How Organizational Culture as an Enabler of Knowledge Management Systems Influence Sustainable Competitive Advantage amongst Humanitarian Agencies in Kenya

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Abstract

This study investigated the influence of Knowledge Management (KM) systems on Sustainable Competitive Advantage (SCA) amongst Humanitarian Agencies-HAs through the use of organizational culture as an enabler of knowledge management. The objective of study was to show how organizational culture affects sustainable competitive advantage in humanitarian agencies- HAs- in Kenya. The study population was 42 HAs with 10,487 employees in Kenya. Both the primary and secondary data were collected using questionnaires, interviews, and observation checklists. The questionnaires were administered by a drop and collect method to ensure high response rates. Employees were stratified into management and junior staff. Purposive sampling was then used to sample management staff in the agencies surveyed and simple random sampling techniques were used to sample employees at the junior level. Statistical tools such as cross-tabulation and frequency tables were used to analyze the data. This study adopted a descriptive research design. The study used resource-based theory of knowledge management for competitive advantage as its theoretical basis. The resource-based view and theory of the firm defines a strategic asset as one that is rare, valuable, imperfectly imitable and non-substitutable. Knowledge is seen as one such strategic asset with the potential to be a source of competitive advantage for an organization. By adopting a resource-based theory of the firm with an extension of a knowledge-based perspective, this study aimed at developing and validating a conceptual model of the relationships between knowledge management enablers and their influence on competitive advantage amongst humanitarian agencies in Kenya. From the study, there is substantial evidence to show that knowledge management has a strong positive influence on sustainable competitive advantage. The results from the 42 agencies surveyed reconfirmed a general agreement found in the literature that culture makes a unique and significant contribution to the sustainable competitive advantage of humanitarian agencies. Finally, recommendations were offered from practical ideas, drawn from experience, and intended for practitioners working with HAs but are also based on the theory behind the knowledge management concept and are just as relevant for consideration by knowledge management and development theorists alike.

Key Words: Knowledge Management, Competitive Advantage, Humanitarian agencies, Culture, Strategy, Organization, Enablers

1. INTRODUCTION

This study adopted Salleh and Goh's (2002) definition of knowledge management where it is a process of leveraging knowledge as means of achieving innovation in process and products/services, effective decision-making, and organizational adaptation to the market for creating business/programme value and generating a competitive advantage to organizations. If the above statement is true, then it is extremely important that an efficient knowledge-intensive process must be established to meet the demands of improved organizational performance (Quinn et al., 1996). It is this area that provided the setting for the study to investigate how organizational culture affects sustainable competitive advantage amongst humanitarian agencies.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study investigated the influence of organizational culture as an enabler of knowledge management systems on sustainable competitive advantage amongst humanitarian agencies in Kenya. The study noted that a multitude of knowledge flows through humanitarian agencies in Kenya every day. However, nobody seems to account for the knowledge that the agencies require for present and future needs, how to acquire that knowledge, the kind of knowledge that individual employees in the agencies possess and how to share such knowledge with others. Given that knowledge is now considered an important source of competitive advantage in the knowledge society, the researcher contends that there is an urgent need to consider organizational friendly culture to enable sustainable competitive advantage. The researcher also notes that while the primary users of knowledge management reside in the corporate community, humanitarian agencies can also benefit greatly from the practice.

In fact, knowledge management in humanitarian agencies could constitute a very relevant civic tool that would give back development to citizens, grass roots organizations and local communities without losing the training and specialization which are required in professionalized development work if implemented.

The information age and the changes created by it have shifted humanitarian agencies away from being myopically concerned with the exploitation of tangible assets toward a steadfast and holistic interest in leveraging intangible assets as well. The management of knowledge as a key to grasping and retaining competitive advantage has recently evolved into the more strategically focused management of knowledge. In order to deal with more donors (at the top) and more beneficiaries (at the bottom), humanitarian agencies increasingly need systems to manage the creation, accessing and deployment of information. Put simply, humanitarian agencies are organizations that need an effective knowledge management system to tackle the problems that arise from both their local-global nature and from the difficulties of effective communication between and within humanitarian agencies and civil society (Vasconcelos et al, 2005). It is this area that provided the setting for the study to investigate how organizational culture, as a knowledge management enabler, can enhance competitive advantage amongst humanitarian agencies in Kenya.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To examine how organizational culture affect sustainable competitive advantage in humanitarian agencies in Kenya

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

From the literature reviewed, culture is defined as a set of beliefs, which provide an identity for the organization, which in turn defines how the organization runs day to day knowledge management activities. These set of beliefs include organizational purpose, criteria of performance, location of authority, legitimate base of power, decision-making orientation, leadership style, compliance, evaluation and motivation (Schermerhorn et al., 1991).

There is a general agreement that a knowledge-friendly culture must be present or nurtured in order for knowledge management implementation to succeed (Choi, 2000). The assertion by Choi is backed by Ribiere (2001), who acknowledges that after having primarily focused efforts on information technology, humanitarian agencies are now realizing the importance of the soft aspects of knowledge management initiatives including culture. Culture practices reflect how the organizations view and facilitate both learning and innovation, including how they encourage employees to build the organizational knowledge base in ways that enhance values for the stakeholders and donors (Jager, 1999). A recent study conducted by the American Productivity and Quality Center shows that 40 companies are known to have corporate culture that supports knowledge sharing (McDermott & Dell, 2001).

Organizational culture as a concept is considered to be a key element of managing organizational change and renewal (Pettigrew, 1990). Thus, since knowledge management is a radical innovation or changes the operations of an organization, it is regarded as an intervention to the organization's culture (Gooijer, 2000). It has been identified that the biggest challenge in knowledge management is not a technical one but a cultural one (Forbes, 1997; Koudsi, 2000). An international survey of the approaches adapted to knowledge management in 500 companies reveals that 80 percent of respondents cited existing organizational culture as a major barrier to the implementation of knowledge-based system (Chase, 1997). The researcher believes this position is due to the fact that culture determines how these organizations conduct their businesses on a daily basis with commitment to knowledge management activities base on whether the corporate culture is favorable to knowledge management.

Similarly, another survey on 430 firms finds that a majority of respondents recognized that their internal cultures represent a major barrier to effective knowledge transfer, and that employees' behavior would have to alter to build on a knowledge management culture and to derive the befits of competitive advantages from the activities (Skyrme & Amidon, 1997).The researcher also supports this position because creation of a knowledge friendly culture must consider the cultural environment of an NGO before implementing knowledge management. Gudpa has backed the researcher's position and writes that an open culture built around integrating individual skills and experiences into organizational knowledge will be more successful in implementing knowledge management activities in organizations (Gupta et al., 2000). Further, Buckman (1999) points out that creating and sharing knowledge are intangible activities that cannot be forced. A culture of confidence and trust is required to encourage the application and development of knowledge within an organization (Scarborough et al., 1999).

Further review of available literature on culture and knowledge management in Africa and particularly Kenya revealed that a culture of sharing knowledge and information is still lacking in Kenya (Ondari-Okemwa, 2006). He further asserts that the traditional cultures in Kenya and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa discourage sharing of

knowledge and information impeding the influence of culture on sustainable competitive advantage.

As such, the study reconfirms that knowledge-friendly culture is critical to successful knowledge management implementation in humanitarian agencies with subsequent linkages to sustainable competitive advantage.

5. DATA FINDINGS, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

5.1 Respondents Features

A total of 375 employees from 42 humanitarian agencies were targeted for this study. 84 managers were in the sample which was purposively sampled and 82 managers successfully completed and returned the questionnaires, resulting in a response rate of 97.6%. A sample of 291 junior staff was targeted from the population. An average of 280 questionnaires were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 96.0%. The respondents surveyed consisted of 48.8%, 183 males and 51.2%, 192 females. Amongst the respondents interviewed, majority, 57%, 104, of the males were aged between 25-35 years, 27.0%, 49, aged between 18-24, 12.0%, 21, between 36-46 years and only 4.0%, 8, were above 46 years. In the female category, 61.0%, 116, represented the age between 25-35 years forming majority of the respondents, 30.0%, 58, between 36-46 years, 7.0%, 14, between 18-24 years whereas those above 46 years were the least at 4.0% constituting only 4 of the respondents surveyed.

6. Specific Findings on How Organizational Culture Competitiveness Amongst Humanitarian Agencies in Kenya

One of the key findings of this study is that culture makes a unique and significant contribution to the sustainable competitive advantage of humanitarian agencies. This is quite consistent with the study of Swierczek and Ha (2003) that cultural elements have a strong impact on innovation and programme activities by humanitarian agencies. This argument is further supported by a number of studies showing that potential for organizational success can be enhanced by cultural factors in general and organizational culture in particular. The study now delves into specific aspects of organizational culture that influence sustainable competitive advantage.

6.1 The Kind of Orientations You Received as an Employee When You Joined Your Agency

Orientation is believed to influence the impression that staff have in their agencies. The study examined the kind of orientations employees received upon deployment by the humanitarian agencies and noted the following responses.

Table 1: Orientation by staff at entry

Source: Author (2004)

Characteristics	Yes	No
The organization values knowledge transfer	221 (81.3%)	51 (18.7%
The organization's orientation package has Knowledge Management component	187 (69.5%)	82 (30.5%)
The organization has a good learning mechanism which helps in Knowledge transfer	185 (68.0%)	87 (32.0%)

In regard to the kind of orientations received by junior staff in their early days of deployment and their impressions, 81.3%, 221, of the junior staff respondents felt that their agencies value knowledge transfer while 69.5%, 187, of the junior staff respondents felt their organizations' orientation package had knowledge management components. 68.0%, 185, of the junior staff respondents felt that their organizations had a good learning mechanism which helps in knowledge transfer.

6.2 Extent the Orientations Affected Your Achievement of Objectives During Your Early Days At The Agency

The researcher then investigated the extent the orientations affected your achievement of objectives during the early days of the employees at the agencies.

Table 2: Orientations and Performance in your organization

Source: Author (2014)

Orientation	Very Large Extent	Large extent	Moderate extent	Small extent	No Extent
The organization values knowledge transfer	25 (9.9%)	123 (48.8%)	70 (27.8%)	20 (7.9%)	14 (5.6%)
The organization has a good orientation package	36 (15.0%)	89 (37.1%)	75 (31.3%)	17 (7.1%)	23 (9.6%)
The organization has a good learning mechanism which helps in Knowledge transfer	27 (10.8%)	101 40.6%	75 (30.1%)	29 (11.6%)	17 (6.8%)

Out of the junior staff respondents interviewed who participated in the study, 48.8%, 123, believed their agencies value knowledge transfer to a large extent. While 27.8%, 70, said their agencies moderately value knowledge transfer, only 9.9%, 25, believed their agencies value knowledge transfer to a very large extent and 5.6%, 14, said their agencies do not value knowledge transfer at all.

As regards orientation package, 37.1%, 89, of the junior respondents said their agencies have knowledge management components in their orientation package to a large extent, while 31.3%, 75, of the junior staff respondents said they have knowledge management components in their orientation packages only to a moderate extent. Only 7.1%, 17, said their agencies have a good orientation package with knowledge management component to a small extent as 15.0%, 36, claimed their orientation packages have a knowledge management component to a very large extent while 9.6%, 23, of the junior staff respondents indicated that their orientation packages are do not have knowledge management components at all.

Regarding learning mechanism, 40.6%, 101, of the junior respondents said their agencies had a good learning mechanism which helps in knowledge transfer to a large extent. 30.1%, 75, of the junior staff respondents said their agencies only have good learning mechanism which helps in knowledge transfer to a moderate extent. 10.8%, 27, said they have good learning mechanism which helps in knowledge transfer to a very large extent while only 6.8%, 17, respondents denied that their agencies have a good learning mechanism which helps in knowledge transfer.

This is backed by the fact that transformational leadership is generally associated with desired organizational outcomes such as the willingness of followers to expend extra effort (Bass, 1985a; Yammarino & Bass, 1990). A willingness to expend extra effort indicates some degree of commitment. Contingent reward behaviors that represent transactional leadership have been found to be reasonably associated with performance and work attitudes of followers although at a lower level than transformational leadership behaviors (Bass, 1990a; Bass & Avolio, 1990a).

6.3 Modes of Employee Evaluation

There are several modes of employee evaluation. The study also established the modes of employee evaluation as follows;

Table 3: Modes of employee evaluation

Source: Author (2014)

Mode of evaluation	N	Yes	No
Knowledge base created by employee	81	45 (55.6%)	36 (44.4%)
Level of creativity	81	21 (25.9%)	60 (74.1%)
IT compliance	81	49 (60.5%)	32 (39.5%)
Level of employee socialism	81	24 (29.6%)	57 (70.4%)

In employee performance appraisal, 55.6%, 45, of the management staff interviewed said they look at knowledge base created by an employee in their agencies. Only 25.9%, 21, considered level of creativity in their performance appraisals. 60.5%, 49, of the management staff respondents considered IT compliance as a criterion for performance appraisals while just fewer than 30.0%, 24, of the management staff respondents considered the level of employee socialism in their appraisal processes.

6.4 Performance Appraisal

The study examined the extent to which performance appraisal has helped employees in achieving organizational objectives. Asked the extent to which the criteria on performance appraisals had helped the employees in achieving organizational objectives, 58.0%, 46, of the management staff said they have helped to a large extent, 23.0%, 18, said it has helped to a very large extent while 19.0%, 15, of the management staff respondents said it has helped them to a moderate extent.

This is in tandem with a study by Schermerhorn which discusses culture as a set of beliefs, which provides an identity for the organization, which in turn defines how the organization runs day to day knowledge management activities. The set of beliefs includes organizational purpose, criteria of performance, the location of authority, legitimate base of power, decision-making orientation, leadership style, compliance, evaluation and motivation (Schermerhorn et al., 1991).

This is further corroborated by the fact that potential knowledge management needs a proper environment to motivate employees to enable the creation, organization and sharing of knowledge through such modes as inclusion of knowledge management in the appraisal process (Abell & Oxbrow, 1999).

It was noted that there was a tendency to focus on one issue in isolation during the performance appraisal (often a negative issue), rather than assessing performance over the whole period. Only 5 management staff members felt that the appraisal results did not fairly reflect their actual performance for the period under review. Here, it was felt that the targets set had been so unrealistic and ambitious that it was well-nigh impossible for the staff members to achieve those. Never-the-less, the staff members had worked hard and achieved a number of goals, but felt penalized in the actual review for not having achieved the items on their work plans. A comment by another staff member from one of the agencies surveyed was that there are however no recommendations given with regards to performance, which indicates a lack of feedback and harks back to the issues surrounding communications that were frequently cited by agencies' staff.

6.5 Basis of Promotion in the Humanitarian Agencies

The basis of promotion in the agencies surveyed was determined by the study from amongst junior staff respondents. The following findings were noted;

Table 4: Basis of promotion in humanitarian agencies

Source: Author (2014)

Promotion	Very Large Extent	Large extent	Moderate extent	Small extent	No Extent
Extent to which promotion is based on recognition of employee efforts	31 (11.6%)	95 (35.4%)	77 (28.7%)	35 (13.1%)	30 (11.2%)
The extent to which the promotions on the basis above affect productivity of employees	36 (13.8%)	117 (45.0%)	63 (24.2%)	28 (10.8%)	16 (6.2%)

While 35.4%, 95, of the junior respondents said promotion their agencies is based on recognition of employee efforts only to a large extent, only 11.6%, 31, of the respondents were extremely confident that promotion in their agencies is based on recognition of employee efforts to a very large extent. 28.7%, 77, said promotion in their agencies is based on recognition of employee efforts to only a moderate extent while 11.2%, 30, of the junior staff respondents said promotion in their agencies is not based on recognition of employee efforts at all. A 13.1%, 35, said this assertion is only true to a limited extent.

On the extent to which the promotions on the basis above affected their productivity 45.0%, 117, junior staff respondents said it affected their productivity to a large extent.24.2%, 63, said the basis of promotion affected their productivity to a moderate extent while 13.8%, 36, said it affected their productivity to a very large extent as 6.2%, 16, of the respondents said it did not affect their productivity at all. About 11.0%, 28, felt it has only

affected their productivity to a small extent.

6.6 Structure and Processes in Humanitarian Agencies

Regarding the extent to which various operational characteristics are distinctive to agencies' structures and process, the following findings were recorded;

Table 5: The extent to which various operational characteristics are distinctive to agencies' structures and process.

Source: Author (2014)

Characteristics	Heavily distinct	well distinct	distinctive	Slightly distinctive	not distinctive at all
Investment patterns are consistent with corporate messages. If the learning and knowledge transfer is high on the organization's strategic lists, the funding reflects these priorities	19 (24.7%)	26 (33.8%)	25 (32.5%)	4 (5.2 %)	3 (3.9%)
The organization conducts events frequently to share ideas, wisdom and experience	18 (22.8%)	35 (41.7%)	20 (25.3%)	4 (5.1%)	2 (2.5%)
The organization has a process to archive and distill learning from past experience and distinguish what works and what does not	16 (20.5%)	37 (47.4%)	19 (24.4%)	6 (7.7%)	0 (0.0%)
Programme information on performance, current activities and best practices is widely accessible and shared	25 (32.1%)	35 (44.9%)	16 (20.5%)	2 (2.5%)	0 0.0%
The organization encourages-and work routines allow-people to capitalize on opportunities for informal learning	18 (23.1%)	38 (48.7%)	18 (23.13%)	4 (5.1%)	0 (0.0%)
The organization uses a variety of mechanisms to learn from external sources in the industry, stakeholders, donors, beneficiaries and competitors/peer organizations	19 (24.4%)	33 (42.3%)	19 (24.4%)	5 (6.4%)	2 (2.6%)
Procedures exists for the organizational knowledge acquired by people who leave the organization	14 (16.7%)	29 (37.7%)	22 (28.6%)	8 (10.4%)	4 (5.2%)

In critical assessment on how various operational initiatives influence agencies' processes and structures, majority of the management staff respondents (91.0%, 70) had the view that investment patterns are consistent with corporate messages and is distinctive to their processes. The same respondents were also in the affirmative that if the learning and knowledge transfer is high on the organization's strategic lists, the funding reflects these priorities. Only 10.0%, 7, of the management staff respondents felt that their investment patterns are not consistent with corporate messages and are not distinctive to their processes hence this characteristic is not unique to their organizations.

89.8%, 73, of the management staff surveyed reported that their organizations conduct events frequently to share ideas, wisdom and experience. A small percentage, 10.2%, 6, said this characteristic was not distinctive in their agencies.

92.3%, 72, of the management staff surveyed felt that their agencies have a process to archive and distill learning from past experience and distinguish what works and what does not. Only about 8.0%, 6, felt otherwise in this regard.

6.7 Programme Information Widely Accessible and Shared

The study established whether programme information, current activities and best practices were widely accessible and shared in the agencies. The percentages for distinct identification were as follows; Almost all the management staff, 97.5%, 76, surveyed agreed that programme information on performance, current activities and best practices are widely accessible and shared in their agencies. Only 2.5%, 2, said their programme information on performance, current activities and best practices are not as widely accessible and shared.

6.8 Opportunities for Informal Learning

The agencies were asked whether their organizations allow employees to capitalize on opportunities for informal learning and noted the results as discussed below. 95.0%, 74, of the management staff surveyed were in agreement that their agencies encourage and work routines allow employees to capitalize on opportunities for informal learning with a reservation on the part of only 5.0%, 4, of the respondents saying this characteristic is slightly distinct to their agencies.

6.9 Mechanisms to Learn From External Sources

Mechanisms to learn from external sources were examined as a characteristic of the humanitarian agencies. 91.1%, 71, of the respondents agree that their agencies use a variety of mechanisms to learn from external sources in the industry, stakeholders, donors, beneficiaries and competitors/peer organizations. Only 6.4%, 5, of the management staff respondents are reserved on this characteristic to their agencies while a few, 2.6%, only 2 management staff respondents said their agencies did not at all use a variety of mechanisms to learn from external sources in the industry, stakeholders, donors, beneficiaries and competitors/peer organizations.

In regard to procedures, 83.0%, 55, of the management staff respondents agreed that their agencies had procedures exists for the organizational knowledge acquired by people who leave the organization to be tapped before they leave. 10.4%, 8, were reserved, slightly distinctive, while only 5.2%, 4, of the management staff respondents said their agencies do not have procedures for the organizational knowledge acquired by people who leave the organization to be tapped before they leave.

In total, all the operational characteristics were distinctive to the agencies surveyed. In terms of how these initiatives have influenced employees' performance, around 60.0%, 49 out of 81 management staff who responded to this question, had the opinion that such initiatives have influenced their performance only to a moderate extent. This is attributed to the fact that an organization achieves success by being consistent in sending clear signal about their priorities, values and beliefs. Once culture is established and accepted, they become a strong organizational tool to communicate the organization's beliefs and values to its employees, and especially new comers. When an organization promotes ethical culture, they become successful in maintaining organizational growth, the good services and programmes demanded by the society, beneficiaries, stakeholders and donors, the ability to address problems before they become disasters and consequently are competitive against rivals. This is affirmed by Schein, who further informs that corporate culture matters, because the decisions made without the awareness of the operative culture forces may have unanticipated and undesirable consequences (Schein, 1999).

The organization conducts events frequently to share ideas, wisdom and experience. This was rated low as the agencies do not hold team building meetings and other activities frequently mainly meant to share ideas, a platform that could be a booster to knowledge management, which ultimately enhances competitive advantage. This is in tandem with a study by Lubit which observes that explicit knowledge is codified and stored in the organizational memory and is available to employees throughout the structure. Conversely, tacit knowledge is personal knowledge possessed by an employee that may be difficult to express or communicate to others. Because a population of employees possesses a theoretically infinite number of mental models, or ways of perceiving information, tacit knowledge is often individualized and highly specific in scope. Lubit further argues that it is this knowledge that is often difficult to disseminate to others in the context of the workplace, but it is also invaluable to propagate because it is a unique asset that is very hard to copy by other firms. Hence, given this premise, it can be logically understood that tacit knowledge can form the basis for competitive advantage, but to do so it must become manifest in the real world and utilized to actualize the strategic agendas

of the organization. Ideally, the organization can better manage its intellectual capital base by uncovering the tacit knowledge of its employees and turning that into explicit knowledge, available to others (Erickson & Rothberg, 2000).

Programme information on performance, current activities and best practices is widely accessible and shared. This proved distinctive. This is affirmed by a statement from CARE Services' report on knowledge management which says, "We recognize that our most important asset is people and their knowledge. We understand Knowledge Management (KM) as the cultivation of an environment within which people are willing to share, learn and collaborate together leading to improvement" (Care Services).

Procedures exist for the organizational knowledge acquired by people who leave the organization. The high percentage of respondents positive to this is attributed to the need to convert tacit knowledge into empirical frameworks which enhance knowledge sharing and transfer. These include the use of such activities as exit interviews which could enhance competitive advantage of the organization. This is corroborated by a study by Senge which asserts that corporations have always had some process to synthesize their experience and integrate it with knowledge acquired from outside sources (Sarvary, 1999). However, not until recently have scholars and practitioners alike become increasingly attracted to the science of applied knowledge within NGOs. This movement is unique in combining information technology theory with pioneering work on models of learning organizations (Senge, 1994).

These responses are corroborated by Porter in his study where he concludes that an organization can achieve a higher rate of return (or potential operational efficiency) over a peer in one of two ways: either it fundraising with ease and at a lower cost, in which case the organization possesses a cost advantage; or it can offer projects or programmes that are differentiated in such a way that the customer/ beneficiaries are able to enjoy a service/ product premium that exceeds the additional cost of the differentiation advantage (Porter, 1985).

The findings above are corroborated by Thompson, Strickland & Gamble, 2005 assertion that an organization can create a culture that distinguishes itself as a great place to work for. Simply put, this creates a culture of commitment, through the allocation of organizational resources, rewards, and promotions that encourages competitive behavior. The best way to encourage competitive advantage is to continuously encourage individuals to innovate new advantages.

The difference between success and failure can depend on the degree and purpose, the value created by the culture of the organization. If an organization is totally consistent in the behavior of the management of paying attention to operating efficiency and encouraging subordinates to be creative, the organization gains low cost advantage over rivals. (Thompson, Strickland & Gamble, 2005) asserts that organizations earn strong industry positions because of the low cost advantages they have achieved over their rivals and their consistent ability to underprice their competitors.

Inconsistent signals from an organization can impose assumption on subordinates that consider management programs to be unimportant. Schein, (2004) states that subordinates will accommodate contradictory messages because founders and management at the top are granted the right to be inconsistent, and they may be too powerful to be confronted. The emerging culture then will reflect not only the organization's assumptions, but the complex internal accommodations created by subordinates to run the organization in spite of the management's commitment. Managers, who continue to fen ignorance and create lack of control at situations, create a culture that poor performance can be excused. Organizations who equally fail to allocate organization resources equitably create cultures that limit organizational growth and the prospect of alternatives.

6.10 Reasons for Joining the Organization as an Employee

In collating the information collected from the questionnaires and interview schedule, it was interesting to note the varied initial reasons that employees had for joining their agencies, with the main reason that came very strongly from nearly all the respondents interviewed in this regard being the desire to work for an organization that promoted transparency and accountability in humanitarian assistance, during a period of transformation towards a newly empowered society. This was, on the whole, consistent with the management's initial reasons for their operations in Kenya. This is also consistent with research done on employees at NGOs, which indicates that individuals tend to work at an NGO because they feel a sense of passion and commitment for the cause of the NGO (Drucker, 1994).

Mention was also made of the desire to work with the country directors - their passion and enthusiasm for the work of the agencies also provided initial motivation to join the agencies. Staff members still with the agencies surveyed unanimously felt that they were achieving their work's ambitions by continuing to work at their agencies. Authors such as Lewis (2001) feel that the desire by employees to work at NGOs gives them an

advantage in terms of organizational culture in that the people who choose to work there buy-in to the reason for their existence.

The overall mission and vision for the agencies provide most staff with a good reason to go the extra mile, as does their perception that their colleagues are also committed to producing quality work. The only negative-type comment to be included in this section was a feeling that because performance and excellence are highly valued, the staff sometimes felt controlled by the system, and that results were achieved at some cost to personal relationships. Never-the-less, this open, dynamic environment provides the backdrop against which a sustainable competitive advantage can be achieved by the application of knowledge management and staff commitment enhanced. With only a few exceptions, the staff and the management felt that knowledge management supports their organizational culture. On this premise, it is evident from this theme emerging from the research, that organizational culture is an important aspect for consideration in the development and implementation of knowledge management and enhancing sustainable competitive advantage in humanitarian agencies and NGOs in totality.

6.11 Core Values

Another important aspect of alignment between individual and organizational goals is the facilitating role played by well-defined and integrated core values (Brown & Armstrong, 1999). At the agencies surveyed, core values are attached to the performance agreement. The management staffs interviewed believe that these core values are essential for the successful continuation of their agencies. They underpin how a person does their job, and as such, form part of the basis for performance appraisal. With most employees agreeing that the core values are an integral part of organizational life in their agencies, it was also reflected that the values are supportive of organizational cultures. The management staff surveyed commented that the core values reinforced the culture through the performance agreement process, by encouraging people to reflect on how they are performing.

Some staff felt though, that the core values had an intrinsic role in controlling employee actions. For example considering the core value of commitment (meaning that being able to commit ourselves on whatever tasks we do and if asked to do a task, that the individual can be relied on to do it without further supervision), it could also be interpreted as meaning, as a staff member noted "you *must* arrive at work on time and be prepared to work overtime" which had negative connotations. It was noted that the focus on core values and the internalizing of these provided external motivation for some staff. It was also noted that in all except one instance, staff felt that the knowledge management activities reflected the commitment to the core values. In the future, specific skills and values may be included on a person's performance agreement (either from the set of core values or from other skills/values more specific to individual jobs).

There are some drawbacks with the core values, however. Some staff resent their core values, feeling that they are an infringement on their personalities. In particular, the interpersonal relations value, where individuals' performance is measured in terms of their relationships with other parties is viewed with some suspicion. However, some people do have poor people skills (and low emotional intelligence) and need to recognize that whilst this does not reflect poorly on their performance, it does impact on their work relationships. In this regard, the introduction of the 360° feedback system (Nel *et al.*, 2001) or other peer review mechanism, which was proposed by some employees of the agencies surveyed, might be advantageous. The researcher's hesitation in utilizing this is that there are limitations to the process and individuals may feel they were being unfairly picked on, if many negative comments arose. Individuals might also seek to find out who said what, which would undermine the current open and honest organizational cultures. The inclusion of core values into knowledge management activities is set out as one of the most important parts of developing the system (Brown & Armstrong, 1999) but as noted from the experience at the humanitarian agencies, is difficult to get exactly right.

6.12 Meetings

All the 42 agencies surveyed held management meetings more often. The management team contributed and the whole meeting would usually conclude within one hour, unless any other business is mentioned. The meetings enable each manager to briefly assess their previous week's goals and comment on the achievement or non-achievement thereof, and to mention any barriers to achievement that they encountered. They note items that have been postponed and those that have been cancelled. The manager then identifies tasks and activities that they will be carrying out in the coming week.

Minutes of these meetings were taken, and distributed, thus enabling the managers to enter accurate meeting information and availability into their planners. At the meetings, discussions of items such as recruitment and selection issues and other items of a more sensitive nature were advanced.

The formal pre-arranged meetings are supported and enhanced by ad hoc meetings between employees and their supervisors. Meetings between the employees and their supervisors usually focus on the nuts and bolts of getting the job done right, and timeously. The meetings with the supervisors usually focus on a more holistic overview of the employee as an individual, and their interaction with both other individuals within the organization, with the organization itself, and with other individuals external to their agencies. These are centred around details besides discussions on stress levels, coping mechanisms and other pressures related to the individual.

7.0 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Humanitarian agencies that require their employees to develop organizational commitment to knowledge management should provide comprehensive training that will encourage management to exhibit leadership behaviors such as building trust, inspiring a shared vision, encouraging creativity, emphasizing development, and recognizing accomplishments. There is substantial evidence to show that organizational culture- which is an enabler of knowledge management- has a strong positive correlation with sustainable competitive advantage. Organizational culture exhibited a strong intuition towards supporting the competitive position of an organization.

7.1 Recommendations Emanating From the Study

Setting Up a Formal Team/ Committee

Most of the knowledge management initiatives relied on employees' volunteering knowledge, but someone needs to be responsible for ensuring that knowledge is mapped and shared, particularly in larger, complex organizations. A knowledge-management team can play a useful role in facilitating the exchange of information between different departments. Some organizations have gone further, appointing a dedicated head of knowledge management on the executive team. A formal team is needed to be involved in operational process in knowledge management activities. A formal team should be constituted with full time Knowledge Management staff and I.T staff to handle all the matters of knowledge management in the agencies.

Conduct an Exit Interview for Staff Upon Separation with the Agency

Before the experienced staff gets retired or the contract staff leaves the organizations after working for a specific period, there should be an exit interview prepared for them. It should be a face to face interview held to directly extract the knowledge, useful practices, experiences accumulated from the heads of the staff. Some tacit knowledge can be disclosed and codified into the audio recordings, and then put into the platform as explicit knowledge for the exiting staff's learning. Part of the interview questions should be tailored made for the staff's working spectrum. This method can be treated as the last chance to extract knowledge from the experienced staff, and supposed to be introduced to enhance the competitive advantage by humanitarian agencies. The study noted that some organizations which conduct exit interviews only gave interview questionnaires to exiting staff without face to face meetings. Through this, some information may be lost due to limited personal touch with the employer at the point of the interview.

Map Information and Knowledge Flows Among The Agencies

The diversity of the humanitarian agencies suggests that they should have a framework to identify knowledge and information gaps; bottlenecks in the flow of knowledge; information about present and future knowledge required; and the formats and location where information may be found within the agencies' field offices. The function of knowledge auditing and mapping should therefore be introduced into humanitarian agencies.

These are the suggestions for improving the performance of knowledge management activities in humanitarian agencies using organizational culture as an enabler. If humanitarian agencies can improve the performance of their knowledge management activities, they can help facilitate corporate management and delivery of services with higher quality, efficiency, effectiveness and productivity.

7.2 Conclusions

The culture of the humanitarian agencies targeted was glaringly noted to affect the success of knowledge management supporting technologies. Most agencies proved open, collaborative, with team-orientated culture and exhibited existence of online platforms, which meant that their staff were already proactively sharing knowledge and have bought into knowledge management practices. In each case, success was based on the ability of the platforms to suit the needs of the end-users and the effectiveness of change management approaches applied during its implementation.

It is hoped that the preceding recommendations could serve as a guide to achieving more effective knowledge creation and management in humanitarian agencies in Kenya for sustainable competitive advantage. The study

strongly recommends that by adopting a knowledge friendly culture, humanitarian agencies would be empowered to implement better knowledge management practices and be equipped to participate as knowledge-intensive members of the global economy with enhanced competitiveness. They could operate more efficiently and incrementally enhance service provision and competitive advantages if they are given the tools to more effectively leverage knowledge (both at an individual and organizational level).

7.3 Limitations of the Study

The findings of this study should be viewed with certain limitations in mind. Respondents seemed sensitive about revealing confidential organizational information, which added to the difficulty of doing this research. It became difficult getting authority from some agency managements to conduct the study and it had to take several persuasions and field visits by the research assistants. This lengthened the timeline for the study. Despite the limitations, this study has contributed in extending the literature on the variables associated with the implementation of knowledge management in humanitarian agencies and the influence it has on sustainable competitive advantage.

7.4 Suggestions for Further Research

On the basis of the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this study, the researcher recommends continued study on the level of adoption of knowledge management culture by Kenyan based and international humanitarian agencies and how the nationality of humanitarian agencies affects their funding and partnerships competition.

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