

# The Role of Organizational Culture on Spiritual Formation of Church Members in districts of Wolaita KHC, Ethiopia.

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**Abstract:** Spiritual formation is the most urgent need of evangelical churches today, with organizational culture expected to play a critical role in the process of bringing change among church members in the districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia. Lack of spiritual formation results in the development of immorality among church members. Spirituality crisis is a base for moral, economic and political crisis of the modern world. The purpose of this study is to investigate the role of organizational culture on spiritual formation of church members in the districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia. The study used a descriptive survey research design. Open and closed ended questionnaires being used to collect data from 385 church members and leaders. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Version 27. The results indicates that organizational culture had a strong positive correlation with spiritual formation at ( $R=0.684$ ,  $p<.01$ ) and the coefficients of determination of the role of organizational culture were 15.8% and 28.3% respectively. It brought 12.5% change in spiritual formation among church members. The study has a potential contribution to the body of knowledge in churches of Wolaita Sodo, Ethiopia and beyond.

*Key Terms:* Organizational Culture, Spiritual Formation, Church members

## I. Introduction

Spiritual formation is spiritual development. This is an essential factor for the church ministry (Kediso, 2023). It is an intrinsic personal experience of Christians. It also a practice of people to grow in the midst of moral struggle (Kuri, 2023; Doehring, 2019). However, in this modern world, spiritual formation among evangelicals has been in a critical stage (Kuri, 2023). There is spiritual crisis in the churches all over the world (Porter et al., 2019). According to Nabozny and Wysocki (2023), crises and challenges have been an integral part of church experience throughout the history of churches. In this regard, spirituality has obtained special attention in the modern world because of its deep systematic crisis (Stamova et al., 2021).

Organizational culture plays a critical role in reflecting the core values of the organization and nurturing its culture for effective performance (Munyao, 2021). Organizational culture is a system of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs, which govern how people act or behave in organization (Faith, 2018). When people share values in the organization systems, these shared values bring a strong impact on the people. Organizational culture carries a sense of identity for the members. It enhances its system stability and works as a sensemaking tool which guides and shapes the behavior of members (Faith, 2018). Organizational culture has a significant effect on employee performance (Ali et al., 2022; Erniwati, et al., 2020; Ihsani & Wijavanto, 2020). Organizational culture can encourage or discourage effectiveness, depending on the nature of values, beliefs, and norms. Arumi et al. (2019), describe organizational culture as sharing experiences, living according to the core values of the organization, trusting and respecting others' way of thinking. In this study, organizational culture plays a critical role to bring spiritual formation among church members of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia.

## II. Problem Statement

The churches are facing spiritual emptiness, tribal conflicts, religious upheavals and self-destruction that affects and threatens the future growth of spirituality (Desta 2020; Kim, 2021). Deuel et al (2019) noted that “the growth of Christianity in the Global South has been accompanied by the growth of heresies and spurious doctrines of every kind” (p.6). Kretschmar (2020) and Knoetze (2022), argued that there is spiritual life decline among the current evangelical church believers. This is because spiritual and moral problems can paralyze a person’s ability to think positively and to take action in the right way (Karle, 2023). In Ethiopia, there are several challenges of spiritual formation. There are divisions among church members (Abera, 2019; Menta et al., 2022), corruption (Shumetie & Watabji, 2019), omission of the Great Commission (Ferreira & Chipenyu, 2021; Knoetze & Wotangeo, 2023). If this situation continues as it is, the church in the future will no longer exist (Dames, 2020).

### III. Concept of Organization Culture

Organizational culture refers to a set of beliefs, values, and assumptions of members in an organization (Meng & Berger, 2019). It can encourage or discourage effectiveness, depending on the nature of values, beliefs, and norms. Arumi et al. (2019) describe organizational culture as sharing experiences, living according to the core values of the organization, trusting and respecting others' way of thinking. Various studies conducted at global, regional, and local levels confirm that organizational culture plays a moderating role in bringing positive change in organizations (Ademba, 2021). A study conducted in Indonesia indicated that organizational culture had a positive effect on the performance of employees in the organization (Pallawagaw, 2021). A study conducted in India showed that organizational culture played a mediating role in the relationship between transformational leadership and management, brought positive and significant change (Baga et al., 2023). These studies indicate that organizational culture plays a significant role in organizations to bring change.

In the African context, a study conducted in Nigeria revealed that organizational culture had an interceding impact on the Total Quality Management of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) performance (Eniola et al., 2019). A study conducted by Ademba (2021) indicated that organizational culture had a significant and positive effect on the performance of employees at 10 top tier Commercial Banks of Kenya.

In the Ethiopian context, a study conducted in Wolaita Zone showed that OC contributed to the local churches being well-led through challenges which are displayed in the WKHC administration (Kenta, 2022). In this regard, the above studies conducted at global, regional, and local levels proved that, indeed, organizational culture had a moderating effect on the relationship between ethical leadership and spiritual formation among church members in three selected districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia.

The five measurable elements of organizational culture are: Core values, policies and procedures, work environment, employee engagement, and stakeholders’ engagement. The study discusses below the concepts of each element.

Core values are the first elements of organizational culture in this study. According to Askeland et al. (2020), values link the purpose of the organization. They direct the effort of practices. The core values of EKHC; such as the supremacy of God’s word, love, leading by the Holy Spirit, prayer, stewardship, servant leadership and holistic ministry guided all church members to spiritual growth (Kenta, 2022).

Another element of organizational culture is policies and procedures. According Amanda (2022), policies and procedures help employees understand the strategies of the organization to do what is required by the law. These church policies and procedures help church members in spiritual formation.

Work environment is the third element of organizational culture. It includes all things that exist around employees; both physical and psychological issues (Badrianto & Ekhsan, 2020). Putri et al. (2019) noted that a comfortable work environment creates enthusiasm and improves the work performance of employees. In this regard, work environment contributes to spiritual formation of church members.

Employee engagement is the fourth measurable element of organizational culture. It is the most important factor for the success of an organization (Susanto et al., 2023). According to Heslina and Syahrani (2021), employee engagement has a positive and significant effect on employee performance. In the church context, active participation of church members in all church programs contributes to spiritual formation (Kuri, 2023).

The fifth element of organizational culture is stakeholders’ engagement. Stakeholders are the people who are affected by the conduct of an organization; directly or indirectly (Waheed & Zhang, 2022; Wang, 2022). According to Gerlak et al. (2023), stakeholder engagement is a process by which stakeholders are engaged and impact society. This could be by offering scholarships from around the world and sharing many personal and environmental issues. In the church context, stakeholders have a significant contribution for spiritual formation of church members.

### IV. Concept of Spiritual Formation

Spiritual formation is a current urgent need of church members (Crete et al., 2020; Knoetze, 2022). Ferreira (2021), explains spiritual formation as an individual experience of Christians who strive to grow and become Christ-like in their internal life. Kediso

(2023) explains that spiritual formation is spiritual development. This is an essential factor for the church ministry. Drexler and Bagby (2021), define spiritual formation as a biblically guided process of growth.

Spiritual formation was an area of interest in this study due to the fact that church members have failed to live a genuine Christian life (Desta et al., 2020). Spiritual formation is needed because there is lack of practical Christianity among church members. There are five measurable elements of spiritual formation that church members should practice. These elements are: Growing into Christ-likeness, building relationships, being missional, enhancing spiritual learning, and developing community (Tang, 2014). The first measurable element of spiritual formation is church members growing into Christ-likeness. Growing into Christ-likeness is a fundamental for the church mission (Chiroma & Chiroma, 2021). The church members are called to live in Christ-likeness (NIV 1985, 1Corinthians 11:1). The process of growing into Christ-likeness includes the practice of prayer, reading the scripture and making daily communication with God (Lam, 2020). This is what expected from each member of the church.

The second measurable element of spiritual formation is building relationships. According to Emeka-Okoli et al (2024), building positive relationships is essential for fostering a conducive environment for business sustainability. Building relationships enhances informal conversations, maintains the strategies of team building and develops transparency (Barrabe et al., 2021). The Bible clearly teaches that building relationship brings both genuine unity and spiritual blessing (NIV 2001, Psalms 133:1-3).

The third measurable element of spiritual formation is being missional. Being missional means proclaiming the good news in the world and making disciples to flourish in their spiritual life (Niemandt & Niemandt, 2021). Mission is a task of the church that needs to be cultivated by forming missionary leaders (Kidiso, 2023). This study endeavored to establish missionary practices because they are measurable in the process of spiritual formation of church members.

The fourth measurable element of spiritual formation is enhancing learning. According to Niemandt and Niemandt (2021), theological education is fundamental to bring spiritual formation of church members. Christian education equips leaders who are able to train others for God's mission. Enhancing learning contributed to spiritual formation. It was practiced among early church members (NIV Acts, 2:41-42).

The fifth measurable element of spiritual formation is building community. According to Sarkus (2022), community can be built by improving relationships and nurturing trust among people. Community needs empowerment and development. Empowerment solves various problems and improves the life of the community (Kustati, 2021; Samsu et al., 2021). Thus, building community is a base for spiritual formation of church members in Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia.

## V. Methodology

The study used a descriptive survey research design with open and closed ended questionnaires being used to collect data from 385 church leaders. The study used simple random sampling techniques to select study participants. Open and closed ended questionnaires were administered to collect data for quantitative data. Data was analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Science (SPSS) Version 30 for quantitative data. The study conducted correlation analysis with organizational culture and spiritual formation and regression analysis. The following section discusses the results of the study.

## VI. Results

The results presented in Table 1 below, there is a strong positive relationship that exists between organizational culture and spiritual formation at ( $R=0.684$ ,  $p<.01$ ). This could imply that spiritual formation increases directly in proportion to organizational culture among church members in of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia. The results of this study are consistent with previous study findings of Kapur (2021) and Isensee et al. (2020), which indicate that organizational culture affects organizations and plays a moderating role in bringing spiritual formation to church members.

**Table 1. Correlation Analysis for Organizational Culture and Spiritual Formation**

		Organizational Culture	Spiritual Formation
Organization culture	Pearson Correlation	1	.684**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	385	385
Spiritual formation	Pearson Correlation	.684**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	385	385

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

Source: Field data (2025)

The findings in Table 2. below indicates that the model summary of the role of organizational culture on spiritual formation among church members. Based on these results, both models were statistically significant at 5 percent significance level. A p-value was

less than 5% significance level. This implies that organizational culture has a significant effect on the spiritual formation among church members in districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia. The coefficients of determination without and with moderating effect of organizational culture were 15.8% and 28.3% respectively. This indicates that the moderating effect of organizational culture brought 12.5% change in spiritual formation among church members in three selected districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia.

**Table 2: Model Summary of the Role of Organizational Culture**

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F
1	.398 <sup>a</sup>	.158	.149	.81504	.158	17.548	4	374	.000	
2	.532 <sup>b</sup>	.283	.273	.75319	.125	64.946	1	373	.000	

Model summary of the Role of Organizational Culture on Spiritual Formation

Source: Field data (2024)

These study findings revealed that organizational culture has a significant role on spiritual formation among church members in districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia. Other previous studies done by Isensee et al. (2020) and Meng and Berger (2019), confirmed that organizational culture had a strong impact on changes in human life.

## VII. Discussion

Organizational culture is one of the components that brings effect to organizations. In the process of spiritual formation, organizational culture can play a moderating role in bringing spiritual formation to church members (Kapur, 2017). Culture is the total thoughts, works, and results of human action ((Paaris & Pattiruhu, 2020). Organizational culture plays a critical role in reflecting the core values of the organization and nurturing its culture for effective performance (Munyao, 2021).

This study provided not only valuable input into the three districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia, but also it contributes to scholarly research in the field of organizational culture, and spiritual formation of church members. The study confirmed the role of organizational culture had a significant positive effect of on the spiritual formation of church members. Additionally, this research advances the understanding and importance of organizational culture and how it shapes the spiritual lives of church members.

A key factor that led to the conduct of this study was a gap in knowledge from the existing literature on the subject of the spiritual formation of church members. This study made valuable contributions to knowledge in addition to the available literature.

## VIII. Conclusion

Spiritual formation of church members is a major factor that needs deep focus. It is an intrinsic personal experience of Christians. It also a practice of people to grow in the midst of moral struggle (Kuri, 2023). On the other hand, organizational culture has a significant effect on employee performance (Ali et al., 2022; Ihsani & Wijavanto, 2020) and it enhances stability, guides and shapes the behavior of church members (Faith, 2018).

The study results showed that the role of organizational culture on spiritual formation among church members were positive and significant. The study recommends that church leaders in districts of Wolaita Zone, Ethiopia should use the elements of organizational culture: Core values, policies and procedures, work environment, employee engagement and stakeholders to advance the holistic and spiritual growth of church members.

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