

Effects of change management on public service delivery: The mediating role of organizational culture

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CITATION

Abawari A, Debela K, Abegaz M. (2024). Effects of change management on public service delivery: The mediating role of organizational culture. *Journal of Infrastructure, Policy and Development*. 8(8): 5259. <https://doi.org/10.24294/jipd.v8i8.5259>

ARTICLE INFO

Received: 18 March 2024

Accepted: 27 May 2024

Available online: 9 August 2024

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Abstract: Several change initiatives that have been introduced in Ethiopian public organizations to address growing quest for effective public service delivery, have not achieved the desired outcomes. Although considerable empirical studies conducted on organizational change, few gave attention to the management of change and its impact on organizational culture and service delivery in the context of public organizations in Ethiopia. By adopting planned change management framework, this study delves into how change management in public organizations affects service delivery directly and indirectly through organizational culture. Using explanatory research design, first survey questionnaires were administered to 301 participants selected through stratified sampling across 16 public organizations in Oromia, the largest state in Ethiopia. Results of a structural equation modeling analysis reveal that change management has no significant direct effect on public service delivery, but has an indirect significant positive effect through the organizational culture which fully mediates the relationship. Subsequent thematic analysis of qualitative interview data collected from 10 managers demonstrate that change management in public organizations is less effective and driven intuitively without any change management framework. The results imply that effective change management significantly improves public service delivery by fostering supportive or constructive organizational culture. The use of change management framework substantively improves change planning, understanding, communication and implementation as well as positive work culture and hence improves effectiveness of service delivery. Accordingly, theoretical and practical implications of the results are discussed.

Keywords: planned change; constructive culture; service delivery; public organization; Oromia

1. Introduction

Change is an unavoidable and hence organizations should continuously reinvent themselves to stay relevant and deliver high-quality services that satisfy the expectations of stakeholders. Change is a result of intricate interactions between an organization's and a community's internal and external settings (Van der Merwe, 2018). Managing change is crucial and can assist an organization in integrating change into its culture and coordinating change initiatives with the broader organizational plan (Al-Haddad and Kotnour, 2015). Hence, change management is helpful as it provides a useful framework to manage organizational change at various phases of the change process (Hussain et al., 2018) to improve organizational performance. Change management should be effective to achieve higher organizational performance (Kaur et al., 2022). Successful organizational change also requires a supportive culture. Most importantly, aligning the change strategy

with a supportive culture is a crucial success factor (Katzenbach et al., 2012) for organization to meet intended goals.

Efficient and effective public service delivery requires accommodating changes in the environment and navigating organizational culture when necessary (Okwata et al., 2022). Organizational culture is crucial because it describes how things are done and articulate goals through values and beliefs and directing activity through common presumptions and group norms (Ram, 2020; Thakkar, 2020). It makes employees feel like they belong, gives them implicit and frequently unspoken rules for getting along with one another in the workplace, and stabilizes the social structure they live in. Organizational culture is essential for accomplishing organizational goals, objectives and considered a crucial success factor for an organization striving for excellence (Roreng, 2020).

However, organizational culture is often a less visible component of an organization and people don't always recognize it (Groysberg et al., 2018) because they took it for granted. As a result, it has given less attention when major change initiatives were planned, introduced or managed resulting in failure of many change initiatives (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Katzenbach et al., 2012; Riordan, 2015; Flanigan, 2016). This is evident in Ethiopian case where many change initiatives such as business process reengineering (BPR), business score card (BSC), change army and quality circle introduced in public organizations without due consideration for existing work culture. An awareness of the cultural characteristics of public service organizations is central to understanding the impact of reforms within the public service. Therefore, it is highly imperative to look into the intricate relationship between change management, organizational culture and service delivery in public organizations.

Empirical studies conducted on organizational change in public organizations in Ethiopia demonstrated that change initiatives were largely ineffective in meeting the desired outcome or in enhancing organizational performances significantly (Daba, 2015; Gebu, 2016; Kebede and Abetwe, 2017; Mekonnen, 2017; Mitike, 2015; Sibhato et al., 2012; Tadesse, 2019). Most of these studies devoted to analyze challenges of the implementation of change initiatives. Empirically, little emphasis was given to the management of the change process and how it affects service delivery in the context of public organizations in Ethiopia. This study, therefore, investigates how change management in public organizations affects service delivery directly and indirectly through organizational culture.

2. Literature review and hypothesis development

2.1. Organizational culture

It is frequently challenging to put culture and, by extension, corporate culture in plain language. As a result, numerous scholars have made an effort to define it indirectly by outlining the elements that make up culture. Organizational culture is commonly defined as a shared values, beliefs, and behaviors among employees in a particular firm (Belias and Koustelios, 2014). According to Riordan (2015) organizational culture refers to the atmosphere and procedures that businesses create for their workers that support and uphold the company's core principles. What sets

an organization apart, like the criteria of success, the language and symbols, the procedures and routines, the prevailing leadership styles, and the value system, are a reflection of its culture. An organization's implicit beliefs, underlying assumptions, expectations, and collective memories are all included in its organizational culture (Cameron and Quinn, 2011; Groysberg et al., 2018). Organizational culture significantly influences organizational performance and supports strategy implementation in public entities (Gasela, 2022; Joseph and Kibera, 2019). Academics have proposed cultural ideas that facilitate organizational change. These are aligning strategy with culture, emphasizing a small number of crucial behavioral changes, harnessing the strength of existing values and norms, providing overt and covert interventions, and evaluating cultural development (Riordan, 2015).

2.2. Change management

Organizational change from a known (present state) to an unknown (desired future state) is frequently met with resistance due to concerns about people's competence, worth, and ability to cope with the uncertain future. As a result, members of organizations less likely support change (Somerville et al., 2021), until they are persuaded.

Effective change management is significantly crucial to improve work performance in public organization. Realizing the need for change, explaining change to others and getting their input, creating and executing change plans, monitoring progress, and acknowledging accomplishments were considered essential components for effective change management (Katzenbach et al., 2012; Riordan, 2015). Elements of effective change management various and depends several factors. For instance, in Polish public administration, the ability of personnel to accept change, resources, and internal communication were found critical success elements for change (Krukowski et al., 2021). Communication, employee involvement, motivation, team building, top management commitment, and coaching were noted (Nyaungwa et al., 2015) as critical components of effective change management.

Stouten et al. (2018) developed a planned organizational change framework consisting of ten evidence-based steps to manage planned change successfully. These are assessing the opportunity or problem motivating the change, selecting and supporting a guiding change coalition, formulating a clear compelling vision, communicating the vision, mobilizing energy for change, empowering others to act, developing and promoting change-related knowledge and ability, identifying short-term wins and use as reinforcement of change progress, monitoring and strengthening the change process and institutionalizing change in company culture, practices, and management succession. The framework integrates common elements from seven well-known change management models: Lewin's Three-Phase change Process, Beer's Six-Step Change Management Model, Judson's Five Steps, Appreciative Inquiry (AI), Kanter, Stein, and Jick's Ten Commandments, Kotter's Eight-Step change Model and ADKAR Model. This formwork is used in this study's to assess the management of change in public organizations.

2.3. Service delivery

Reform initiatives in many developing nations have placed a strong emphasis on improving the delivery of public services and raising public satisfaction (Gerrish, 2016). Over the past 50 years, public sector reforms have aimed to ensure that public services have the right personnel, organizational structures, and systems in place to develop and deliver effective policies and services (Ramona, 2020).

The increasing demand from citizens for better governance and more effective public service delivery has led governments to experiment with various strategies and models in an effort to improve overall performance and the provision of public services (Siddiquee, 2020). Performance management has been a crucial component of public sector reform. Various theories and models have promoted and nurtured a multitude of approaches, including decentralization of service provision, creating standards and charters, performance-based remuneration, participatory budgeting, and citizen report cards (Mccourt, 2013) to improve service delivery.

Chen and Hsieh (2014) note that the digitalization of public services can lead to better public service policies and better services as newer technologies allow big data processing in a better and faster manner. However, the introduction of ICT into public services in developing economies, on the other hand, lagged both in time and scale. There is a need for the public service to utilize technology to help solve service delivery challenges. For this, employees need to possess relevant skills to enhance service delivery using evolving technologies (Nhede et al., 2022). Bekele (2018) indicated that public service delivery was affected by a number of factors such as knowledge, attitudes, operational skills, poor communication, rewards, environment, and absences of well-crafted rules and regulations.

2.4. Organization culture, change management and service delivery

Sustaining change strategies significantly require organizational culture (Stauffer and Maxwell, 2020). Studies showed that both organizational culture and change management had significant impact on organizational performance (Sinaga et al., 2018). Strategic change management practices involving friendly communication, well-structured and elaborate policy, and staff participation in decision making had positive effects on service delivery in banking sector in Kenya (Chematia, 2021; Kariuki, 2014). Provided service delivery is one aspect of the organizational performance for public sector organization, the following hypothesis could be proposed.

H1: Change management significantly and positively affects service delivery in public organizations.

Studies substantively established strong positive impact of organizational culture on change management (Kaur Bagga et al., 2023) Organizational culture significantly affects organizational readiness for change (Al-Tahitah et al., 2021) including employees' readiness for change (Engida et al., 2022) and employees' commitment for change (Yaseen et al., 2018). Logically, organizations having positive work culture tend to achieve organizational change successfully. Change could affect existing culture in an organization in one way or another. Though the impact of change management on organizational culture has not been sufficiently

studied, properly managed organizational change can develop or enhance a positive organizational culture. Accordingly, the following hypothesis is proposed.

H2: Change management will have significant positive impact on organizational culture in public organizations.

Organizational culture significantly influences organizational performance and supports strategy implementation in public entities (Gasela, 2022; Joseph and Kibera, 2019). Organizational culture found to have positive influence on organizational performance (Almahasneh et al., 2023; Lasrado and Kassem, 2021) including employee performance (Rikardus and Sopiah, 2022). Based on these findings the following hypothesis could be proposed.

H3: Organizational culture will have a significant effect on service delivery in public organizations.

Many studies demonstrated the mediating role of organizational culture in the relationship between various dependent variable and various outcome variables (Hanh Tran and Choi, 2019; Mishra and Upadhyay, 2022) including change management (Kaur Bagga et al., 2023) and organizational readiness for change (Al-Tahitah et al., 2021). But the role of organizational culture in the relationship between change management and service delivery is limited. With this assumption, the study proposed the following hypothesis.

H4: Change management will have a significant indirect effect on service delivery through organizational culture.

3. Methodology

3.1. Population and sampling

This study was conducted on public service organizations in Oromia, Ethiopia's largest regional state. In the region, around 50 public sector organizations are organized around five clusters and providing various services. Multistage sampling technique was employed to identify the target population and study sample. First, 2 clusters consisting of 16 organizations were selected using lottery method. A total of 3035 employees were working in these sectors, constituting the sample frame for the study. Using Yemane's 1967 formula, sample size of 353 was calculated. Then proportional samples were drawn from all 16-organization using stratified simple random sampling.

3.2. Survey instrument

To assess change management 13 items were developed based on planned change management framework which integrates 10 common elements from seven change management models. The elements indicate steps to be followed for successful management of change in organization. Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used to validate the instruments. The EFA analysis resulted in a Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) value of 0.952, which is higher than the threshold value 0.50 required for sampling adequacy indicating sampling adequacy of the scale for factor analysis. Moreover, the Bartlett's test of sphericity ($X^2 = 4356.413$; $df = 253$) was found statistically significant ($p < 0.001$).

All indicators, with the exception of items 4 (KMO = 0.445) and 7 (KMO = 0.405), had extraction values more than 0.5, suggesting that the four components produced by the PCA adequately explained 65.84 percent of the variance. The components were named: change understanding, change planning, change communication, and change implementation. A reasonably acceptable fit between the proposed model and the observed data can be found when cutoff values close to 0.95 for Tucker Lewis index (TLI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI), cutoff < 0.08 for standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), and cutoff < 0.06 for root mean squared error of approximation (RMSEA) (Hair Jr et al., 2017; Hu and Bentler, 2009). Based on this, the CFA analysis also established an acceptable model fit: $\chi^2/df = 1.576$, RMSEA = 0.044, CFI = 0.981, TLI = 0.977, and SRMR = 0.035.

Six items were adopted from an earlier study to evaluate public service delivery. These items measure six domains: timely service delivery, service fairness, service quality, accessibility, service providers' competence, and use of technology. The items were validated through EFA and CFA. The EFA analysis found a KMO value 0.884, which is higher than the threshold value 0.50 required for sampling adequacy indicating the scale is adequate. In addition, the Bartlett's test of sphericity ($X^2 = 1131.365$; $df = 15$, $p = 0.000$) was significant. The original data used in the sample were appropriate for principal component analysis (PCA), as the p value was less than 0.05. The items converged on a single component which explains 68.5 percent variance. Furthermore, CFA analysis confirmed the validity and fitness of the EFA model. Hence, our CFA model satisfactorily fit the data at $\chi^2/df = 1.657$ (<3), RMSEA = 0.044, CFI = 0.972, TLI = 0.968, and SRMR = 0.041.

Similarly, to evaluate the organizational culture construct, 12 items were adopted and validated through EFA and CFA. A KMO value 0.840 was generated for organizational culture scale. This score indicates that the PCA is adequate because it is higher than the sample adequacy criteria of 0.50. Moreover, Bartlett's sphericity test ($X^2 = 1603.528$ and $df = 66$) was found statistically significant at $p < 0.001$. Two items (curcul8 = 0.483 and curcul12 = 0.329) with low KMO values (less than 0.5) were removed. Subsequent CFA examination eliminated one item (curcul1) for factor loadings less than 0.7. The items were consolidated into three components—constructive/supportive, passive, and coercive cultures using varimax rotation. The nine-item, three-factor model was validated by first-order CFA. However, the second-order CFA validated only two components and removed one component (coercive culture, with factor loading 0.26 < 0.7). The two component CFI model satisfactorily fit the data at $\chi^2/df = 1.335$, RMSEA = 0.033, TLI = 0.989, CFI = 0.993, SRMR = 0.026, and PCLOSE = 0.816 (Hu and Bentler, 2009). Five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 denoting strongly disagree to 5 denoting strongly agree were used as measurement for all three constructs.

Then the validated questionnaires were distributed to each organization. Top leadership, middle-level management, and employees participated in the survey. In total, 315 questionnaires were completed and returned. However, 301 were found suitable for further analysis, accounting for a response rate of 82 percent. Others were excluded due to substantial missing data. Finally, structural equation modeling based on Amos 26 was employed to test the hypotheses.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. Measurement model assessment

Evaluation of the measurement model fit assessment using the maximum likelihood (ML) yielded acceptable results. Values for all major indices: CMIN/df = 1.575 < 2 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007), CFI = 0.966 > 0.95 (Hu and Bentler, 1999), TLI = 0.961 > 0.95 (McDonald and Marsh, 1990; Sharma et al., 2005), SRMR = 0.036 < 0.05 (Byrne, 2013; Diamantopoulos and Sigauw, 2000), and RMSEA = 0.044 (Hu and Bentler, 1999) fall within acceptable range.

Evaluation of standardized regression weight loadings in **Table 1** indicates that all indicator’s loading, except for sdp1 (0.694), were higher than 0.7, indicating appropriateness of the indicators for model fit. In addition, composite reliability values computed for change management, organizational culture, and service delivery were higher than 0.7, a cutoff value recommended as a rule of thumb, indicating internal consistency of the items used.

Table 1. Standardized loadings, construct reliability and validity.

Items		Constructs	Loadings	CR	AVE	DV
chu2	<---	Chg_mgt	0.822			
chu1	<---	Chg_mgt	0.774			
chu3	<---	Chg_mgt	0.753			
chp4	<---	Chg_mgt	0.758			
chp3	<---	Chg_mgt	0.843			
chp2	<---	Chg_mgt	0.786			
chco4	<---	Chg_mgt	0.792			
chco2	<---	Chg_mgt	0.770			
chim4	<---	Chg_mgt	0.817			
chim3	<---	Chg_mgt	0.790			
chco5	<---	Chg_mgt	0.788			
chim5	<---	Chg_mgt	0.831			
chim6	<---	Chg_mgt	0.802	0.938	0.625	0.791
curcul2	<---	Org_cult	0.728			
curcul3	<---	Org_cult	0.806			
curcul4	<---	Org_cult	0.830			
curcul5	<---	Org_cult	0.730			
curcul6	<---	Org_cult	0.794			
curcul7	<---	Org_cult	0.712	0.896	0.589	0.768
Sdp1	<---	Ser_dry	0.694			
Sdp2	<---	Ser_dry	0.816			
Sdp3	<---	Ser_dry	0.865			
Sdp4	<---	Ser_dry	0.820			
Sdp5	<---	Ser_dry	0.788			
Sdp6	<---	Ser_dry	0.747	0.909	0.625	0.79

Source: own data.

Average variance extracted (AVE) was examined to assess convergent validity. In **Table 1**, AVE values for all three latent constructs: change management (AVE = 0.625), organization culture (AVE = 0.589), and service delivery (AVE = 0.625) were all higher than threshold value 0.5, indicating the presence of convergent validity in the model (Hair Jr et al., 2010). Discriminant validity (DV) was assessed using Fornell and Larcker criteria and Heterotriat-Monotriat ratio (HTMT). In both cases, the statistics in **Table 2** establish presence of discriminant validity in the measurement model. For instance, the DV values (written in bold) were all higher than the intercorrelation values underneath between the latent constructs in each column (Fornell and Larcker, 1981).

Table 2. Discriminant validity.

	Ser_dry	Chg_mgt	Org_cul
Ser_dry	0.790	0.887	0.788
Chg_mgt	0.578	0.791	0.784
Org_cul	0.773	0.746	0.768

Note: Values written in bold represent DV based on Fornell and Larcker criteria and the values in plain text underneath are correlation coefficient between the constructs.

4.2. Structural model assessment

Assessment of structural model fit indices revealed good-fitting model as the value for most measures: CMIN/df = 1.575 < 2 (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007); TLI = 0.961 and CFI = 0.966 > 0.95 (Hair, Jr et al., 2010; Shevlin and Miles, 1998); SRMR = 0.036 and RMSEA = 0.044 < 0.5 (Hu and Bentler, 2009) fell within acceptable range.

Structural model path coefficients in **Figure 1** indicated that change management has no statistically significant effect on service delivery ($b = 0.003, t = 0.029, p = 0.977$) but it has a significant positive effect on organizational culture ($b = 0.750, t = 7.514, p = 0.000$). Organizational culture has significant positive effect on service delivery ($b = 0.770, t = 5.383, p = 0.000$).

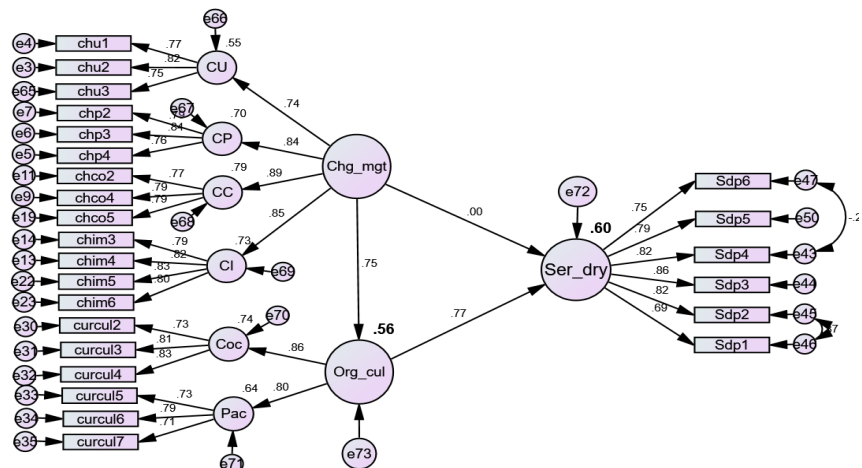


Figure 1. Results of the study.

Note: CU(Change understanding), CP(change planning), CC(Change communication), CI(change implementation), Coc(constructive culture), Pac(passive culture), Chg_mgt(change management), Org_cul(organizational culture), Ser_dry(service delivery)

The structural model direct effect results supported two hypothesized relationships, H2 (Chg_mgt > Org_cul) and H3 (Org_cul > Serv_dry) and rejected H1 (Chg_mgt > Serv_dry). The bootstrapping analysis of significance test confirmed results of the hypotheses.

4.3. Mediation analysis

The fourth proposition of the study (H4) hypothesized that organizational culture mediates the relation between change management and service delivery. The result supported the proposition i.e., change management has significant indirect positive effect on service delivery (Chg_mgt > Org_cult > Serv_dry ($b = 0.575$, $CI = (0.383, 0.825)$, $p = 0.023$)). Organization culture fully mediate the relationship (see **Table 3**).

Table 3. Standardized total, direct and indirect effect – Bootstrap (BC).

	β	Std. error	Lower bound	Upper bound	P value
<i>Total Effect</i>					
Chg_mgt > Serv_dry	0.578	0.059	0.469	0.662	0.015
<i>Direct Effect</i>					
Chg_mgt > Serv_dry	0.003	0.211	-0.273	0.219	0.935
<i>Indirect Effect</i>					
Chg_mgt > Org_cult > Serv_dry	0.575	0.205	0.383	0.825	0.023

Source: own data.

4.4. Discussion of the results

The study aims to examine the effect of change management on public service delivery directly and indirectly through organizational culture. In relation to this aim the study tested four hypotheses using SEM. The results indicate that change management significantly and positively affect existing work culture in public organizations. Change management had no significant direct effect on public service delivery in public organization but it has an indirect significant positive effect on service delivery through organizational culture. The result which indicates that change management had no significant direct effect on public service delivery seems to contradict earlier findings made by Chematia (2021) and Kaur et al. (2022) which suggest positive impact of strategic change management practices on service delivery and effective change management on organization performance respectively.

Thematic analysis of qualitative interview data obtained from 10 public organization managers explains why change management had no significant direct effect on public service. The interview data overwhelmingly asserts that change management in most of the public organizations were ineffective, driven intuitively without use of change management framework, poor engagement and involvement of employees in the change process, incompatibility of the existing work culture with

change needs. Therefore, the ineffectiveness of change management process in public organization could be a prime reason for change in public organization being less effective in meeting desired goals such as service delivery. Thus, we cannot conclude that this result does not support earlier findings because change management should be effective in improving service delivery significant which was not the case in this study.

One of the quantitative results indicates that change management has indirect impact on service delivery through organizational culture. This result partially lends support to previous studies (Sinaga et al., 2018). The thematic analysis in this respect highlights the use of established change management frameworks or models for effective change management and development of constructive or positive organizational culture.

Previous empirical results showed the significant impact of organizational culture on change management (Kaur Bagga et al., 2023), organizational readiness for change (Al-Tahitah et al., 2021), and employees' readiness for change (Engida et al., 2022). This study made contribution to the literature by providing empirical evidence for the significant effect of change management on organizational culture. Effective change management potentially reduce change resistance and improves the change understanding, planning, communication and implementation thereby shapes existing organizational culture positively resulting to effective service delivery.

Organizational culture is found to have direct significant influence on service delivery. This result strengthens findings of earlier studies which found the direct effect of organizational culture on organizational performance (Almahasneh et al., 2023; Lasrado and Kassem, 2021) including employee performance (Rikardus and Sopiah, 2022). This study also found the mediating role of organizational culture in the relationship between change management and service delivery. It also adds to the literature in this respect.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the effect of change management on service delivery directly and indirectly through organizational culture. The findings revealed that change management has no direct effect but it has an indirect impact on service delivery through organizational culture. Organizational culture fully mediates the relationship. For the change management to have an impact on service delivery a positive or constructive culture should exist or promoted in the organization. Effective change management fosters the development of constructive culture thereby enhance efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery.

Constructive or supportive organizational culture has significant association with change understanding, change communication and change implementation. The study highlights that introducing change initiatives alone is not sufficient to bring desired efficiency in service delivery in public organization. Change should be managed effectively and supported with positive or constructive organizational culture. To this end, there is a need for promoting a positive organizational culture. Accordingly, policies should focus on cultivating a positive organizational culture

that supports change and innovation. This includes recognizing and rewarding behaviors that align with the desired culture, promoting transparency, and fostering a supportive and collaborative work environment.

This study made significant theoretical contribution to the literature. The study showed how change management shapes organizational work culture to improve service delivery. This potentially enriches limited literature. The results significantly highlight that effective organizational change in the public sector requires constructive organizational culture to enhance efficiency of service delivery in public sectors. Thus, to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery, leaders need be aware of existing organizational culture and foster cultural norms that promote required change success. In addition, organizations should employ change management framework to manage changes effectively.

As a limitation, public service delivery was assessed only from the perspectives of public sector employees. Customer or client viewpoints were not explored. Hence, future studies may include customer's opinions to strengthen the findings.

Author contributions: Conceptualization, methodology, software, formal analysis, original draft preparation, AA; supervision, review, edition, validation, KD and MA. All authors have read and endorsed this version of the manuscript for publication.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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