
Clan Culture and Performance of United Nations Agencies in Nairobi, Kenya

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study determined the influence of clan culture on the performance of United Nations (UN) agencies in Nairobi, Kenya.

Material/methods: The study was anchored on the Resource-Based View and the Competing Values Framework and adopted a positivist philosophy and an explanatory cross-sectional survey design. The target population comprised 302 top managers from 15 UN agencies, from whom a sample of 172 respondents was selected. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and regression analysis.

Findings: Clan culture had a positive and statistically significant influence on organizational performance ($\beta = .841, p < .001$).

Conclusion: The study concludes that teamwork, trust, employee involvement, technical capability and a sense of belonging improve coordination, commitment and program delivery in UN agencies.

Value: The study recommends participatory decision-making, mentoring, cross-functional teamwork, staff development and employee-recognition practices to sustain a collaborative culture and enhance agency performance.

Keywords: Clan Culture, Organizational Culture, Organizational Performance, United Nations Agencies, Nairobi

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1. Introduction

Organizational performance refers to the extent to which an institution achieves its mandate, uses resources efficiently and delivers outcomes valued by stakeholders. In international organizations, performance also includes program relevance, accountability, coordination, legitimacy, responsiveness and the sustainability of development outcomes (Eckhard et al., 2023; Lall, 2017). Performance is particularly important for UN agencies because continued donor confidence and public legitimacy depend on visible results, transparent resource use and effective coordination with governments, implementing partners and beneficiary communities.

Despite their global mandate, UN agencies experience uneven performance. The thesis reported that 26% of evaluated UNDP projects in 2023 were rated moderately unsatisfactory or lower, while only 43% of UNFPA decentralized evaluations achieved satisfactory ratings. Complex mandates, multicultural workforces, layered approval

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systems and overlapping responsibilities may weaken coordination and slow decision-making. These performance gaps create a need to examine internal organizational factors that can strengthen employee commitment, cooperation and effective implementation.

Organizational culture comprises the shared values, assumptions and behavioral expectations that guide how employees interpret issues, relate to colleagues and perform their duties (Alvesson, 2022; Chatman & O'Reilly, 2021). Clan culture is a collaborative cultural orientation characterized by teamwork, trust, mentoring, participation, loyalty and a sense of belonging. Leaders in clan-oriented organizations act as facilitators and mentors, employees are encouraged to participate in decisions, and success is associated with human development, cohesion and commitment (Cameron & Quinn, 2006). These attributes may be particularly valuable in UN agencies, where employees from different professional and national backgrounds must work together around shared humanitarian and development objectives.

Empirical studies generally associate collaborative cultures with positive employee attitudes and organizational effectiveness. Hartnell et al. (2011) found that clan values are closely connected to cohesion, morale and employee commitment, while Gong et al. (2020) showed that employee participation and collaboration support knowledge creation and innovation. Within humanitarian organizations, trust and teamwork can improve information exchange, reduce internal conflict and enable faster coordination during program implementation. Nevertheless, excessive emphasis on consensus may delay urgent decisions or weaken individual accountability. Clan culture therefore needs to be examined within the specific institutional context of UN agencies.

Much of the existing evidence concerns private firms, public agencies, universities and non-governmental organizations. The distinctive environment of UN agencies—characterized by multicultural staffing, transnational governance and complex accountability relationships—has received limited empirical attention. This contextual gap makes it uncertain whether findings from conventional organizations apply directly to Nairobi-based UN agencies. The study therefore sought to determine the influence of clan culture on the performance of United Nations agencies in Nairobi, Kenya.

2. Theoretical Review

The Resource-Based View (RBV), associated with Wernerfelt (1984), explains differences in organizational performance through valuable, rare, difficult-to-imitate and well-organized resources. The theory recognizes that intangible resources such as shared norms, trust, knowledge, employee commitment and coordinated routines can support superior performance. Clan culture is embedded in organizational history and social relationships and cannot be easily copied. In UN agencies, its collaborative norms can function as a strategic internal resource by facilitating knowledge exchange, joint problem solving and coordinated delivery across departments and programs. RBV is relevant because it explains why technical and financial resources may not produce the expected results unless employees are willing and able to collaborate. A supportive culture enables agencies to combine individual expertise and convert it into organizational capability. However, RBV may understate external constraints and does not fully explain when collaboration becomes excessive. It is therefore complemented

by the Competing Values Framework, which locates clan culture within wider tensions between flexibility, control, internal integration and external orientation.

The Competing Values Framework (CVF), developed by Quinn and Cameron (1983) and extended by Cameron and Quinn (2006), classifies organizational culture using two dimensions: flexibility versus stability and internal orientation versus external orientation. Clan culture combines internal focus with flexibility. It emphasizes participation, teamwork, employee development, loyalty and cohesion. The framework predicts that clan culture contributes to effectiveness through human relations, commitment and collective capability.

The CVF is appropriate for this study because UN agencies depend on cooperation among diverse specialists and departments. Clan practices can create a common identity and reduce fragmentation. The theory nevertheless acknowledges competing values: collaboration should not eliminate clear performance expectations, external responsiveness or procedural accountability. The study therefore evaluates whether the clan orientation makes a measurable independent contribution to agency performance.

3. Empirical Review and Hypothesis Development

Clan culture creates a work environment in which employees are treated as important members of a collective. Leadership is supportive, decisions are participatory and employees receive mentoring and development opportunities. Such conditions can increase psychological safety, encourage knowledge sharing and strengthen willingness to assist colleagues. When employees believe their opinions are valued, they are more likely to identify problems, contribute solutions and accept responsibility for shared outcomes.

Hartnell et al. (2011), in a meta-analytic examination of the CVF, established that clan culture was strongly related to employee attitudes and operational effectiveness. Gong et al. (2020) similarly found that employee participation and collaboration strengthen knowledge creation and innovation in service organizations. Tsai (2011) reported that organizational culture and leadership behavior influence job satisfaction, while Zheng et al. (2010) linked culture, knowledge management and effectiveness. Together, these studies suggest that collaborative values improve performance through motivation, learning and coordinated action.

In UN agencies, clan culture may be especially useful because program outcomes depend on multidisciplinary teams, partnerships and coordination across organizational boundaries. Trust can reduce the reluctance to share information, while mentoring helps employees understand institutional standards and complex operating environments. Employee involvement can also improve the quality and acceptance of decisions. Conversely, an overly inward-looking clan may favor harmony over difficult performance conversations or become slow when consensus is required. Effective clan culture should therefore combine support with accountability and timely decision-making.

Although the literature supports a positive relationship, evidence from Nairobi-based intergovernmental organizations remains limited. Differences in nationality, professional identity, contract status and agency mandate may shape how clan practices

influence performance. The present study addressed this gap by testing the following null hypothesis:

H₀₁: Clan culture has no significant influence on the performance of United Nations agencies in Nairobi, Kenya.

4. Research Methodology

The study adopted a positivist philosophy and explanatory cross-sectional survey design. The target population comprised 302 top managers drawn from 15 UN agencies operating in Nairobi. A sample of 172 respondents was selected proportionately across the agencies using stratified and simple random sampling procedures. Top managers were appropriate because their roles gave them direct knowledge of organizational culture, program implementation and agency performance. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire with five-point Likert-scale items.

A pilot test involving 10 UNEP employees was undertaken outside the final sample to assess item clarity and reliability. Supervisors and subject experts assessed face and content validity, while exploratory factor analysis assessed construct validity. Internal consistency was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha, with coefficients meeting the accepted threshold of .70.

Data analysis involved frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations, skewness, kurtosis, Pearson correlation and multiple regression. The hypothesis was evaluated at the .05 significance level. The regression coefficient for clan culture was estimated within the thesis's full direct-effects model, which controlled for the other measured cultural dimensions. Regression diagnostics indicated that normality, linearity, multicollinearity and homoscedasticity assumptions were adequately satisfied.

5. Results

Of the 172 questionnaires distributed, 160 were returned and 148 were complete and usable, giving an 86.1% usable response rate. Male respondents comprised 53.4% and female respondents 46.6%. Most respondents were aged 26–35 years (54.1%), followed by those aged 36–45 years (32.4%). A majority had worked in UN agencies for one to three years (60.8%), while 25.7% had four to six years of experience.

5.1. Descriptive Statistics for Clan Culture

Clan culture recorded an overall mean of 4.086 and standard deviation of 0.862, indicating that respondents generally agreed that collaborative practices were present. The highest-rated item was possession of the technical skills required for effective job performance ($M = 4.264$, $SD = 0.992$), followed by a strong sense of belonging ($M = 4.210$, $SD = 1.108$), the view that collaboration improves performance ($M = 4.169$, $SD = 1.019$), and active participation in team meetings ($M = 4.101$, $SD = 0.974$). Sector knowledge ($M = 3.027$) and participation in training ($M = 3.196$) were comparatively weaker, revealing areas for improvement.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Clan Culture

n=148	Mean	Std. dev.
I have the necessary technical skills to perform my job effectively.	4.264	0.992
I am confident in my ability to solve work-related problems.	3.784	0.900
I possess adequate knowledge about the humanitarian sector and refugee operations.	3.027	1.043
I frequently participate in job-related training and development programs.	3.196	1.111
I feel that my opinions are valued by my team and supervisors.	3.905	0.852
I actively participate in team meetings and discussions.	4.101	0.974
Collaboration between colleagues improves work performance.	4.169	1.019
I feel a strong sense of belonging within the organization.	4.210	1.108
Overall clan culture	4.086	0.862

5.2. Descriptive Statistics for Performance of UN Agencies

The descriptive results indicate that employees generally perceived UN agencies in Nairobi as performing effectively, particularly in achieving planned goals, aligning programs with global priorities and beneficiary needs, coordinating with partners, generating sustainable program benefits and using resources efficiently. Stakeholder satisfaction was also rated positively, while relatively lower ratings for accountability and transparency ($M = 3.960$) and learning, innovation, and continuous improvement ($M = 3.818$) suggest areas requiring improvement. Although the aggregate performance score was moderate ($M = 3.073$, $SD = 0.856$), the overall findings suggest that UN agencies performed strongly in strategic alignment, coordination, resource utilization, goal achievement, and sustainability but should strengthen innovation and evidence-based accountability practices.

Table 2: Performance of UN Agencies

n=148	Mean	Std. Dev
The agency's programs match global priorities and beneficiary needs.	4.338	0.877
The agency coordinates and collaborates well with other UN entities and partners.	4.264	0.899
The agency uses its financial, human, and logistical resources efficiently.	4.196	0.830
The agency consistently meets its planned goals and expected results.	4.412	0.824
The agency's programs produce lasting benefits beyond the project period.	4.257	0.897
The agency promotes learning, innovation, and continuous improvement.	3.818	1.119
The agency ensures accountability and transparency through evidence-based reporting and evaluation.	3.960	1.075
Stakeholders and beneficiaries are satisfied with the agency's responsiveness and quality of services.	4.027	1.100
performance	3.073	0.856

5.3. Correlation

As presented in Table 3, clan culture had a strong, positive and statistically significant correlation with the performance of UN agencies in Nairobi ($r = .841$, $p < .01$). This finding indicates that higher levels of teamwork, employee involvement, collaboration, trust and organizational belonging were associated with improved agency performance.

However, because correlation does not establish causality, regression analysis was subsequently conducted to determine the effect of clan culture on performance.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis

	Performance	Clan culture
Performance	1	
Clan culture	.841**	1

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: (Survey Data, 2025)

5.4. Regression Results (Hypothesis Testing)

The simple linear regression results presented in Table 4 show that clan culture had a positive and statistically significant influence on the performance of United Nations agencies in Nairobi ($\beta = 0.841$, $p < .001$). This implies that a one-unit increase in clan culture was associated with a 0.835-unit increase in performance. The model produced an R^2 of 0.707, indicating that clan culture explained 70.7% of the variation in the performance of UN agencies, while the remaining 29.3% was attributable to other factors not included in the model. The model was statistically significant, $F(1, 146) = 351.77$, $p < .001$, confirming that clan culture significantly predicted performance. Therefore, H_{01} was rejected, and the study concluded that clan culture had a positive and statistically significant influence on the performance of United Nations agencies in Nairobi, Kenya.

Table 4: Effect of Clan Culture on Performance

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
	B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.498	0.143		3.495	0.001
Clan culture	0.835	0.044	0.841	18.756	0.000
Model Summary Statistics					
R	.841				
R Square	0.707				
Adjusted R Square	0.705				
Std. Error of the Estimate	0.465				
ANOVA (Model Goodness of Fit Statistics)					
F	351.77				
Sig.	.000b				
a Dependent Variable: performance					

6. Discussion of Findings

The study established that clan culture had a positive and statistically significant influence on the performance of UN agencies in Nairobi. The finding demonstrates that a collaborative work environment characterized by trust, employee involvement, teamwork and belonging contributes to effective program implementation. Employees who feel supported and valued are more likely to share knowledge, assist colleagues and remain committed to organizational objectives. In a multicultural institution, these practices can build cohesion across national, professional and functional differences.

The result supports the Resource-Based View because collaborative norms and trusted relationships operate as intangible resources that enable agencies to combine individual expertise into coordinated organizational capability. Unlike formal assets, these relationships develop through repeated interaction and are difficult to imitate. Clan culture therefore contributes to performance not merely by improving employee satisfaction but by strengthening the agency's capacity to mobilize knowledge and respond collectively to operational challenges.

The finding is also consistent with the Competing Values Framework, which associates clan culture with cohesion, morale and human development. It agrees with Hartnell et al. (2011), who found strong relationships between clan values, employee attitudes and effectiveness. The result further supports Gong et al. (2020), who established that participation and collaboration strengthen knowledge and innovation, and Tsai (2011), who linked supportive culture and leadership with job satisfaction. These mechanisms are important in UN agencies, where program delivery depends on coordinated contributions from multiple teams and partners.

The descriptive findings provide additional insight. Respondents strongly endorsed technical capability, participation, collaboration and belonging, but ratings were lower for humanitarian-sector knowledge and access to training. This pattern suggests that agencies possess a strong relational foundation but should invest more consistently in professional development. Collaboration is most effective when employees also have current technical and contextual knowledge. Management should therefore connect the supportive features of clan culture with structured learning, performance expectations and timely decision-making.

7. Conclusion

The study concludes that clan culture is an important determinant of the performance of UN agencies in Nairobi. Teamwork, trust, employee voice, participation and a strong sense of belonging improve commitment, information sharing, coordination and program execution. The significant regression coefficient shows that clan culture makes an independent contribution to performance even after accounting for other cultural dimensions. However, its value depends on maintaining accountability and strengthening the comparatively weaker areas of sector knowledge and employee training.

8. Recommendations

8.1. Managerial Implications

UN agency managers should strengthen clan culture through participatory decision-making, cross-functional teams, mentoring, team-building programs and regular learning forums. Supervisors should create safe channels for employee voice and provide timely feedback on staff suggestions. Agencies should recognize collaborative behavior and team achievements in performance-management systems. Greater investment is needed in humanitarian-sector training and continuous professional development so that strong relationships are matched by relevant technical capability.

8.2. Policy Implications

Human-resource and operational policies should formally support teamwork, mentoring, knowledge sharing and employee participation. Policies should provide minimum expectations for induction, refresher training and cross-agency learning. At

the same time, collaborative decision-making should be supported by clear responsibility, deadlines and performance standards to prevent consensus processes from delaying urgent action.

8.3. Theoretical Implications

The findings extend RBV by demonstrating that clan culture functions as a valuable intangible capability in intergovernmental organizations. They also support the CVF proposition that internally focused flexibility contributes to effectiveness through cohesion and employee development. The study shows that these theoretical relationships remain relevant within multicultural UN agencies operating in Nairobi.

9. Limitations and Further Research

The cross-sectional design limits causal inference, while self-reported data may be influenced by common-method and social-desirability bias. The Nairobi focus also limits generalization to UN operations in other institutional and security contexts. Future research should employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs, incorporate objective program indicators and compare clan culture across UN agencies and countries. Studies could also examine whether employee engagement, knowledge sharing or psychological safety mediates the relationship between clan culture and performance.

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