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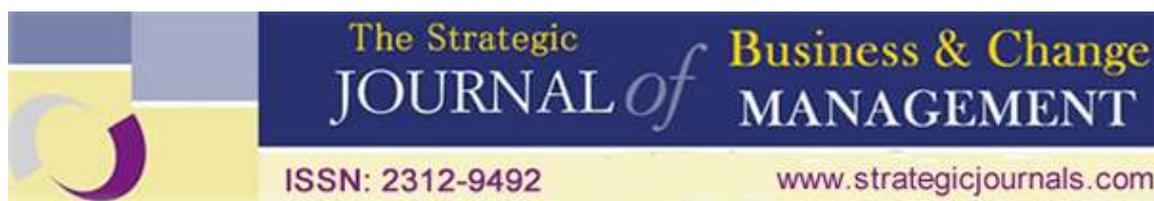
EFFECTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ON NGOs: A PERSPECTIVE FROM NAIROBI, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this study was to investigate the relationship between organizational learning and organizational culture. The study investigated 3 Non-Governmental Organizations based in Nairobi County; a sample 84 respondents were interviewed using a standardized questionnaire. A descriptive research design was adopted to determine the relationship among the variables. The specific objectives of the study were: to explore the culture of Non-Governmental Organizations; to analyse the impact of organizational culture on organizational learning and to understand the importance of organizational culture and organizational learning in the Nairobi based NGOs. The findings indicated that all the dimension of the organizational culture affects the different perspective of organizational learning. Research also indicated that most of the employees agreed that there was concrete knowledge sharing among groups, and the results further showed that these organizations support organizational learning (M=4.16), the results also attributed that the same mean of (M=4.07) agreed that concrete knowledge sharing among individuals in these organizations support organizational learning, While (M=4.07) of the employees agreed that commitment in an organization support organizational learning. The findings also indicated that a mean of 4.03, agreed that employees are nurtured from their organizational culture and that openness to new ideas is also supported (M=4.00), that employees have effective time allowance for reflection (M=3.96). On the same way, it was indicated that employee participation in decision making is also promoted for organizational learning purposes (M=3.91), a mean of 3.64 of the employees agreed that appreciation of their differences in their organizations also supports organizational learning while a mean of 3.13 indicated that they did not agree with the notion that their organization is not fully committed to nurturing organizational learning.

Keywords: *Consortium, Culture, Learning, Knowledge, Organizational performance, Nairobi (Kenya).*

INTRODUCTION

Organizational culture has great influence on organizational learning. Bundles of literature have established that Organizational culture is a main component for promoting an enabling working environment in different organizations. Different authors and scholars have come up with several characterizations of organizations culture. Some have expressed organizational culture as a system of knowledge, of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting that serve to relate human communities to their environmental settings (Buschgens et al., 2013). Others have expressed organizational culture as a set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people that are largely implicit among members and are clearly relevant and unique to the particular group which are also passed on to new members. Also organizational culture is defined as a system of knowledge, of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting that serve to relate human communities to their environmental settings (Buschgens et al., 2013).

Furthermore, empirical studies of organizational culture have involved the functionalist perception, providing significant evidence of the role of organizational culture in improving organizational learning (Denison & Mishra, 1995). The generality of an organizational culture requires that organizations recognize its sustaining opportunities and its impact on employee-related variables, such as organizational commitment, performance and job satisfaction, (Denison, Haaland & Goelzer, 2004). Lund, (2003) believed that less research was done on the relationship between organizational culture and organizational learning within the research topic of organizational culture and its effects. The organization consists of the staff, with the behaviour of its individual members affecting outcomes. Since cultural research within the NGOs field is not common, it is necessary to explore the ways culture influences the behaviours of the NGOs staff, and in turn how the behaviour of the same staff influences the organizational learning outcome (Cooke & Green, 2000).

Organizational learning has had different definitions from different scholars across the world. According to Probst and Buchel (2010), organizational learning is the ability of the institution as a whole to discover errors and correct them and to change the organization' s knowledge base and values so as to generate new problem-solving skills and new capacity for action. According to these two scholars, the following characteristics are performed in the process of learning: Change in inter subjective constructions of reality, increase in the range of possible actions and change in organizational knowledge (Casida & Pinto-Zipp, 2008). The definition of organizational learning according to Sheehan and Sparrow (2012) is as a process in which organizational performance can be improved by managers through the advancement of learning ability of staff step by step on the basis of focusing on its significant role in organizational performance. Whilst DiBella and Nevis (2013) definition of organizational learning talks of its capacity or process within an organization tries to maintain or improve performance based on experience. In their view, they state that organizational learning is a social process whereby some awareness or knowledge created either by an individual working individually or collectively, becomes accessible to others.

Organizational learning also refers to more than the sum of the information held by employees since it requires collective interpretation and systematic integration of new knowledge that leads to collective action and involves taking of risks as experimentation. For Berends and Antonacopoulou (2014), it is the development of knowledge held by organizational members that is being accepted as knowledge and is applicable in organizational activities, thus implying a potential change in those activities. Similarly it is defined as the acquisition, sustenance or changing of meanings shared by people through collective actions and cultural devices. According to Wang (2011), organizational learning can be described as the accumulation of individual learning in an organizational setting. He says organizations need to learn in order to respond

to rapidly transformation to changing environmental conditions.

Child (2015) emphasized organizational learning on collective knowledge construction and then went on to define it as the process through which an organization constructs knowledge or reconstructs existing knowledge. Kirwan (2013) views it from individual but also stress to collective pattern, where they define organizational learning as a collective phenomenon in which new knowledge is acquired by the members of an organization with the aim of settling, as well as developing the core competences in the firm, while taking individual learning as the basic starting point. The aim of this article is to demonstrate how organizational culture influences on building and developing organizational learning in the Non-Governmental Organizations.

A culture must be established that enables each organization to operate within its knowledge and demands. What must be emphasized here is that each organization has a different environment that requires concentration. Soyeon et al., (2018) indicate that culture is an artefact of what people believe and how they behave; if there is a good fit, it will enable and reinforce inventive and creative behaviour. If that culture is contradictory to these beliefs for example, controlling communication, emphasizing hierarchy, then it is likely to act as a limitation on innovation and creativity of those concerned. In essence, if an organization's culture is concentrated on learning, and structured in such a way that the actors within the organization can transfer knowledge, then human resources are more likely to feel more empowered to learn and progress.

It is important for an organization to create an enabling environment that is appropriate to create and restore its knowledge to keep up with ever changing world of innovation. A knowledge-centered culture challenges people to share and transfer knowledge throughout the organization for the betterment of the same organization. An organization can promote and strengthen an enabling environment that permits learning, and henceforth leads to innovative capabilities, through its cultural context. This would be achieved by the character, systems and structures coupled with the management style of the respective organization. Each organization has its own set of systems and structures that must be taken into consideration. Establishing a workable learning culture in any organization requires different processes and procedures in order to become productive and manageable. The management can promote its organization as a learning organization and cultivate cultural standards that alleviate this cause. However, the creation of a learning culture is not sufficient but organizations must rejuvenate this by emphasizing through changing times. Another way of the establishing of the organization as a learning organization is the fact that it must be all rounded and willing to learning. That is, the culture of learning today within the Non-Governmental organization established and working in the county of Nairobi must try to find for their staff and members participations.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is a main component for promoting an enabling working environment in different organizations. Different authors and scholars have come up with several definitions of organizations culture. Some have defined organizational culture as a system of knowledge, of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting that serve to relate human communities to their environmental settings (Buschgens et al., 2013). Others as a set of understandings or meanings shared by a group of people that are largely implicit among members and are clearly relevant and unique to the particular group which are also passed on to new members. Also organizational culture is defined as a system of knowledge, of standards for perceiving, believing, evaluating and acting that serve to relate human communities to their environmental settings (Buschgens et al., 2013).

Skyrme (2013) definition of organizational culture is any social system arising from a network of shared ideologies consisting of two components: substance-the networks of meaning associated with ideologies, norms, and values; and forms-the practices whereby the meanings are expressed, affirmed, and communicated to members. Alternatively, culture is comprised of distinct observable forms, case in point: language, use of symbols, ceremonies, customs, methods of problem solving, use of tools or technology, and design of work settings that groups of people create through social interaction and use to confront the broader social environment (Skyrme, 2013). This second view of culture is most valid to the inquiry and assessment of organizational culture and to strategies of cultural that leaders can implement to improve organizational performance.

Hester (2016) defined it as the pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented or advanced in learning to cope with its problems of external integration and internal adaptation. He categorized culture to consist of three levels. The most visible level is behaviour and artefacts which is the observable level of culture, and consists of behavioural patterns and outward appearances of culture, for instance, the advantages provided to executives, dress codes, level of technology utilized, and the physical design of work spaces. All may be visible indicators of culture, but difficult to understand (Hester, 2016). At the next level of culture is values which inspire and to a large extent define behaviour, but they are not directly observable, as behaviours' are. Often, there may be a difference between operating and stated values whereby, people will usually attribute their behaviour to stated values. The deepest level of culture is the level of beliefs and assumptions.

The underlying assumptions grow out of values, until they become taken for granted and drop out of awareness (Hester, 2016). As the definition above states, people may be oblivious to explain the assumptions and beliefs forming their deepest level of culture. The culture of an organization defines suitable behaviour, bonds and motivates

individuals, and affirms solutions where there is uncertainty. Culture influences and determines the way a company processes information, its internal relations, and its values. It functions at all levels from hidden to visible (Kirwan, 2013).

Organizational cultures are usually created, maintained, or transformed by people or by organization's leadership (Singh, 2011). They further emphasizes that leaders at the executive level are the principle source for the generation and re-infusion of an organization's ideology, articulation of core values and specification of norms. Organizational values express preferences for certain behaviours or certain outcomes, that is, the aspirations. Organizational norms express the culturally acceptable behaviours, for instance, ways of pursuing goals. Values and norms, once conveyed through the organization, create the organization's culture stability. Value systems tends to be reinforcing and it requires a lot of effort and time and to change them is very difficult once they are in place (Gehman et al., 2013).

According to Lee (2014), organizational culture is the pattern of values, norms beliefs, attitudes and assumptions that may not have been expressed but shape the ways in which things get done in an organization and how people behave. It has been established that the quality of the organizational culture matters greatly for institutional performance and organizational learning (Hester, 2016). Learning does not necessarily take place only in the minds of individuals, but rather shoots from the individual's participation in social activities (Hartnell et al., 2011). The central concept of research into organizational learning is the concept of organizational culture, because it highlights the context within which learning occurs, and it provides the basis for understanding how the results of past learning become entrenched in organizational norms and routines (Wang & Ellinger 2011).

It has been stated that creating lasting organizational change is closely linked with culture change (Budhwar et al., 2012). According to many social science scholars, behaviour is a function of

the meaning of a given situation. Participants in social events bring to them defined meanings and stereotypes, which can be understood only in a historical and cultural context. Organizational climate and culture scholars have been concerned with how the sense-making process, the filtration, processing and attachment of meaning in organizations occurs (Capgemini Consulting, 2012). Sense-making is an emerging process which to some extent institutionalized. Shared cognition has been argued to play an important role in understanding organizational issues (Grant et al., 2011).

Organizational culture holds strong effects upon the organizations who wish to increase their effectiveness through organizational learning. Hester (2016) theorizes that organizational culture is the basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic 'taken for granted' approach a view of it and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group's problems of internal integration. They come to be taken for granted because they solve those problems repeatedly and consistently. This deeper level of assumptions is to be distinguished for the 'artefacts' and 'values' that are manifestations or surface levels of culture, but not the essence of the culture (Burke, 2014).

Cekuls (2014) states that organizational culture serves as a sense making and control mechanism that guides and shapes the attitudes and behaviours of employees. Developing organizational culture that values learning, growth, and knowledge sharing must be properly established in order to promote organizational learning (Lim et al., 2014). An organization that desires to foster creativity and innovation should instill a work culture that encourages learning hence be able produce new ideas or products (Chiva & Habib, 2015). Subtle and undermining forces in an organizational culture can sabotage attempts at improving organizational learning, and/ or be a barrier to organizational culture change (Lim et al., 2014).

There is a human element in the culture of an organization that cannot be ignored and is the factor in effective organizational performance and management of change. Baird & Reeve (2011) observe that to be able to change an organization' s culture, peoples' morals, standards, attitudes and behaviours must be improved so that they may make the right impact to their organizations through collective cultural practices and contribution. This is a necessary right contribution to the organization since too radical shift in organizational culture can affect the organized behaviour of the people in a very negative way. On the same regard, Liao et al., (2012) agreed that different organizations requires a different set of cultural values in order to achieve their objectives and therefore if an organization is dealing with unclear circumstances then there is a higher need for flexibility that require a diversity of understandings.

A dominant characteristic of organizational culture in a traditional public service is authority vested in hierarchy and bureaucracy (Flores et al., 2012). Initially, this form of public administration was intended to ensure clear accountability of staff for the completion of tasks. However, the downside of strict adherence to hierarchical authority is that it tends to evoke compliance in government bureaucracies rather than commitment to the work at hand (Melhem, 2011). The more strongly hierarchical power is exerted, the more results are generally focused on compliance. Yet the genuine commitment of staff is usually an essential factor in fostering meaningful change in any organization (Easterby-Smith, 2011).

In today's complex and dynamic environment, it is important for the NGOs to embrace the concept of organizational learning that allows for continual development of new staff competencies and skills in order to enhance efficiency and effectiveness in their organizations thus enhancing their performance in provision service to people (Melhem, 2011). Recognition of the professionalism and knowledge of staff is central to the development of organizational learning in the NGOs

sector (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014). organizations that upholds knowledge generation and sharing like universities and consulting firms, emphasize the creation of mechanisms that recognize and reward innovation and creativity, professionalism, productivity and knowledge leadership of staff (Berends & Antonacopoulou, 2014).

Due to the increase in pressure from the operating environment in the NGOs, they now tend to have some similarities with private organizations therefore they are expected to act like knowledge - and expert-based organizations hence influencing the development of staff and the management of personnel (Gehman et al., 2013). It is therefore important that NGOs enhance organizational learning in the operations by creating an enabling environment and an organizational culture that encourages staff to acquire, share and manage knowledge, to network and collaborate with colleagues and external partners, to have a knowledge repository, to have a vision, goals and to build up their skills in accordance with a competence-based capacity development frameworks (Wang & Ellinger 2011).

METHODOLOGY

This study used descriptive design. Descriptive design shows an accurate profile and also gives a detailed description of events, situations and interactions between people and things (Mugenda,

2012). The study had a target population of eight hundred and forty (840) members of the 3 Non-Governmental Organizations based in Nairobi County. Based on Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) who stated that a sample should be at least 10% of the target population, a sample size of eighty four (84) employees was used in the study. The sample comprised of 4 senior management, 6 programme officers and 74 registered members of these 3 Non-Governmental Organizations based in Nairobi County. The study used self-administered questionnaires to collect data. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The descriptive statistical tools help in describing the data and determining the respondent's degree of agreement with the various statements under each factor. Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was used to derive descriptive statistics such as frequencies, means and other statistical information from which interpretation and presentation were based on. Qualitative data based on open-ended items in the questionnaires were managed using thematic analysis. The responses were organised in relation to the themes of research instruments.

Findings and Discussions

Table 1, presents the descriptive statistics results in terms of mean for the aspect of organizational culture on organizational learning.

Table 1: Effects of Organizational Culture on Organizational Learning

Organizational Culture on Organizational Learning	Mean
Concrete knowledge sharing among individuals in an organization support Organizational learning	4.07
Employees are nurtured from our organizational culture	4.03
Does employee commitment in an organization support Organizational learning	4.07
Concrete knowledge sharing among groups, in an organization support Organizational learning	4.16
Effective time allowance for reflection for employees in an organization support Organizational learning	3.96
Does employee participation in decision making promote organizational learning	3.91
Organization is not fully committed to nurturing organizational learning	3.13
Openness to new ideas in an organization support Organizational learning	4.00
Appreciation of differences by employees in an organization support Organizational learning	3.64

Source: Field Data (2018)

Table 1 above highlighted the findings of the effects of organizational culture on organizational learning that this study revealed. Based on the aspect of organizational culture on organizational learning it revealed that most of the employees agreed that there was concrete knowledge sharing among groups, and the results further showed that these organizations support organizational learning (M=4.16), the results also attributed that the same mean of (M=4.07) agreed that concrete knowledge sharing among individuals in these organizations support organizational learning, while (M=4.07) of the employees agreed that commitment in an organization support organizational learning. It went further to indicate that a mean of 4.03), agreed that employees were nurtured from their organizational culture and that openness to new ideas was also supported (M=4.00), that employees had effective time allowance for reflection (M=3.96). On the same way, it was indicated that employee participation in decision making was also promoted for organizational learning purposes (M=3.91), a mean of 3.64 of the employees agreed that appreciation of their differences in their organizations also supported organizational learning while a mean of 3.13 indicated that they did not agree with the notion that their organization was not fully committed to nurturing organizational learning.

This led the study to agree with Singh (2011), that organizational culture are usually created, maintained, or transformed by people or by organization's leadership. There is employees' participation in decision making in their organizations and therefore the employees feel to be part of the organizations and thus committed to the organizational growth and development (Kim, 2014).

Conclusion

The scope of this paper was to try to investigate and understand the link that exists between organizational culture (independent variable) and organizational learning (dependent variable), in 3

Non-Governmental Organizations of different structures established and operating within the county of Nairobi, Kenya. To reach this goal, we used a descriptive analysis method and a relational research design to establish the relationship between organizational culture and organizational learning as indicated earlier.

The findings of this research revealed that organizational culture impacts organizational learning. These findings also indicate that in today's employment market, organizations need to meet a new set of employee expectation. A motivating, fulfilling and enabling work environment is key component in the equation. Consequently, there is a need for human resources departments to understand and feel as a fully-fledged part of organizations, and how to know their individual contributory roles to the organizations as a whole. For employees in Nairobi, Kenya and more especially in the NGOs sector to be productive, they need to work in an enabling environment that energizes and motivates them. Effective communication contributes a lot to a healthy cooperative and enabling work environment. Building a good organizational culture characterized by cooperation between individual employees, groups, and organizations through an active participation, commitment and involvement of people, honest communication as well as empowering the same groupings are encouraging components to organizational learning. The ability of an organization to learn and propagate that learning into a meaningful action is the perfect competitive advantage. All relevant stakeholders in the NGOs world in Nairobi, Kenya need to establish an atmosphere that encourages collaboration and knowledge sharing in order for them to cultivate a great pool of knowledge management in their organizational members.

All studies were conducted with definite limitations and this study was not exceptional. For one, however structured questionnaires technique was employed for this study, and therefore proposed that focus group discussions could have been

utilized as well. Again, since only 3 NGOs were selected in the capital of Nairobi more others should have been involved to be able to capture more views of the wider NGO sectors in the capital in the perspective of instituting the relationship among organizational culture and organizational learning in the NGOs world. Therefore, there should be a more detailed study with more focus on organizational culture all over the capital of Nairobi if not throughout the country for a much more assessment of organizational culture and organizational learning in the context of NGOs in Nairobi, Kenya. Notwithstanding these limitations, the statistical findings of this study provided a new piece in the dilemma of organizational culture in the general operation of NGOs in Nairobi, Kenya. The evidence proves the conclusions that organizational culture significantly affects organizational learning in the NGO sector.

Recommendations

The study recommended that to effectively adopt the concept of organizational learning or any other initiative the management of NGOs needs to make thorough self-assessments to know how the employees perceive it as well as to put into consideration their organizational culture into perspective because it has great influence in their behaviour hence hindering their capacity to share, learn and embrace the dynamism of change. In addition, leaders of these NGOs should lead by example in order for them to influence their staff/ employees and thus upholds participatory approaches of development where everyone would feel involved and accommodated in the day to day operation of their respective organizations.

Further, it is important that the organizations through their top management work towards offering a conducive learning environment in order to encourage individual employees/ members' to fully participate in policy and decision making guided by a clear vision, mission and strategy in order to enhance professionalism and knowledge acquisition which are critical components of advancing organizational learning.

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