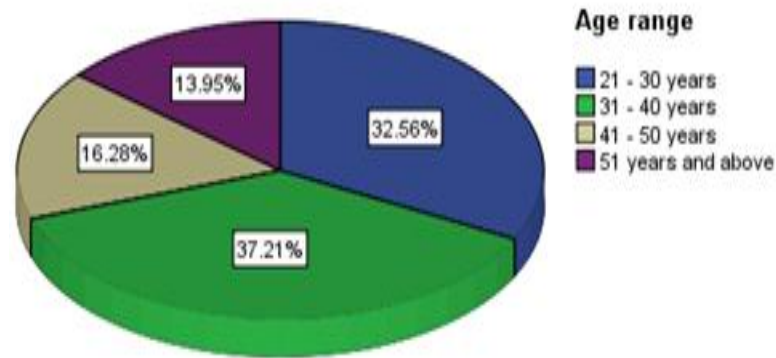|	Min of Local Government officials		Local Authority officials		Residents	
	Distributed	Returned	Distributed	Returned	Distributed	Returned
Manyame RDC	10	5	10	8	10	7
Bindura Municipality	10	4	10	7	10	11
Ruwa Local Board	10	4	10	6	10	7
Total	**30**	**13**	**30**	**21**	**30**	**25**

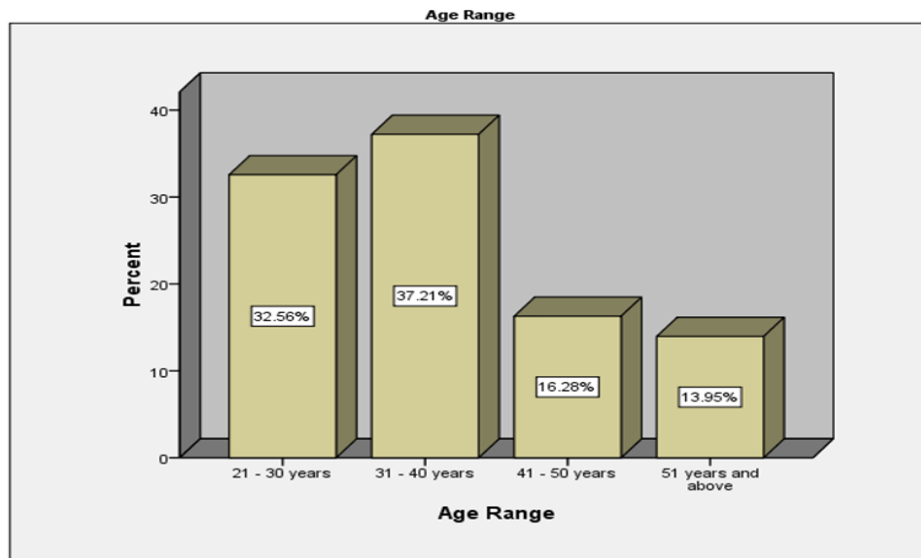**Figure–4.** Pie chart depicting age variations of the sample.

Figure-5. Bar graph depicting age variations of the sample.

Figures 4 and 5 below reveal that out of the total 59 people who completed the questionnaires 32.56% were in the age range of 21-30; 37.21% were in the age range of 31 40; 16.28% in the age range of 41-50 and 13.95% in the age range of 51 years and above. Critically, the questionnaires managed to capture basically all the age groups as envisaged by the researcher. The majority of respondents among the citizenry were those in the age group of 31-40 followed by 21-30, then 41-50 and last the 51 and older age group. Interestingly, the trend displayed in the graphs above revealed that interest in the affairs of public institutions, which are mainly funded by taxpayer's money, waned as people got older as evidenced by the 15% response rate of the 51 years and above age group. It could also be explained that the demographics of the sample target reflected that the majority of the populace are found in the 21-40 years age groups. This age group, which falls in the economically active section, given the economic conditions in Zimbabwe is severely affected by the poor performance of Local Authorities.
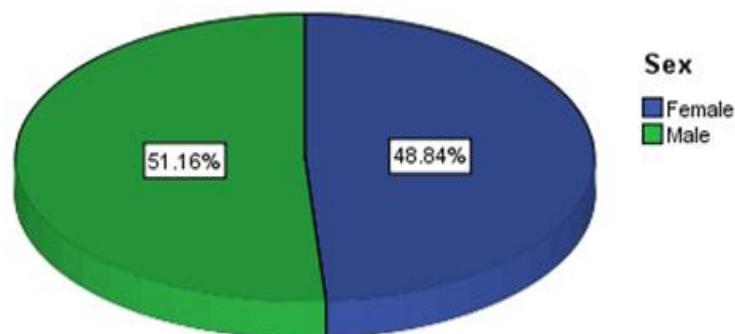

Figure-6. Pie Chart depicting distribution of respondents according to Gender.

The responses received from the distributed questionnaires revealed that 51.6% of the respondents were male while the remainder of 48.84% were females. The results proved to be more or less reflective of statistical data of both the 2002 and 2012 Zimbabwe national census surveys where at least 51% of the population were females. It could therefore be that interest in the performance of Local Authorities in matters of service delivery transcends gender connotations and stereotypes. It could be also be explained in the context of the continued impact and spread of the global village concept even in the previously tradition intensive societies in rural Zimbabwe that women have now a greater say in the provision of basic services that affect their livelihoods.
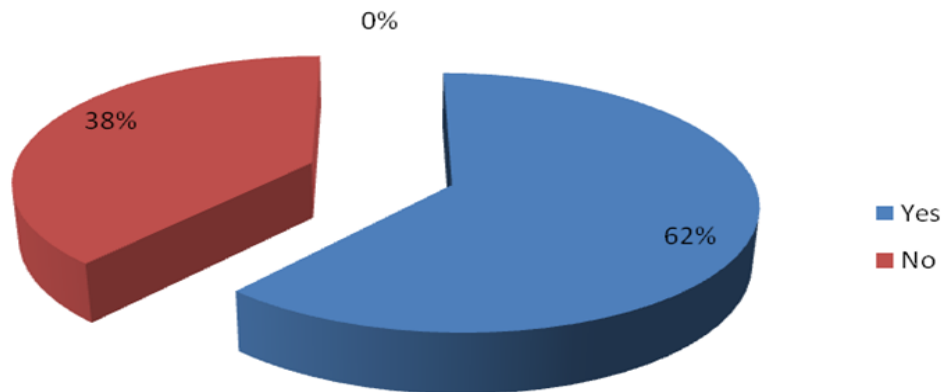
4.3. Culture as a Social Construct

Figure-7. Pie chart indicating percentage view of culture as a social construct.

In any community setting, a way of life for the inhabitants is easily deducible and can be taken to represent 'the way we do things around here'. Similarly, while trying to gauge an understanding of culture among the respondents, it was apparent that culture as concept was viewed as a social construct that evolves over a long period of time in a community. It becomes normal for certain attributes to be associated with that group of people or community. These attributes could be surmised to be reflective or to represent a culture of a community. It was evident from the responses that there were some attributes and persona that could be attached to a people or a company to represent the way they do business. For example, courtesy and respect were two attributes that came out strongly from the respondents, 62%, and were felt as being essential.

Without these and other attributes, one could not be described to be fully conforming to societal expectations. As a result, it can easily be determined that a person could be classified as an outcast even in his home area by not conforming to a certain criterion of behaviour. Similarly, this could be transmitted to organisations operating within the sample area. It was apparent that thelocal authorities in these areas were expected to mirror their societies in general as they were part and parcel of the socio-economic fabric of the communities which they served. In that regard, it is deducible that the same were expected to serve and protect those interests and attributes of their respective societies.

4.4. Identifying Contemporary Organisational Culture in Local Authorities

Who brings an organisational culture to a local authority? Is it the political leaders in office or council management? An analysis of the data revealed that it is a difficult exercise to identify any typology or form of culture to associate with any of the local authorities under study. It was difficult for the respondents to clearly articulate whether a ccouncil displayed any cultural traits in the way they conducted their business. However, there were some norms that manifested themselves during data collection which are listed below.

Performance culture

There was a frustration amongst the respondents that local authority officials could not be held to account for the performance of their portfolio. In the event of poor performance there was no recourse that could be sought against them as they were all on open ended 'life time' contracts. While performance culture embedded in the sampled local authorities was not linked to any value system, employee perspective or collaborative underpinnings in terms of enhancing service delivery was evidence. The local authorities were solely burdened with the duty of providing all the facets of basic municipal services yet it could also be sub contracted to third parties at mutually beneficial terms and conditions. This lack of appreciation of the contemporary dynamics of service delivery came out strongly as an area of concern amongst the respondents in the face of the hefty perks that were often punctuated with lucrative performance bonuses. Respondents, particularly the residents, felt that there was an unjust mismatch between the reward system in councils and their performance output. It was simply a culture of rewarding mediocrity and incompetence within local authorities that irked the ratepayers.

Lack of timeliness

Timeliness in service delivery was a major borne of contention with respondents in as far as delivering what was needed at the right time. The government was not happy with the way local authorities dealt with matters of efficiency in terms of deliverables such as water, roads; grass cutting etc. This was supported by the numerous calls made by the Minister for local government in his speeches for councils to diligently pursue value for money with the service delivery agenda on behalf of the government. For residents it was a reason for them to withhold paying their rates and charges to the local authorities concerned. Their argument centred on the point that, for instance, they were fetching most of their water requirements from boreholes and therefore did not see value in paying for the little water that ran out of their taps.

'We know it all culture'

The data revealed that there was little to no consultation of the stakeholders by the local authorities in as far as the needs of the communities residing in the sample areas were concerned. Respondents were not aware of the strategic plans of their local authorities and neither were they shared to stimulate community involvement in the achievement of the strategic goals. These strategic plans such as budgets were only found at the Ministry of Local Government offices for statutory obligations only and were not made available to stakeholders. It can be argued that there was a deliberate attempt by council officials not to disclose to stakeholders the strategic direction of their entities. In short, there was little room for the consultation and participation of stakeholders in the affairs of the local authority affording council officials unfettered powers to decide on pertinent service delivery issues on behalf of residents. It was evident that the consumer/customer/resident who is a direct beneficiary and taxpayer in the council area was not considered important in the operations of a council.

Performance Measurement

It was felt that there was no basis or parameters that were used within local authorities to measure performance. Only once as of November 2013, has there been an attempt to introduce a performance measurement regime in local authorities under the Integrated Results Based Management (IRBM) principle adopted by the Government of Zimbabwe in 2005 to guide operations of all public institutions in Zimbabwe. That nine years after the adoption of the IRBM principle, only seventeen out of 92 councils have embraced the concept is evident of a resistance to transform to a results-oriented mode for local authorities. There exists a fear of being measured for results to define and measure competency on the part of the executive. A close analysis of the performance contracts (entered between the Chief Executive Officer/ Town Clerk/ Town Secretary and Council Chairperson/ Mayor) of

the three local authorities submitted to the Ministry revealed that the contracts did not provide for action in the event that agreed targets were not met.

Additionally, it was clear that indeed there was no solid understanding or comprehension, on the part of the accounting officers concerned, of the concept of performance management and how the same affected the overall performance of their organisations. This assertion from the secondary data was supported by views raised by respondents who felt that there was indeed a lack of accountability in terms of senior officers' performance. The executive functionaries were not trying to take responsibility for the performance of the organisations under their command. In fact, analysis of secondary data revealed that at one point or the other some of the accounting officers have faced revolt from the councillors who have tried to oust them on various issues. The volatile nature of the local government sector for professionals could explain the fear to take responsibility for the general strategic direction on the part of the chief executive officers.

Quality function

Quality is a buzz word that is used as a differentiation factor in gaining competitive advantage in any industry and commerce. From that perspective, local authorities neither considered nor infused quality in their operations. An analysis of reports, systems audits and minutes submitted to the Ministry of Local Government revealed that local authorities were primarily concerned with addressing demand rather providing the requisite service. The fact that lucrative industries, such as the mineral water industry, have been born out of the deficiencies in meeting the residents' demands was testament to the capacity gap that could be plagued to bridge the service delivery question.

4.5. Measuring and Transforming Organisational Culture

Given the ambiguity around defining organisational culture, it is hard to effectively measure culture from the responses obtained from the questionnaires. Taras *et al.* (2009) contend that "by quantifying values, assumptions or practices along four to eight cultural dimensions or factors,' with individual models varying depending on the author's area of expertise, it therefore present challenges to construct organisational culture. Whilst they highlight that the superiority of the self-reporting questionnaire approach remains controversial, they acknowledge that, 'because alternative methods such as observation or experiment are more resource demanding, the self-report questionnaire remains the most popular method of quantifying culture.' Further to that, Taras *et al.* (2009) acknowledge that there are very real practical challenges when measuring culture, and argue that 'a single model cannot comprise all aspects of such a highly complex, multidimensional and multi- layered phenomenon'. But what is particularly evident from the results is that as Pellegrin and Currey (2011) assert culture is simply a collection of behaviour and can therefore be changed.

4.6. Importance of Culture in Local Authorities

An analysis of the results obtained, respondents were sceptical of the role or rationale of prioritising organisational culture as a forerunner to optimal performance by local authorities. None of the respondents, in answering on what could be done to improve service delivery, mentioned culture as a prerequisite. This revealed that people in Zimbabwe are not necessarily concerned by the inputs into a process but by the final product delivered to the people.

It is a mindset that was evident in the responses obtained as issues such as capital, the national economy, human capital deficiencies, and corruption were mentioned as requiring active attention in order to prop up service delivery by councils. Critically, this is identified by Bluedorn and Lundgren (1993) when they exclaim that the lack of an understanding of organisational culture in the public sector is a serious concern as it is critical toward the achievement of strategic objectives. It was therefore important to note that the determinants of a highly performing

local authority were vast and varying in context. Culture, yes, was considered as an ingredient by the respondents but could not be isolated with certainty as a major factor towards sustainable service delivery.
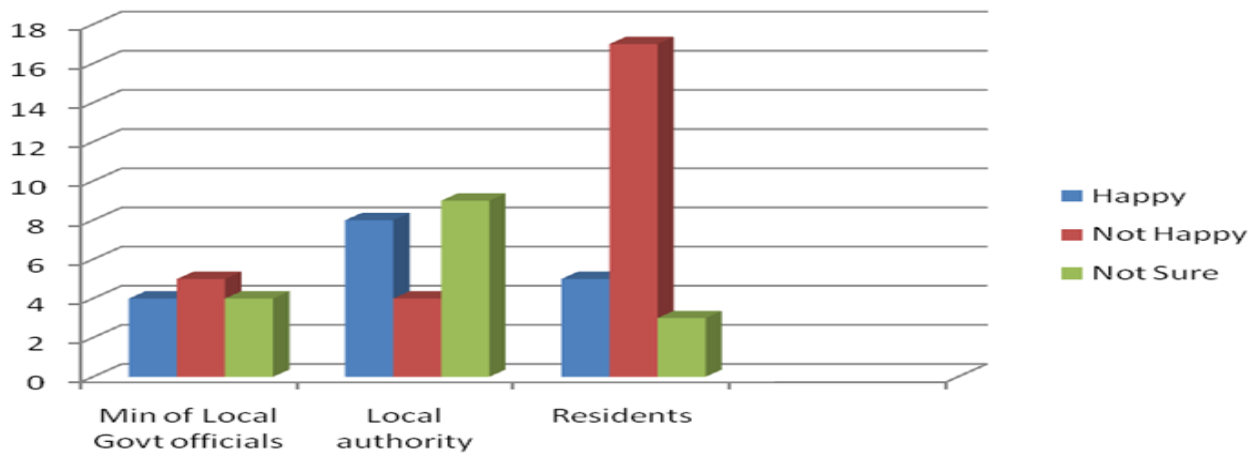
4.7. General Assertions on Local Authority Performance

Figure-8. Graph showing views on Local Authority performance.

Given that the research occurred during a period where national attention had been focused on public sector organisations' performance, it was not surprising that most of the respondents were not entirely happy with the way local authorities were carrying out their mandate. As could be expected as per Figure 8, residents (17/25) were particularly scathing in their attack on performance of their councils citing a variety of reasons from misplaced priorities and a lack of understanding of the mandate of a public institution. Their dissatisfaction stems from poor services in the manner of water supply, roads and housing delivery.

From the local authority sphere it was a case of defending their territory and the level of their performance. local authority officials cited a number of issues including a poorly performing national economy, excessive government intervention in their affairs, (an example being the slashing of all debts owed to the same in June 2013 for a period dating back to 2009), the general attrition of plant and equipment and an emerging culture amongst ratepayers of not paying rates and user charges. Chatiza (2010) tends to support the assertions by local authority officials by claiming that the outcomes in terms of quality of service delivery resulting from a greater client focus are unclear in the public sector. The views on the performance of local authorities, it has to be said, are a product of a number of issues given the political nature of the same but crucially respondents cited tangible factors and service delivery indicators as reference for their responses.

4.8. Uncoordinated Government Interventions in Service Delivery

Some respondents particularly from local authorities and the Ministry were not overly impressed by the way government intervened in local authority processes. Some of these interventions were blamed to fuel the culture of non-performance as they merely blanketed the failure of internal management systems to cope with challenges bedevilling councils. In 2013, the Public Sector Investment Programme (PSIP) allocated over US$7 million in funds to a number of local authorities for infrastructural development in water and sewer reticulation but it has not had the desired results. Chatiza (2010) what was telling from the data sifted through was that none of the disbursements were needs based. Some local authorities ended up being allocated targeted funding for projects that had already achieved their project objectives several times. Monitoring and evaluation exercises carried out by the Ministry revealed that in most instances excess project monies were misused to procure executive perks such as luxury vehicles disguised as project and service delivery instruments. Chatiza (2010) it was worth noting that for the year 2013, none of the local authorities have been made accountable for every cent of public monies expended allocated

by government for service delivery. Yet the underlying objective of government interventions in local authorities is to prop up service delivery by its delegated institutions.

Importantly, the lack of an operating framework and synergies among and between government departments and agencies in local authority areas was an area of concern raised by players in the sector. An analysis of secondary data revealed complaints and concerns of the need for greater coordination between government agencies so as to enhance service delivery by local authorities. Bechman and MacCleery (2006) A case in point refers to the coordination between the Ministries of Local Government and Finance over the allocation of PSIP funds wherein the Ministry of Local Government raised concern with its counterpart of the selection criterion of beneficiary local authorities. Indeed, while interventions from the Ministry of Finance have in the short term addressed service delivery deficiencies it has only addressed the symptoms and not the underlying problems that have hindered local authorities from effectively delivering on their mandate. Government interventions were therefore not seen to make major differences to the way things were done at council level as long as bureaucratic hierarchy culture remained unchanged. The interventions merely served to sustain what was essentially an unsustainable culture in local authorities.

This section sought to analyse and interpret data gathered from the questionnaires which will form the basis for making recommendations and conclusions in the next section.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. The Essence of the Research

This study was carried out to assess the impact of organisational culture on local authority performance in Zimbabwe. The population for this study was thus divided into three categories: government officials, local authority officials and residents in the sample local authorities (Manyame, Ruwa, Bindura). The study sought to find solutions to the following objectives:

1. explore organisational culture in local authorities,
2. establish whether the current poor service delivery standard by local authorities can be attributed to the culture prevalent in the same, and
3. establish whether culture can be targeted to improve internal cohesion thereby enhancing service delivery by local authorities.

5.2. Summary of Major Findings

The major findings from this study are explained below.

It was determined that there is no organisational culture that can be associated with Local Authorities in Zimbabwe.

Culture is a social construct and is reflected in any organisation. It is the operating environment (country/community) that shapes the way organisations and individuals behave.

Culture is dynamic and can be changed to suit the environment. It was apparent that over time, values and norms do not remain static but rather transform to also conform to societal underpinnings or expectations as well as regulatory, national policy and legal provisions.

The role of organisational culture is not given prominence in the operations of local authorities. It is a concept that is not well understood and its value disregarded for organisational success.

There is a direct link between culture and the overall performance of local authorities. While local authorities may not appreciate the value of culture, the norms that were evident revealed a culture that was not geared to achieve optimal performance as they inculcated lethargy in their approach to business.

Stakeholders such as central government, management, residents do not have a common vision or common beliefs with regards to the running of local authorities hence there is poor coordination in their daily operation.

There is a need to link the reward system in local authorities to organisational performance. There were no performance evaluation techniques applied to support and justify the reward systems employed.

There is a need to measure performance of local authority officials to enhance organisational performance. Performance management as a key management function was not given prominence in local authorities.

Government interventions have not necessarily enhanced service delivery but have merely sustained the status quo in local authorities.

To summarise, the findings revealed that there was a pressing need to address the organisational culture in local authorities if they are to play the role that is encapsulated in legislation as well as national policies.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The research focused on the impact of organisational culture on performance in the local governance sector and it can be deduced from the analysis that:

Local authority performance is indeed a quantum aggregate of factors both tangible and non tangible variables. It is thus imperative that all these factors are given equal measure in attention in order to significantly revitalise and transform of service delivery standards in Zimbabwe.

A strong performing local authority sector can be the catalyst for economic development both at the local and central levels. Local authorities play an enabling role through the provision of key infrastructure in the manner of roads, water and housing among others.

For the Zimbabwean economy to revitalise, there is an urgent need for a strong local authority sector across the country.

In a dynamic contemporary global environment, culture can be targeted as a means to achieve optimal service delivery. The world has changed to become one global village and local authorities need to learn and adapt to the dictates of the new world order. The research found that despite culture being a product of socialisation it can be transformed. A weak culture is recipe for failure.

While one cannot put monetary value to organisational culture, it is an important element of organisational life in that it knits the various facets of an organisation together to foster a sense of belonging among staff in a local authority. Prioritising the building of a strong culture in a local authorities in Zimbabwe can be the first step in reengineering the local government sector. Stakeholder participation in local authority affairs can improve the level of mistrust that exists between local authorities and their constituency.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

After a careful scrutiny of the findings and conclusions, the researcher makes the following recommendations:

1. that the management of local authorities seriously consider culture as a key determinant of organisational performance,
2. that Integrated Results Based Management (IRBM) is introduced with speed in its entirety to local authorities,
3. thathe each local authority establishes a compliance department to monitor organisational activities,
4. that the Ministry for Local Government establishes a compliance department to effectively monitor and supervise local authorities, and
5. that legislation regulating local authorities is revisited to further empower local authorities to cover their areas of jurisdiction.

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