

**DETERMINANTS OF PUBLIC SECTOR PERFORMANCE IN KENYA. IS ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE (A TACIT KNOWLEDGE FACTOR) AN INFLUENCE?**

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**ABSTRACT**

Knowledge is a crucial component in the growth of any economy and forms a significant fraction of all the resources required for organizational growth. Out of the renowned factors of production, three out of the five factors (60 percent) are human factors (resource) who are actually, the main drivers of knowledge management and tacit knowledge sharing. In the Kenyan civil service, there seems to be ignorance about the amount of knowledge that flows through the service every day. Chief among the reasons for this scenario are strong hierarchy and bureaucracies that impede workforce communication and interactions and consequently, the generation, distribution and sharing of knowledge and information which is crucial for organizational performance. The study sought to establish the role played by workforce communication and interactions as a driver of tacit knowledge sharing, and the consequent effect this has on performance of the Kenya public sector. The study was guided by intellectual capital theory and Nonaka's model of knowledge creation. The study employed use of descriptive research design and targeted all public sector departments in Kenya. Eight counties namely Samburu, Makueni, Kirinyaga, Kilifi, Nairobi, Homa Bay, Bungoma and Garissa, formed the sample of the study. The study adopted purposive sampling and simple random sampling to seek responses from targeted civil servants. Data was collected by use of questionnaires, was analysed and presented using tables and other appropriate presentations. Chief among the conclusions made was that workforce communication and interactions had insignificant influence on tacit knowledge sharing in all the counties under study, save for Garissa, Makueni and Kirinyaga counties. Among the key recommendations, were creation of knowledge repositories whereby crucial information is stored and retrieved at will in order to propagate a knowledge economy. In addition, there should be automation of workflows for ease of work and enhancement of Government service delivery efficiency

**Keyword:** Tacit knowledge, Organisational culture, public service, knowledge economy, repositories

**INTRODUCTION**

Knowledge management (KM) involves embracing knowledge as a strategic asset that focuses on knowledge sharing (Maier, 2007). Knowledge management enhances organizational performance and competitiveness and is based on two critical activities: capturing and documentation of individual explicit and tacit knowledge and dissemination within the organization. Many organizations in Kenya and abroad have espoused the concept of Knowledge

Management (KM) as one that gives them a competitive edge over others. KM has been touted as the ultimate solution to most organizations' competitiveness in this era of knowledge edge (Maingi, 2007). The knowledge possessed and used by an organization's personnel could be the difference between the organization's survival and collapse. According to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), because of the Knowledge- Based Economy, the role of research centers, whether private or public, is becoming predominant. These institutions are crucial for the production of knowledge, which is an economic asset capable of sustainable growth and a decisive competitive advantage for businesses.

Hicks, Dattero and Galup (2007) in their work, "A Metaphor for Knowledge Management: Explicit Islands in a Tacit Sea", identified three fundamental concepts of knowledge which include: data, information and knowledge. They explain that data is a set of records and represents a fact or statement of event and information and is formed when we attach semantics to the data. Knowledge on the other hand is awareness of facts or information gained from experience, exposure or a learning experience. Govil (2007) expresses similar view with Hicks, Dattero and Gulip (2007 that when intelligence is attached to information; knowledge is created. This shows that there is a close relationship between data, information, and knowledge.

Information is data that has been accurately organized for purpose or use (Holvand ,2003)scholars distinguish between raw information and knowledge by regarding raw information as widely available to a number of organizations, but only some organizations are able to convert it to relevant knowledge and use it to achieve their aims (Holvand, 2003). Gammelgaard (2010) underscores the importance of knowledge and how organizations lose when they allow knowledge to leave the organization. He notes that individuals are disposed to hoard the knowledge they possess, and therefore, as people leave organizations because of dismissal, death or for other reasons, they take with them valuable knowledge. To counteract this loss and to ascertain that accumulated knowledge does not leave with individuals exiting the organizations, the leadership factor is deemed very important in facilitating the tapping and storage of that knowledge, whose essence again is realized through sharing.

Ramirez (2007) posits that management needs to support knowledge sharing in organizations and provide visible support to motivate employees to share their knowledge. The same argument is upheld by Bock and Kim (2002), whose views are that knowledge sharing has been considered the most important part of KM. Additionally, the ultimate goal of sharing employees' knowledge is its transfer to organizational assets and resources and unless individual knowledge is shared throughout the organization, knowledge will have a limited impact on organizational effect. They opine that the goal of knowledge sharing therefore can either be to create new knowledge by differently combining existing knowledge or to become better at exploiting existing knowledge.

For purposes of this study, tacit knowledge sharing is defined as the willful application of one's ideas, insights, solutions, experiences (knowledge) to another individual either via an intermediary, such as a computer-based system, or directly (Turban, King& Viehland, 2004). According to Bock and Kim (2002), to activate knowledge movement directly across individuals and indirectly through a repository calls for involvement of individuals in knowledge sharing

activities since tacit knowledge is a component of knowledge that is embedded in people's mind and which is externalized through sharing and performance.

### **Overview**

#### **Tacit knowledge sharing in Kenya civil service**

The benefits that tacit knowledge sharing brings to the civil service can only be realized if KM practices are effectively integrated into public service operations (Weber, 1978) though this would involve a very complex process that depends on the government's approach to the situation. For instance, it is crucial that any knowledge management program should take into account both tacit and explicit knowledge, as well as the dominant managerial model of governance. A further factor is the extent to which individuals are both willing and able to maximize their own value, based on the amount of knowledge they have and are willing to share with others. This, in turn, may dictate how knowledge is structured and presented to best enhance the decision-making capabilities of civil servants. Another aspect to consider is that the introduction of knowledge management practices into a civil service though this does not necessarily mean the relevant civil servants will be willing to share knowledge.

Within any bureaucratic structure such as predominates the Kenyan public sector, there is an unspoken motivation not to share knowledge, since according to Weber (1978), the power of any bureaucracy rests upon two types of knowledge: "technical know-how" and "official information". Considering that technical know-how may be shared by many, a civil servants competitive advantage may lie in official information. This is usually confined in their minds and only exposed upon an individual's choice and it is unfortunate that knowledge sharing decreases as the level of competition within an organization increases.

Other challenges in knowledge sharing include time and financial costs of attending meetings including transport costs, inadequate political will to mobilize knowledge sharers, lack of communication and information flow and political uncertainty (county governments are elected after 5 years cycle and therefore not enough time to harness knowledge. The sharers find it unprofitable to share given that many political electives would not return to power after the five-year term expires.

#### **Organizational Culture and Public Sector Performance**

Organizational culture is said to be the fabric that holds groups together (Aluko, 2003). It includes the shared values, norms, beliefs, principles and rituals that members share and conform to. Aluko (2003) further opines that, man is born into organizations, lives in organizations, works for organizations and even dies in organizations. The organization and its culture becomes an inevitable feature of man's life. Fulcher and Scott (1999) add weight to Aluko's opinion by defining an organization as a structure for carrying out particular social activity on a regular basis and have the following features: a specific goal, a defined membership and rules of behavior or conduct and authority relationships.

Hofstede (1999) view of culture is one of collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category from another and consists of knowledge, philosophy, morals, languages, motivation, attitudes, values and norms that are shared and transmitted in a society. Organizational culture is integral in organizational knowledge sharing and determines whether it will grow or not. The Kenyan civil service has a very rich organizational culture which works most of the time for the betterment of the service but it is also full of bureaucratic tendencies that deter more than enable tacit knowledge sharing. Firstly, culture acts as a barrier to people's ability to exchange intellectual assets or knowledge (Hofstede, 1999) and causes delay in decision making, setting a platform for believing that some specific individuals are chiefs of answers. This is because culture and subcultures shape assumptions about what knowledge is and which knowledge is worth managing.

Secondly, culture defines the relationships between individuals and organizations and determines who is expected to control specific knowledge including who can share and who can hoard. Thirdly, it creates the context for social interaction which in essence determines how knowledge is utilized in particular situations. Fourthly, culture shapes the process by which knowledge is created, legitimized and distributed in an organization. The Kenya civil service is a victim of all these four factors.

### **Public Sector Performance**

Public sector performance (PSP) refers to the total unit performance that adds up to the whole organizational performance. PSP involves comparing the expected results to actual results and investigating deviations and their causes (Hashim, 2007). Knowledge is a key component in the performance of any economy and in the Kenyan case; the counties are the basis or parameters of measurement of the overall public sector performance. There are three key elements popularly regarded as the 3 E's to be put into consideration when measuring public sector performance: Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness. Economy refers to the system of balancing available resources of a country i.e. land, labour, capital and enterprise against the wants and needs of consumers. Efficiency is the increase in output for a given unit of input, which may be in form of physical, human or financial resources. Effectiveness is the measurement of whether the output from given inputs meet organizational needs and requirements (Verbeeten, 2008).

Worth noting is that every organization's main objective is productivity which is consequently expected to translate into performance. According to Verbeeten (2008), these objectives make organizations to use techniques and management tools such as total quality management, benchmarking, business process reengineering and change management, which have been adopted by both the public and the private sector, so as to improve performance. The same observation is confirmed by Groffand and Jones (2003), who noted that the public sector has started to apply and adopt private sector management practices; a shift from emphasis on the traditional public administration to public management and entrepreneurship. Kiragu and Mutahaba (2005) confirm this through their advocacy for customer service delivery improvement by making it more market-oriented.

Knowledge management is a crucial source of wealth creation that supplements industrial and human capital (World Bank, 2001). In addition, knowledge sharing in organizations or departments is one of the key functions of any knowledge management program. The knowledge-based theory of the firm (Grant, 1996) supports the argument by affirming that knowledge is the organizational asset that enables sustainable competitive advantage in hyper competitive environment. The emphasis on knowledge in today's organizations according to this theory is based on the belief that barriers to the transfer and replication of knowledge endow it with strategic importance. Amidst this view however, is a sorry state in most sub-Saharan countries. While many countries elsewhere in the world have initiated and implemented KM programs in the civil service, most sub-Saharan countries are yet to initiate because of lack of experience or knowledge to do so. Another reason advanced by World Bank (2001) is that the civil service in sub-Saharan Africa is still rigid and bureaucratic in its operations. Bureaucracies are emphatic on rigidity and adherence to retrogressive hierarchical orders, procedures, rules and regulations which make the civil service deliver not more than the stipulated results.

McEvily (2003) views public institutions as having strong functional boundaries that interfere with knowledge sharing. This however, may not act as a hindrance since modern KM has benefited tremendously from the internet and associated technologies and the current power of KM lies in the extensive use of emails, chat rooms, blogs, discussion forums, social networks and databases that leverage ideas and knowledge to benefit the various groups and teams involved. This advantage can only be gained if institutions are fully automated, and the current situation is a far cry from the expected. Aldrich (2005) adds weight to the view by arguing that Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is ruled by knowledge and intellectual property which are key to achieving national development and therefore must invest in infrastructure that breaks the boundaries as they encourage sharing.

### **Profile of Counties in Kenya**

The new county governments in Kenya represent a rebirth of the former provincial and local government, which were manned from a central or national government, with a lot of authority decentralization. The 47 counties were formed under the constitution of Kenya review commission (CKRC) draft constitution through several deliberations of the national constitutional conference whose proposals were further deliberated and approved by a committee of experts. The objectives of creating counties were first to tackle long-term deeply entrenched disparities from regions, to create responsiveness and accountability of government to citizens, to allow greater autonomy and to drift regions and groups and rebalance power away from a historically strong central government. The key issues put into consideration to come up with the number and size of these counties were: geographical features of the area, means of communication or accessibility to effective governance, population density, available resources both human and physical, historical and cultural ties of communities and minority interests. This is according to the Commission on Revenue Allocation records (CRA, 2014).

However, even with all these factors being put into consideration, the 47 counties are still a replica of the 47 districts that existed in 1992 before others were hived later from the original ones.

The following are the counties by their names alphabetically arranged: Baringo, Bomet, Bungoma, Busia, ElgeyoMarakwet, Embu, Garissa, Homa Bay, Isiolo, Kajiado, Kakamega, Kericho, Kiambu, Kilifi, Kirinyaga, Kisii, Kisumu, Kitui, Kwale, Laikipia, Lamu, Machakos, Makueni, Mandera, Meru, Migori, Marsabit, Mombasa, Muranga, Nairobi, Nakuru, Nandi, Narok, Nyamira, Nyandarua ,Nyeri, Samburu, Siaya, TaitaTaveta, Tana River, TharakaNithi, Trans Nzoia, Turkana, Uasin Gishu, Vihiga, Wajir, and West Pokot county. The 47 counties are portrayed geographically in figure 1.



Figure 1: The 47 Counties in Kenya

Source: CRA County Factsheets, 2012 (<http://softkenya.com>)

### Guiding Theory

The study was guided by constructivism theory. This theory was crafted by Piaget in 1995 and deals with the way people create meanings of the world around them through a series of individual constructs. Constructs are the different types of filters we choose to place over our realities so as to change them from chaos to order.

When an individual comes into contact with a particular environment, they experience and



perceive it as they personally interpret and make meanings out of and which they imbibe in form of tacit knowledge. This is then displayed or exuded later in task performance. The same knowledge can be shared with other people who again perceive and make meanings out of it.

Kolb (1984) emphasizes the importance of conditionalised knowledge through experiential learning. He and Roger Fry created the Kolb and Fry Model out of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations. Their view is that learning is a continuous spiral and can begin at any one point. It begins with a person carrying out a particular action and then seeing the effect of the action in this situation. This theory gives a generalization that the nature of the learner has to be self-directed, creative and innovative through analysis, conceptualizations and synthesis of prior experience to create new knowledge. This supports tacit knowledge sharing because the same applies in sharing whereby self-drive and the level of creativity of the sharer determines how much knowledge will be shared. This concept gives insight on how tacit knowledge is shared, more specifically through interactions and observation especially from a willing learner.

The other generalization is the importance of the background of the sharer and culture of the learners. Social constructivism theory encourages the learner to arrive at his version of the truth influenced by his or her background, culture or embedded worldview. This view stresses the importance of the nature of the learner's social interaction with knowledgeable members of the society that makes it possible to acquire social meaning of important symbol systems and learn how to utilize them. The other generalization is that the responsibility of learning should reside increasingly with the learner (Glaserfeld, 1989). Social constructivism therefore emphasizes the importance of the learner being actively involved in the learning process.

Social constructivism theory strongly suggests that the process of sharing individual perspectives called collaborative elaboration (Meter & Stevens, 2000) results in learners constructing understanding together that which would not be possible alone (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick., 1996).

The theory however misses a few points. It asserts that individuals assimilate new experiences in already existing frameworks without changing them. What can be deduced from this assertion is that the theory does not discriminate whether the existing framework is positive or negative. This is because human beings may prefer to build into the positive than the negative. It may also be argued that the existing frameworks may clash or contradict the individual's experiences and therefore the theory in this situation may not contribute to knowledge. The theory also assumes that the learner constructs useful knowledge which may not be the case since it will depend on the nature of the learner in terms of perception, learning abilities, and situation at hand. The theory also emphasizes on the level of exposure and experiences of the learner and especially the people the learner is interacting with. It therefore may seem to discriminate on some disadvantaged groups like the physically and mentally challenged and the young

### **Methodology**

This study adopted a descriptive research design. Descriptive research design according to

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) is used to obtain information concerning phenomena and to describe what exists based on chosen variables. The target population consisted of all public sector workers who are in the public sector ministerial departments of the 47 counties in Kenya. Table 1 provides this data.

**Table 1: Number of Employees in the Public Sector**

<b>SECTOR</b>	<b>NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES</b>
Central Government	222,600
Teachers Service Commission	260,000
Government-Owned Parastatals	90,600
Institutions Where Government Owns 50 percent	43,600
Local Government	37,700
Total	645,300

**Source: Economic survey, 2013**

From table 1, there were about 645,300 public sector workers according to the year 2012 statistics but this study was interested in those in the devolved government (Devolved Government-37,700) and those in the central Government (222,600) which in total add up to 260,300 employees. The study mainly centered on the 47 counties in Kenya though the complimentary influence from the national government was also taken into account.

### **Study Sample**

The research employed use of purposive sampling method (also called judgmental, selective or subjective sampling method) which is an appropriate non-probability sampling method, if the units being investigated are based on the judgment of the researcher and focuses on particular characteristics of a population (Patton, 1999, 2001; Kuzel, 1999). 8 counties based on the former provinces were sampled, which represent 30% of the 18 devolved ministries. This gave rise to 6 departments namely: Agriculture, Trade, Education, Health, Planning and Public works. 1 county director and 6 line staff from each of the departments formed the sample as demonstrated in table 2.

**Table 2: Sampling Frame for Devolved Departments**

<b>County</b>	<b>Public Departments</b>	<b>No. of Directors</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>No. of line Staff</b>	<b>Sample Size Per County</b>
Samburu	6	6		6x6=36	42
Makueni	6	6		6x6=36	42
Kirinyaga	6	6		6x6=36	42



Nairobi	6	6	6x6=36	42
Kilifi	6	6	6x6=36	42
Homa Bay	6	6	6x6=36	42
Bungoma	6	6	6x6=36	42
Garissa	6	6	6x6=36	42
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>288</b>	<b>336</b>

**Source: Author, 2016**

**Table 3: Department/Ministries involved in the study**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
Agriculture	50	17.7
Trade	50	17.7
Education	44	15.5
Health	41	14.5
Planning	54	19.1
Public Works	44	15.5
Total	283	100.0

From table 3, the indication is that the ministries targeted by the study were adequately represented in all the counties

From the questionnaire, respondents were asked to indicate how long they had worked in their departments. 29% of the respondents had worked for more than 15 years and 12% had worked for less than a year. This meant that many had adequate institutional knowledge about the department. When asked whether they understood what tacit knowledge is, from the responses, majority viewed tacit knowledge as informal knowledge acquired from one person to another. Generally, most respondents had some idea of what tacit knowledge is. Additionally, most respondents indicated that employees attended seminars and workshops, brainstorming sessions on skills and competencies, open forums for sharing knowledge and whether there were informal platforms/grapevine that encourages tacit knowledge sharing. All of them were answered to the affirmative. Majority also confirmed that knowledge gained in such forums is shared to a fair extent. Majority of the responded confirmed also that tacit knowledge sharing contributes to public sector performance to a tune of between 75-89%. On the same note, some outstanding organizational culture factors findings are as presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Effect of organizational culture factors on public sector performance**

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Teambuilding exercises	283	1	5	1.81	1.154
End of year parties	283	1	5	1.85	1.359
Uniform wearing	283	1	5	1.69	1.131
Appreciation of organizational logo, emblem, mission & vision	283	1	5	2.36	1.383
Sharing common language(acoustics, sounds, nicknames)	283	1	5	2.04	1.233
Valid N (list wise)	283				

The results in table 4 indicate that some employees appreciate wearing of uniforms (mean score =1.69) as a unifying factor while others felt that holding end of year parties (mean score = 1.85) and Team building exercises (mean score=1.81) enhance tacit knowledge sharing and influence public sector performance. This demonstrates that to some extent, members share common identity and also interact in unofficial forums. The same factors were regressed and findings portrayed in table 5.

**Table 5: Coefficients**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	4.240	.309		13.718	.000
Teambuilding exercises	.227	.143	.121	1.585	.114
End of year parties	-.307	.096	-.190	-3.158	.002
Uniform wearing	.217	.152	.114	1.433	.153
Appreciation of organizational emblem	.106	.109	.068	.966	.335
Sharing common language (acoustics, sounds, nicknames etc.)	.240	.113	.137	2.130	.034

*a. Dependent Variable: Public Sector Performance*

The beta values in table 5 demonstrate the degree to which each predictor variable affects the outcome when all other predictors are held constant. Sharing common language (acoustics, sounds and nicknames) had a positive and significant effect on public sector performance with  $\beta=.240$  and p value  $.034<0.05$ . This means that as staff shares common language, public sector performance is improved. End of year parties were found to have negative and significant effect on performance with  $\beta=-0.302$  at p value  $.002<0.05$ . Of the remaining organizational culture factors, appreciation of organizational logo, emblem, mission and vision had a  $\beta=0.106$ , uniform wearing  $\beta=.217$  and Teambuilding exercises  $\beta=.227$  had a positive but insignificant effect on public sector performance. It can therefore be concluded that organizational culture factors have an effect on public sector performance but the effect may be positive or negative and further the effect may be significant or not significant.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the findings, it was noted that respondents had institutional knowledge and experience, having worked in their departments for a fairly long period. Most of them had an idea of what tacit knowledge was and acknowledged that it was being shared and that it is crucial in organizational performance. It is also concluded that Interpersonal Relationships among employees were fairly good and played an important part in tacit knowledge sharing among employees. Team building exercises and sharing of common language, acoustics, sounds and nicknames were highly rated as factors that enhanced interpersonal relationships, tacit knowledge sharing and consequently public sector performance. The conclusion therefore is to enhance them for the purposes of enhancing sharing. Summarily, organizational culture was found to have a positive but insignificant effect on public sector performance. According to Sathe (2007), culture is the integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, speech, action and artifacts and depends on man's capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. therefore, as insignificant as the effect may be, organizational culture is still a significant determinant of public sector performance.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings indicate that organizational culture has a positive influence on public sector performance. Among the parameters tested, uniform wearing was found to have moderate influence on public sector performance. Following these findings, the study recommends that various departments in the public sector should come up with dress code for their employees as this will show the employees that there is something they share in common. Teambuilding activities are also recommended to unite and enhance workforce interpersonal relations.

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