

Employee Perceptions of Collaborative Organizational Culture

Ahmed Bello

Igbinedion University, Okada, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Collaborative culture has become a priority for organizations seeking innovation and employee retention. This study examines how employees experience and make meaning of working in environments that emphasize teamwork. A qualitative literature review method was employed following systematic procedures for article identification and thematic synthesis. The analysis reveals that employee experience in collaborative culture is shaped by leadership style, psychological safety, training and development, and organizational justice. Transformational leaders who model collaborative behavior create conditions where employees feel safe to share ideas and take risks. Employees who experience fair recognition for their team contributions develop stronger affective commitment to the organization. The relationship between autonomy and collaboration requires careful balance as excessive teamwork can overwhelm employees who need independent work time. Technology enables virtual collaboration but requires new approaches to building trust and relationships. Positive collaborative experiences enhance employee engagement, loyalty, and organizational citizenship behavior. Organizations that invest in creating meaningful collaborative experiences enjoy higher retention rates and stronger innovation capabilities. Future research should employ phenomenological approaches to capture the subjective richness of collaborative experiences across different industries and cultural settings.

INTRODUCTION

Modern organizations increasingly realize that long-term success is determined not only by business strategies or technology, but also by the quality of relationships among individuals within them. A work environment that encourages teamwork creates space for employees to share knowledge, support one another, and solve problems collectively (Barkova, 2023). Proper management of organizational values, particularly in organizations with diverse cultural backgrounds, likewise helps build a shared foundation for the creation of teamwork (Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2021). According to Edmondson (1999), teams possessing high psychological safety are more capable of learning from mistakes and generating innovation. A collaborative culture does not emerge by itself, but rather is shaped through management policies, leadership role modeling, and daily experiences undergone by employees. Every interaction among coworkers, ranging from routine meetings to informal discussions, contributes to the formation of perceptions regarding whether the

organization truly values cooperation (Potapiuk et al., 2023). Appropriate communication practices in managing cross-cultural teams also serve as a determinant of cooperation success, especially in organizations with diverse employee backgrounds (Sajjapong & Irfan, 2022). Employees who feel that their contributions are valued within the team tend to demonstrate higher engagement. Understanding how employees interpret their experiences in a collaborative culture becomes important for organizations wishing to retain top talent.

Employee experiences in a collaborative culture are subjective and heavily influenced by both internal and external factors. Every individual brings different backgrounds, values, and expectations when entering an organization (Bedwell et al., 2012). Schein (2004) explains that organizational culture consists of three layers, namely artifacts, espoused values, and tacit basic assumptions. Shared narratives and symbols that develop within a group likewise play a role in forming collective identity, as seen in how works and stories can strengthen a group's values and

* Corresponding author, email address: ahmad.bello@gmail.com

identity (Kurniawan et al., 2021). This layer of basic assumptions is the most difficult to change and exerts the most influence on how employees perceive their work environment. In a culture emphasizing collaboration, basic assumptions such as trust in teammates and the belief that cooperation yields better results become the foundation. This process illustrates how individual thoughts can evolve into a collective understanding that shapes the direction of shared decisions within an organization (Darmawan, 2024). Employees possessing positive experiences in teams will develop a strong sense of belonging toward the organization. Conversely, negative experiences such as unresolved conflicts or unfairness in task distribution can damage perceptions of the collaborative culture (Chawla & Jain, 2021). Organizations need to understand that each employee's experience is unique and cannot be generalized.

Transformational leadership has been identified as a crucial factor shaping employee experiences in a collaborative culture. Leaders capable of inspiring and motivating teams create conditions where employees feel safe to take risks and voice ideas. Hariharan and Anand (2023) find that organizational learning flows are heavily influenced by the leadership style applied. The application of leadership styles tailored to organizational conditions is likewise proven to assist more precise decision-making in continuously changing situations (Darmawan, 2024). Leaders who encourage knowledge exchange and cross-functional collaboration will accelerate the organizational learning process. Employees working under transformational leaders report higher levels of job satisfaction and fewer intentions to leave the organization. The situational leadership approach in organizations with cultural diversity is also proven capable of enhancing overall team performance (Gardi et al., 2024). Oorschot, Moscardo, and Blackman (2021) add that the psychological contract between leaders and subordinates determines the extent to which employees feel the organization fulfills their expectations. When leaders are consistent in their collaborative behaviors, employees will emulate those behaviors and disseminate them throughout the organization. Positive collaborative experiences become a self-reinforcing cycle.

Organizational support for employee development likewise influences how collaborative experiences are perceived (Djahid, 2023). Training designed to improve teamwork

skills provides employees with tools to interact effectively. Haritha and Reddy (2017) emphasize that training constitutes a key component in sustainable human resource development initiatives. Support from integrated management information systems also helps organizations make more strategic decisions in supporting employee development (da Silva & Darmawan, 2023). Employees receiving training on effective communication and conflict resolution demonstrate improvements in team collaboration quality. Ozkeser (2019) finds that proper training enhances employee motivation to participate actively in team activities. Optimal data utilization likewise strengthens the managerial decision-making process in designing development programs suited to employee needs (Ali & Darmawan, 2023). Development programs focusing on trust building and interpersonal skills create a foundation for a strong collaborative culture. Employees who feel the organization invests in their growth tend to respond with higher commitment toward team goals. Targeted technology strategies in developing training programs likewise support the creation of sustainable innovation for the organization (Mardikaningsih & Hariani, 2023). Collaborative experiences supported by adequate training yield higher productivity and greater job satisfaction (Fiore et al., 2018).

The primary issue in employee experiences within a collaborative culture lies in the gap between the values proclaimed by the organization and the reality experienced by employees on a daily basis. Many organizations declare commitment to teamwork, yet reward and promotion structures remain based on individual achievements. The gap between stated values and actual obligations fulfilled by the organization is also apparent in how local legal provisions are frequently not fully complied with despite having been promised from the outset (Waluyo et al., 2024). Conflict between collaborative values and individual incentive systems creates confusion and dissatisfaction among employees. Newman and Ford (2022) observe that organizations frequently fail to demonstrate their loyalty to employees through concrete actions, even though they expect loyalty from employees. The tension arising from this kind of gap requires a clear resolution mechanism so that working relationships remain maintained (Khayru, 2024). Employees who feel exploited within teams without fair recognition will develop cynical

attitudes toward the collaborative culture. They may continue to work together formally but without true emotional commitment. This situation creates pseudo-collaboration that does not yield meaningful innovation or performance improvement. Similar issues between parties possessing greater power and those who are weaker within an organization likewise require clear rules so that conflicts can be resolved fairly (Rahayu et al., 2024). Dutta and Dhir (2021) emphasize that employee loyalty must be measured and managed carefully to avoid misunderstandings.

Another equally important issue is the organization's inability to accommodate individual differences in cooperation preferences. Not all employees enjoy or thrive in a highly collaborative environment. Miller and Hill (2017) find that deep employee engagement requires approaches tailored to individual needs. Some employees require autonomy and time to work independently before contributing to team discussions. Introverted employees may feel overburdened by overly frequent meetings and intense social interaction. Organizations forcing uniform collaboration on all employees risk alienating individuals who contribute best when working alone. Preferences for work autonomy become increasingly relevant in digital platform-based working models, where algorithmic control can actually limit individuals' room to maneuver in determining their own working methods (Rohmawati & Mardikaningsih, 2023). Mittal (2019) adds that employee empowerment must consider individual work preferences to generate optimal engagement. Failure to balance collaboration needs and autonomy can reduce overall team effectiveness. Generational differences also influence preferences regarding collaboration methods, with the younger generation being more comfortable with digital tools compared to face-to-face meetings.

Employees face new challenges in building collaborative relationships without frequent physical interaction (Ghar, 2024). Regulatory gaps protecting flexible workers in the digital platform economy likewise constitute a separate challenge in maintaining the quality of working relationships in virtual environments (Hambodo & Darmawan, 2024). Mardikaningsih and Darmawan (2022) observe that digital human resource practices in remote working systems require new approaches to build engagement. Employee experiences in the digital workplace become a primary concern for modern human resource management. The application of technology supporting efficiency and

transparency of work processes likewise helps maintain collaboration quality even though physical interaction decreases (Gardi & Darmawan, 2024). Organizations failing to create meaningful collaborative experiences in virtual environments will lose talented employees. Without deep understanding of what makes collaboration valuable for employees, companies cannot design effective interventions. Change management accompanied by appropriate technology strategies serves as the key to organizational success in facing such digital transformations (Sinambela, 2023).

The objective of this research is to construct a conceptual framework explaining how employees interpret their experiences in a collaborative culture and identifying the factors shaping those meanings. This research provides a theoretical contribution in the form of an expanded understanding of employees' subjective experiences within the context of a collaborative culture, which has thus far been predominantly discussed from a management perspective. Its practical contribution is a guide for managers and human resource practitioners to design interventions that enhance the quality of employees' collaborative experiences. Companies can use this framework to evaluate the effectiveness of their organizational culture programs from the employee perspective.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research employs a qualitative literature study approach with a systematic procedure to identify, evaluate, and synthesize findings from various written sources. According to Fink (2005), literature studies in the realm of social sciences aim to produce narrative syntheses capable of identifying patterns of relationships among variables that remain invisible in individual studies. The research process begins with the formulation of clear questions regarding employee experiences in a collaborative culture. Literature searches are conducted through international academic databases such as EBSCO, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect using combinations of keywords such as employee experience, collaborative culture, teamwork, and organizational culture. Inclusion criteria are applied to ensure that only studies employing empirical methods with adequate samples are included in the synthesis. Theoretical studies without data, commercial industry reports, and opinion articles are excluded except for the purpose of conceptual framework development. Cooper (2003) emphasizes the importance of documenting every decision in the literature selection process to enable replication by

other researchers. The bibliographies of identified articles are also examined to uncover additional relevant studies through the snowballing method.

Data analysis in this literature study applies the thematic synthesis method outlined by Thomas and Harden (2008). The first stage of analysis is open coding, where each statement in the articles concerning employee experiences in a collaborative culture is assigned a descriptive label. The resulting codes are subsequently grouped into broader categories such as experiential dimensions, forming factors, and consequences. The second stage is the development of descriptive themes by mapping the frequency and consistency of themes reported across the studies. The third stage is the development of analytical themes, wherein the researcher moves beyond the content of individual studies to generate new propositions regarding how collaborative experiences are shaped and interpreted by employees. Jesson et al. (2011) recommend using flowchart diagrams to visualize the document selection process and matrices to present the characteristics of the synthesized studies. The validity of the findings is maintained through cross-checking by two independent researchers who extract data from the same sample of articles. Differences in interpretation are resolved through discussions referring to pre-established operational definitions. This study does not aim to test hypotheses statistically, but rather to develop a conceptual framework that can be tested in subsequent qualitative research.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Employee experiences in a collaborative culture are shaped by the interaction between individual factors, team factors, and organizational factors (Scott & Manning, 2022). Robbins and Judge (2019) explain that organizational behavior is influenced by individual characteristics such as personality, values, and attitudes which subsequently interact with team norms and organizational policies. The diversity of employee backgrounds within a team demands an inclusive approach so that every individual feels recognized in the cooperation process (Mardikaningsih & Hariani, 2022). Employees with open and sociable personalities tend to enjoy collaborative environments much more than more introverted employees. Nevertheless, even introverted employees can thrive in teams if the collaboration structure respects their need for alone time (Marjanović et al., 2023). The support perceived by employees in a diverse work environment likewise determines

the extent to which they are able to adapt to the demands of team collaboration (Hariani et al., 2021). Qin (2024) finds that building a positive corporate culture significantly enhances employee sense of belonging. Employees who feel that they are part of something larger than themselves will be more motivated to contribute within teams. An adaptive approach based on a socio-cultural perspective is also relevant to apply so that employees with different backgrounds can adjust to team work demands (Oluwatoyin & Mardikaningsih, 2022). This sense of belonging emerges when organizations consistently communicate collaborative values through concrete actions rather than mere slogans. Positive collaborative experiences strengthen employee identification with the organization and reduce the intention to leave.

Supportive leadership serves as a primary determinant of how employees interpret their collaborative experiences (Zaitouni & Ouakouak, 2018). Rojak et al. (2022) observe that transformational leadership acts as an agent of change within the organization's value system. The application of flexible and adaptive situational leadership styles is also proven to enhance employee engagement simultaneously while accelerating team development (Rojak & Darmawan, 2023). Leaders who actively model collaborative behaviors create norms followed by other team members. Employees who see their leaders share credit for successes and accept responsibility for failures will develop greater trust. Oorschot, Moscardo, and Blackman (2021) emphasize that the psychological contract between leaders and subordinates heavily determines the quality of work experience. When the psychological contract is violated, such as when leaders take credit for subordinates' ideas, employees experience profound disappointment. Servant leadership, wherein leaders prioritize team needs over personal interests, creates an environment where collaboration flourishes. Employees in such environments report higher levels of satisfaction and engagement. Collaborative experiences become meaningful when employees feel heard and valued.

Organizational culture that values differences of opinion actually strengthens collaboration rather than weakening it (Curşeu et al., 2016). Trninic, Swanson, and Kapur (2018) find that productive disagreement within learning communities drives critical thinking and innovation. The role of managers in fostering a culture of team innovation and creativity serves as a determinant of whether differences of opinion are directed into new ideas or

instead trigger division (Özkaya et al., 2023). Teams that are overly homogeneous in thought tend to experience groupthink, which hampers creativity. Employees who feel safe to voice differing opinions will be more engaged in the team's decision-making process. Appropriate communication strategies in handling conflict within multicultural teams also help differences of opinion evolve into constructive discussions rather than mere friction (Marsal & Darmawan, 2022). Putra et al. (2021) explain that organizational social capital and team collaboration support each other in the implementation of total quality management. The application of total quality management principles in human resource management likewise reinforces the foundation for teams to trust one another while remaining open to differing viewpoints (Arifin et al., 2022). Trust among team members allows healthy debate to occur without threatening interpersonal relationships. When employees are confident that differences of opinion will not be used against them personally, they are more willing to share unique perspectives. Proper conflict management in the workplace likewise ensures that differences of opinion do not develop into barriers to team productivity (Nuraini et al., 2021). Collaborative experiences become richer when teams are capable of integrating diverse viewpoints into better solutions (Burris & Sohn, 2021). Organizations succeeding in creating a culture like this enjoy higher levels of innovation.

Human resource development through targeted training strengthens employees' capacity to collaborate effectively. Eddine et al. (2023) find that knowledge management and quality of work life jointly influence employee commitment. Training on interpersonal communication, conflict resolution, and teamwork provides employees with the skills necessary to interact constructively. The gamification approach in employee training is proven capable of enhancing engagement simultaneously with the effectiveness of the learning process within organizations (Eddine & Darmawan, 2022). Ozkeser (2019) adds that well-designed training enhances employee motivation to engage in team activities. Employees who are confident in their collaboration skills will be more proactive in seeking cooperation opportunities. Haritha and Reddy (2017) emphasize that training constitutes a key component of sustainable human resource development initiatives. Sustainable development programs, rather than one-off activities, create a learning culture that supports collaboration. The integration of quality of work life into human resource management is also proven to

be closely related to employee well-being and overall performance (Eddine et al., 2021). Employees who continuously develop their skills feel that the organization invests in their growth. Collaborative experiences supported by adequate training yield higher team productivity.

Employee loyalty is formed through the accumulation of positive experiences within the organization, including meaningful collaborative experiences (Smarżewska, 2019). Darmawan et al. (2020) find that human resource quality and job performance correlate positively with employee loyalty. The balance between work life and personal life, supported by family backing, likewise contributes to employee well-being as well as their loyalty toward the organization (Hariani & Mardikaningsih, 2023). Employees who feel their contributions are valued within teams develop emotional bonds with the organization. Dutta and Dhira (2021) develop an employee loyalty measurement instrument encompassing affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment. Positive collaborative experiences primarily influence affective commitment, which is emotional attachment to the organization. When employees possess meaningful relationships with teammates, they are more reluctant to leave the organization despite more financially lucrative offers. The relationship between employee well-being and public organization performance in service delivery also affirms that attention to employee working conditions exerts a tangible impact on team work outcomes (Gautama et al., 2021). Ott, Tolentino, and Michailova (2018) emphasize that effective talent retention approaches must consider interpersonal relationship aspects. Employees possessing strong social bonds in teams are more likely to remain within the organization. Positive collaborative experiences serve as the adhesive binding employees to the organization.

The role of technology in shaping collaborative experiences is increasingly vital in the era of hybrid work (Verma, 2024). Gani and Darmawan (2023) discuss human resource readiness for Generation Alpha entering the digital workplace. This new generation grows up with technology and possesses different expectations regarding how collaboration should occur. The effective use of social media in the work environment is also proven to help build employee engagement even when interactions are conducted digitally (Hariani et al., 2023). Digital communication platforms like Slack, Microsoft

Teams, and Zoom have transformed how teams interact and share information. Employees proficient in utilizing these tools report smoother collaborative experiences despite working from different locations. The formulation of well-prepared communication strategies in change management likewise determines how smoothly the transition toward digital-based collaboration can be accepted by employees (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). Mardikaningsih and Darmawan (2022) observe that digital human resource practices in remote working systems require adjustments to maintain employee engagement. Virtual collaboration demands different communication skills compared to face-to-face collaboration, such as the ability to read tone in written text. Digital access gaps as well as the circulation of misinformation also possess the potential to decrease employee participation levels and trust toward technology-based collaboration processes (Issalillah & Hardyansah, 2022). Employees uncomfortable with digital technology may experience less satisfying collaborative experiences. Organizations need to provide digital literacy training to ensure all employees can participate fully in virtual collaboration. The management of organizational reputation on social media in the digital era likewise requires caution so that a positive image remains maintained amidst increasingly open work interactions (Darmawan et al., 2022).

Employee motivation influences the extent to which they engage in collaborative activities and how they interpret those experiences (Haines, 2021). Jovanovic and Bozilovic (2017) discuss human resource management policies that influence motivation, including policies supporting collaboration. Employees intrinsically motivated by an interest in the work itself tend to be more open to collaboration compared to those motivated solely by external incentives. Darmawan (2024) identifies six key factors enhancing organizational effectiveness, including factors related to motivation and team collaboration. Individual experience, capability, and motivation jointly prove to determine employee performance levels in executing collaborative tasks (Sinambela & Ernawati, 2021). Employees seeing a clear relationship between collaborative efforts and achieved outcomes will be more motivated to participate. When teams successfully achieve goals through cooperation, such experiences reinforce the belief that collaboration is valuable. This positive experience creates a feedback loop strengthening motivation to collaborate in the future. Conversely,

collaborative experiences failing due to poor coordination can damage motivation. Organizations need to design collaboration structures enabling visible success.

Employee involvement in team decision-making influences their perceptions of fairness and ownership over outcomes. Employees involved in team decisions develop a greater sense of ownership toward outcomes (Appiagyei et al., 2012). Mittal (2019) emphasizes that employee empowerment through involvement in decision-making enhances their commitment. Human resource capability in analyzing data likewise supports more targeted decision-making processes within organizations, including decisions directly involving teams (Khairi & Darmawan, 2022). When decisions are made authoritatively without team input, employees may cooperate outwardly but without inner commitment. Meaningful collaborative experiences occur when every team member feels their opinions are considered seriously. Nasir (2022) discusses how to build a reward culture in the manufacturing industry through the recognition of individual contributions within teams. Sincere recognition of every team member's contribution reinforces the sense that collaboration is fair and valuable. Employees feeling valued tend to invest more in team relationships. Collaborative experiences become a significant source of job satisfaction.

The reciprocal relationship between organizational culture and ethical leadership creates a foundation for positive collaborative experiences (Armenakis et al., 2024). Rojak and Darmawan (2021) explain that ethical leadership and social responsibility in organizational managerial practices reinforce one another. Leaders behaving ethically serve as role models for team members in interacting fairly and respectfully. Human resource policies paying attention to environmental aspects likewise reflect the organization's commitment to sustainability while strengthening employee trust toward the company's policy direction (Hariani et al., 2022). Employees seeing their leaders treat all team members with respect will emulate those behaviors in their own interactions. Work environments based on mutual respect enable more open and honest collaboration. The application of ethical principles in business decision-making also has implications for organizational sustainability as well as relationships with parties outside the company (Mardikaningsih & Darmawan, 2022). When employees believe they will be treated fairly, they are more willing to share information and resources. The fulfillment of legal obligations by business entities, including sole

proprietorships, likewise forms part of organizational responsibility with implications for the trust of parties involved within them (Sujito et al., 2023). Positive collaborative experiences build trust serving as valuable social capital for organizations. Darmawan (2024) emphasizes that organizational effectiveness depends on the distribution of key factors including trust and cooperation. The development of ethical and fair technology also constitutes an important part of organizational responsibility in maintaining employee trust toward the work systems used (Radjawane & Mardikaningsih, 2022). Organizations with high trust levels experience lower transaction costs in collaborative activities. Collaborative experiences based on trust yield superior team performance.

The physical dimension of the work experience also influences how employees perceive a collaborative culture. Putra et al. (2022) observe that employee experiences in the digital workplace encompass physical, technological, and cultural aspects. Open office layouts that support informal interaction can encourage spontaneous collaboration. Employees working in spaces designed for collaboration report more meaningful interactions with coworkers. Nevertheless, open spaces can also disrupt concentration for employees who require quiet for deep work. A balance between collaborative space and private space becomes important to accommodate differing work preferences. The implementation of systematic risk management in information technology projects likewise serves as a determinant of infrastructure success supporting collaboration within dynamic work environments (Silva et al., 2022). Collaboration technologies such as shared screens and digital whiteboards facilitate cooperation within geographically dispersed teams. Employees possessing access to adequate collaboration tools report more positive experiences. The utilization of digital technologies like big data and the internet of things in work processes also expands infrastructure scope supporting more efficient inter-team coordination (Putra & Arifin, 2021). Investment in physical and technological environments supporting collaboration constitutes an important part of the employee experience strategy. Positive collaborative experiences depend not only on interpersonal relationships but also on the infrastructure supporting them.

The impact of positive collaborative experiences extends beyond the team and influences the entire organization (Kristensen & Kijl, 2012). According to Darmawan et al. (2020), good human resource

quality and job performance enhance employee loyalty. Employees with positive collaborative experiences tend to become brand ambassadors who promote the organization to prospective employees. An organization's reputation as a collaborative workplace attracts talent that values teamwork. New employees joining due to collaborative reputations will bring expectations aligned with the organizational culture. Positive collaborative experiences reduce turnover rates and associated recruitment costs. Teams possessing good collaborative experiences demonstrate higher productivity and better work quality. Organizations succeeding in creating a positive collaborative culture enjoy competitive advantages that are difficult to imitate. Collaborative experiences become a valuable intangible asset for the long-term success of the organization. Investment in creating positive collaborative experiences provides returns through enhanced performance and retention.

CONCLUSION

Employee experiences in a collaborative culture are shaped by the complex interaction among individual factors, leadership, organizational structure, and the work environment. Employees interpret their collaborative experiences through the lens of fairness, recognition, autonomy, and interpersonal relationships formed within teams. Supportive and ethical leadership creates the foundation of trust that enables meaningful collaboration. Sustainable training and development equip employees with the skills necessary to collaborate effectively. Positive collaborative experiences enhance employee engagement, loyalty, and overall performance. Organizations succeeding in creating a supportive collaborative environment enjoy higher retention rates and a stronger culture of innovation. Digital technology facilitates virtual collaboration yet requires new approaches in building relationships and trust. The balance between collaboration and individual autonomy is important to accommodate diverse work preferences. Positive collaborative experiences serve as a strategic asset providing sustainable competitive advantage for organizations.

The theoretical implication of this research is the expansion of understanding regarding employees' subjective experiences in a collaborative culture as a multidimensional construct. Its practical implications encompass recommendations for managers to actively model collaborative behaviors, provide interpersonal skill training, and design reward systems that appreciate team contributions. Suggestions for future research involve conducting in-depth

phenomenological studies to explore employee experiences from various industry backgrounds. Companies are advised to regularly collect qualitative feedback regarding employees' collaborative experiences and use such insights for continuous improvement. Collaboration between human resources departments and operational management is necessary to design effective interventions.

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