

Background

It is the belief of the Aberdeen Integration Joint Board (IJB) that culture, as well as forming strong, trusting relationships with partnering organizations, are essential for effective strategic decision-making with regard to the delivery of health and social care services (“Aberdeen IJB Brief...”). In developing strong relationships across the IJB and ACHSCP teams, while also promoting the use of informal spaces, the Board has been able to prioritize the commissioning of “care at home” services under a new consortium arrangement, they have been able to repurpose a care home into a “step-up/step-down care facility”, and they have transitioned from exiting “day care provision” to a series of preventative, community-based activities (“Aberdeen IJB Brief...”). The IJB believes that the combination of these decisions and initiatives has led to the ACHSCP’s good performance in relation to national indicators (“Aberdeen IJB Brief...”). As a result, the Board has requested for an evaluation to be conducted to assess and observe the IJB culture, identify areas of improvement, and ensure that the “lessons learned” from the Aberdeen IJB’s experience are taken into consideration when developing the future National Care Service (NCS) (“Aberdeen IJB Brief...”).

Key Theoretical Themes

The theoretical component of the quantitative portion of the study examined academic literature and research studies on the use of surveys as tools for organizational development and efficiency, primarily focused on organizational trust. From the document review, surveys were found to be effective strategic management tools for organizational development, with regard to three (3) main areas:

1. To Improve Employee and Customer Satisfaction: Surveys, particularly employee attitude surveys, are effective in collecting information on employee or customer satisfaction and experiences, which can then be used to inform the appropriate action items. In particular, as examined in the theoretical component of the study, there is a positive relationship between customer and employee satisfaction analysis, and organizational performance.
2. To Inform Organizational Change: Within organizations, surveys are often part of a larger change effort. They are effective in introducing large-scale change, and require action to be taken at multiple levels of the organization.
3. To Improve Organizational Efficiency: Within organizations, surveys are effective tools for strategic action planning, with the findings presenting a diagnostic picture of the organization in question. Survey findings can also provide information on organizational performance, which can then be used to improve organizational effectiveness or efficiency.

There were five (5) main theoretical themes with regard to the qualitative portion of the study, which are as follows:

1. Culture and Trust: This theme examined the formation of trust within organizations, emphasizing the importance of aligning individual conduct with social norms and how trust influences employee engagement.

2. Culture and Effective Communication: Explored the link between organizational culture and communication effectiveness, highlighting the impact of unity and pride on honest communication and the role of culture in creating an inclusive atmosphere for diverse business landscapes.
3. Organizational Culture and Staff Motivation: Focused on how organizational culture motivates employees by fostering internal integration, emphasizing social connections' significance in employee motivation, and exploring culture's role in crisis resolution.
4. Culture and Innovativeness: Examined the role of organizational culture in fostering innovation and emphasized the crucial involvement of senior management in cultivating an innovative culture.
5. Culture and Leadership: Explored the symbiotic relationship between leadership and organizational culture, highlighting how leadership shapes culture and vice versa, and emphasizing the challenge of recognizing cultural limitations for effective leadership and organizational evolution.

Methods (including reference to the subjects engaged and the various difficulties encountered).

The purpose of this evaluation was to assess the impact of the culture developed by the Aberdeen Integration Joint Board (IJB) on the Board's strategic decision-making, and the performance of the Aberdeen Health and Social Care Partnership (HSCP). In particular, this evaluation had six (6) objectives:

- 1) To assess the effectiveness of the culture development work in fostering strong, trusting relationships across the IJB and ACHSCP teams.
- 2) To determine the effectiveness of communication channels within Aberdeen IJB.
- 3) To evaluate the extent to which the IJB's culture development has played a role in achieving its strategic goals and objectives.
- 4) To assess the impact of the culture development work on staff morale, motivation, and engagement.
- 5) To evaluate the impact of the "informal spaces" established by the IJB on promoting collaboration and effective decision making.
- 6) To identify any gaps or areas for improvement in the current culture of the IJB and make recommendations for how these can be addressed.

To accomplish this, we took a mixed methods approach, using both primary and secondary data sources. To ensure the project was completed efficiently, as well as to ensure all aspects of the individuals' experiences were taken into consideration, the project was divided into two components: a qualitative and a quantitative portion.

The quantitative component of the project consisted of an online, Likert scale-based survey, which was developed using the University-approved survey application "Snap 11", which

ensures the security of survey responses by storing them on the University's "Snap WebHost" server ("SNAP"). The survey included 10 questions, which used a 5-point Likert scale as the response option, while questions #2, #4, and #10 also offered an "explanation box" for participants to elaborate on their responses. In terms of the analysis method utilized, descriptive statistics of the Likert scale-based survey responses were produced using SPSS, through which we were able to determine the average survey responses provided, which translates to the average attitude towards the statement in question, or the average behaviour exhibited by respondents. In addition to the descriptive statistics produced, a content analysis was also conducted using the information provided by respondents in the "explanation boxes" of questions #2, #4, and #10.

For the qualitative component, qualitative interviews were employed as the primary research method to understand how individuals associated with the IJB perceive the board's success. The choice of qualitative interviews aimed to capture personal perspectives and insights, treating interviewees as "conversational partners" to generate trustworthy information. Leveraging online interviews via Microsoft Teams offered convenience, cost-effectiveness, and a relaxed atmosphere conducive to open conversations. The semi-structured interview format allowed for flexibility while ensuring a guiding framework. Microsoft Teams was chosen for its recognition by the University and Aberdeen City Council, emphasizing participant safety and confidentiality. Open-ended questions were utilized to obtain comprehensive data, and the transcriptions, done using Microsoft Word 365, were cross-referenced with Teams recordings for accuracy. Overall, this approach aimed to create a secure and comfortable environment, encouraging authentic exchanges of information, and facilitating a nuanced exploration of perceptions regarding IJB success.

Thematic analysis was employed as the data analysis method in this research. This method allowed for the incorporation of unexpected findings and systematic summarization of data, enhancing transparency in the research process. The theoretical thematic analysis variant was later used to connect findings with existing literature. Open coding was utilized for code development, ensuring flexibility for systematic exploration guided by the evaluation objectives and emerging themes. The inherent flexibility of thematic analysis facilitated a back-and-forth engagement with the data, leading to the identification of suitable codes and themes aligned with the theoretical framework.

Lastly, the population for this evaluation consisted of individuals who are affiliated with, or members of, the Aberdeen IJB, and who have experienced the IJB's culture. To select the participants for this evaluation, we employed purposive sampling, and relied on the expertise of our Aberdeen IJB liaisons to provide us with a list of individuals who met the sampling frame criteria, which included being affiliated with, or members of, the Aberdeen IJB, and having experienced the IJB's culture, as well as individuals that they felt could provide valuable input regarding the impact of the Aberdeen IJB's culture. Our Aberdeen IJB liaisons provided us with a comprehensive list of 28 individuals to invite to participate in the evaluation, 11 of which agreed to participate in the study. Of the 11 participants, two (2) were voting members, whereas nine (9) were non-voting members.

Challenges during Data Collection

Throughout the course of our study, we faced several challenges. While the ethics approval process required more time than initially anticipated, we also grappled with response rate issues. While we had initially invited twenty-eight (28) individuals to participate in the study, for example, only eleven (11) individuals agreed to participate. This not only substantially diminished our expected sample size, but also extended the duration required for data collection. As a result, we found ourselves facing pressing time constraints, and the study's overall timeline was significantly prolonged. Consequently, the results of the study need to be considered in light of these limitations experienced.

Key Findings

As suggested by the quantitative analysis findings, the culture developed by the Aberdeen IJB has been effective in reducing formality, building trust, and fostering personal relationships among Board members. Additionally, the findings indicate that, while the informal spaces developed by the Aberdeen IJB have been effective in promoting collaboration and encouraging effective conversations, the development sessions and seminars are not attended by all IJB members. In terms of the impact of the Aberdeen IJB culture on the Board's strategic decision-making, the analysis findings suggest that respondents are kept informed of any decisions or changes made in the ACHSCP, with decisions being made in a transparent and accountable manner. However, in terms of the Board's progress towards their strategic goals and objectives, the variance in the minimum and maximum responses received, which are "disagree" with the statement and "strongly agree" with the statement, indicates that there could be some uncertainty regarding the Board's progress towards their goals and objectives. However, in terms of the impact of the culture developed by the Aberdeen IJB on the performance of the Aberdeen City HSCP, it is difficult to determine the impact of the culture when there are other key influencing factors, including healthcare-based or socio-economic factors. However, this could be addressed through future research. To assess the impact of the culture developed by the Aberdeen IJB on the ACHSCP National Integration Indicators 1-10, for example, which includes the level of satisfaction reported by patients and carers with regard to the services provided, future researchers could conduct an additional survey, which would allow for patients and carers to identify any improvement or changes experienced since the development of the Aberdeen IJB's culture ("Annual Performance Report 2021-2022", 2022).

In terms of the study's qualitative findings, the analysis of the culture developed by the Aberdeen Integration Joint Board (IJB) focused on five key thematic dimensions: trust, staff motivation, innovativeness, effective communication, and leadership, offering insights into their implications on organizational effectiveness.

Culture and Trust:

The IJB has fostered an informal culture, emphasizing open communication and personal relationships among members. Informal addressing, culture workshops, in-person meetings, and

"boom-boards" contributed to breaking down barriers and building trust. Newcomers noted the welcoming atmosphere, while workshops aided conflict resolution and facilitated open dialogue.

Communication and Culture:

Communication involves a blend of electronic and in-person interactions. While the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) plays a crucial role in disseminating information, challenges included a somewhat hierarchical approach and insufficient structures for non-voting members to actively participate. Suggestions for improvement include a robust intranet system to enhance internal communication.

Culture and Staff Motivation:

Staff motivation is linked to feeling appreciated, supported, and working in a blame-free culture. Leadership support and a focus on inclusivity and equality have contributed to a positive environment. Effective administrative support enhanced meeting efficiency and allowed personnel to concentrate on substantive issues.

Culture and Innovativeness:

Innovation is facilitated by a consultant-led culture clarification initiative, encouraging risk-taking and experimentation. The IJB embraced creative meeting formats, warm-up videos, and "boom-boards" to maintain engagement. The willingness to learn from both successes and failures reflected a key aspect of the IJB's approach to achieving goals.

Culture and Leadership:

Leadership was identified as pivotal in shaping organizational culture, influencing motivation, trust, innovation, and communication. Supportive leaders promoted a non-hierarchical atmosphere, fostering collaboration and constructive interactions. The selection and development of leaders aligned with cultural values were crucial for a thriving organizational culture.

Challenges to Culture Development:

Challenges include operating in silos, turnover affecting consistency, transition difficulties, power dynamics, political influences, and the impact of virtual meetings. Overcoming these challenges requires a focus on breaking down silos, managing turnover, addressing power dynamics, balancing political influences, and prioritizing face-to-face interactions over virtual meetings.

Recommendations, Lessons Learned, and Future Work for Aberdeen IJB:

1. Induction and Onboarding:

- Strengthen the induction process to provide a comprehensive understanding of the organization's vision and unique culture.
- Mandate a thorough onboarding process for all newcomers, including the assignment of mentors to guide them.
- Emphasize the importance of personal connections through buddy systems and informal meetings for smoother transitions.

2. Culture Workshops and Informal Spaces:

- Increase the frequency and purposefulness of culture workshops, ensuring optimal scheduling for maximum participation.
 - Enhance the authenticity of informal meetings to foster genuine interpersonal connections and deeper understanding among members.
3. Politics:
- Leaders must proactively safeguard IJB meetings from political influence to maintain a non-partisan atmosphere.
 - Implement careful scrutiny of meeting materials and strategic agenda-setting to prevent political elements from overshadowing organizational objectives.
4. Public Awareness:
- Prioritize public awareness campaigns to educate the general public about the IJB's role and contributions.
 - Organize workshops or open sessions for staff to interact with IJB members, increasing internal awareness of roles and activities.
5. Meetings:
- Prioritize face-to-face meetings to nurture cohesive and trust-driven organizational culture.
 - Advocate for activating cameras during virtual meetings to showcase active participation and engagement.
 - Exercise caution to maintain a balance between meetings and reports to prevent overwhelming workloads.

Lessons Learned:

- The pivotal role of proactive leadership in maintaining a politically neutral environment within the organization.
- The significance of face-to-face meetings in building strong relationships and fostering trust among board members.
- The importance of balancing the quantity of meetings and reports to avoid overwhelming workloads.

Conclusion:

Aberdeen IJB's success lies in the deliberate cultivation of a culture of trust, cooperation, and effective communication. Despite challenges, it stands as a remarkable example of integration within healthcare and social services. Valuable insights and recommendations from their experiences can guide future initiatives, including those of the National Care Service, ensuring effective service delivery and operational excellence. The organization's commitment to continuous improvement and adaptation positions it as a valuable case study for the broader healthcare sector.