EXAMINATION OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES THAT ADDRESS TACIT KNOWLEDGE SHARING AND HOW WELL THESE POLICIES HAVE BEEN APPLIED AND FORTIFIED TO ENHANCE PUBLIC SECTOR PERFORMANCE.

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Abstract

Knowledge is an integral part of the factors that impact growth in an economy; more so in this knowledge age. Both public and private sector enterprises have embraced the knowledge concept, through not only harnessing the knowledge that abounds, but also managing it as they also ascertain that it is shared. Out of the numerous facets of knowledge, the most elusive and difficult to share is tacit knowledge, yet it highly impacts performance of organisations. The public sector generates and is also exposed to a lot of knowledge which in most cases is acquired but rarely shared. In the Kenyan civil service, there seems to be ignorance in the following areas: the amount of knowledge that flows through the Kenyan civil service every day, accounting for the knowledge that the Kenyan civil servants require for present and future needs, how to acquire that knowledge, the kind of knowledge that individual employees in the civil service possess and how to share such knowledge so as to enhance public sector performance. This situation then begs the question: are there tacit knowledge sharing policies in the Kenyan civil service and if there are how are they applied and fortified to enhance public sector performance?

Key words: knowledge, tacit knowledge, public sector, civil servants, performance

1. Introduction

Tacit knowledge is a facet of knowledge that is implicit and intangible unless transformed into explicit knowledge. Its demand to be managed has become a clarion call for institutions that are looking to engage a resource that is inexhaustible and non-imitable. Due to this fact, knowledge management is inevitable. Knowledge management is as old as mankind with its eminent debut being traced to the late forties, during the Second

World War, when it was noted that upon successive building of fighter planes, fewer defects were reported and this was associated with knowledge sharing. The early industrial age saw the ancient man make improvements on the survival tools which improved in quality as he made one tool after the other, each time realizing fewer defects because of perfection derived from experience. Upon such understanding, man decided to start saving the experience gained in forms that can be retrieved if need arises. This brought about the concept of learning that encouraged producers of goods to engage in quality mass production that came to warrant exchange of products in form of barter trade (Cortada & Cortada, 2011).

An empirical study conducted in Malaysia by Syed-Ikhsan and Rowland (2004), which investigated and examined the availability of KM strategy in the ministry of entrepreneurs and development of Malaysia and whose concerns were perceptions of KM benefits, problems, responsibilities and technology involved in managing knowledge, revealed that the ministry did not have KM strategies required to harness the benefits of knowledge even though knowledge was embedded in the ministry's procedures and policies and therefore available. Many workers felt that the ministry was responsible for managing knowledge and therefore made little attempt to go out of their way to benefit from the available knowledge. Other studies done in the public sector on KM include benchmarking of KM (Syed-Ikhsan, 2004), knowledge sharing (Liebowitz & Chen, 2003), KM initiative (Shields, Holden & Schmidt, 2000) and KM practices in public administration (Wiig, 2002). Knowledge by its very nature is non-imitable and as such is a unique resource that should be nurtured at all costs.

Africa lags behind in knowledge management initiatives but amidst this quagmire, are bodies associated with knowledge that ensure that knowledge is created and shared. Knowledge Management Africa (KMA) is a KM body that holds biennial conferences in different countries to promote knowledge management implementation in Africa and devices ways in which knowledge management and sharing can be enhanced. The first conference was held in Johannesburg, South Africa in 2005, and the second was in 2007

in Nairobi and whose theme was Pursuit of Mutual Advantage to rival the countervailing dominance of trade, finance, and investment by affluent countries with high technology. The latest one was held in Dakar Senegal in 2009 (Shields, Holden & Schmidt, 2000). Most of these conferences are driven by realization by Africa that her vast resources are useless unless she takes her people's knowledge as very crucial to her growth and move from a resource-based economy to a knowledge-based economy.

Kenya has 83 registered non-profit organizations and 277 profit-making organizations which in one way or another generate knowledge but whose sharing is not ascertained (Ireri & Wairagu, 2007). This is exemplified by the civil service which keeps reinventing the wheel (repeating mistakes) and routinely conducting business with no improvement (Ondari, 2006). Reinventing the wheel is a costly endeavor for it involves reproduction of what others have already produced and therefore does not give the coveted competitive advantage. In this regard, Kenya exhibits similar traits with other Sub-Saharan countries since she has not productively integrated KM into its government agencies (Ondari, 2006).

Further, in Kenya, the KM system is just beginning to appear in many organizations and consequently, little research and field data to guide the development and the implementation of systems that can give potential benefits of KM systems exist. Chief among the reasons why KM has not been integrated is slow application of appreciation of information and communication technology and introduction of e-government. Similarly, rigid bureaucracy, lack of incentives and cultural barriers continue to contribute to KM inadequacies. Lodge and Kalitowski (2007) confirm this view in their paper on "The Role of Knowledge Management in Enhancing Government Service Delivery in Kenya" that: the civil service is bloated, rigid, hierarchical and over-centralized and its monopoly status ensures that it is unresponsive and inefficient in enhancing KM systems. Furthermore, the government is driven by the interest of producers, not users. There is also a notable absence of a performance culture and civil servants are unaccountable and over-privileged according to Lodge and Kalitowski

(2007). The Kenya knowledge management and sharing initiatives and policies can be said to be almost wholly reliant on Africa initiatives as indicated by KMA, GDN, AMREF and World Bank but not the government.

In Kenya, like in other sub-Saharan regions, members of the public are rarely involved or consulted in policy formulation mostly due to the culture of secrecy that prevails in the government matters, which is even demonstrated by the Swahili word that denotes government's name (Serekali) which if translated means "top secret" (Ondari, 2006). Consequently, the civil servants are not eager to acquire or create knowledge and the few who do, are not motivated enough to continue doing it. Consequently, very little knowledge is generated and shared and therefore not many people are specialized in specific areas and only few are specialized consultants.

1.1. Concept of Tacit Knowledge

Tacit knowledge refers to the soft invisible knowledge that is hard to recognize its existence and which could be termed as more valuable than hard knowledge. it is captured through four ways as postulated by Popper (2000. The first one is mentoring a new employee, which means assigning a mentor to new employees as part of an orientation process and new hire acclimatization process where the mentor transfers and shares knowledge. The second is focusing on employee retention. It is expensive to recruit, hire and train new employees and so the most effective way is to retain good employees. This helps to sustain a strong tacit knowledge base. The third is to provide employees with opportunities to share experiences. This can be as formal as weekly staff meetings or as informal as annual employee events. The forth is to document all processes. This process can be automated to have very detailed and written processes sequenced step by step for every job. Worth noting is that tacit knowledge can offer sustainable and comprehensive competitive advantage because competitors have a difficult time replicating it.

Tacit Knowledge Sharing in the Kenya Civil Service

The Kenyan public service goes by many similar names like the public sector, public service and public administration. Those working in the departments in this sector are referred to as public servants or civil servants, whose responsibility is to articulate public policies and implement government strategies. These departments provide essential

public utilities like education, agriculture, planning, defense and health services (Potts, 2009).

Tacit knowledge is not well understood and embraced in the Kenya civil service because of its abstract and intangible nature which makes people pay more attention to explicit knowledge as opposed to tacit knowledge. Further, the Kenya civil service consistently loses experienced workers when they attain the age of 55 years and recently 60 years due to retirement, which translates to loss of valuable knowledge. Other reasons for people leaving the service are transfers, dismissals, and natural attrition. This leaves a lacuna of knowledge which in most cases is filled through explicit knowledge by those who remain (Butler, 2011). Polanyi (1966) advocates for the harnessing of that crucial knowledge which is embedded in people's mind and is difficult to express.

The Kenyan civil service is characterized by rigid bureaucracy and hierarchical chains that dictate the organizational structure and modes of operation (Clavier, Senechal, Vibert & Potvin, 1999). This hierarchy has inflexible norms, policies, and rules which must be adhered to and only adjustable if orders come from above (Arowolo, 2010). Bureaucracies are a precursor to a culture of mistrust and impersonal interactions which inhibit tacit knowledge sharing. Comparing the Kenyan public sector with other economies brings out an interesting contrast. A case in point is what is noted by Herbert (2000) that successful companies like Yahoo, Google and Intel, rely heavily on tacit knowledge as a major asset for competitive advantage and therefore keep on generating intellectual skills which they continuously encourage members to share. It is no wonder then that they have led the world in terms of inventions and innovations.

Tacit knowledge often requires that those already holding knowledge, work with the novice to teach them in a hands-on process (Zucker & Darby, 2001). Awad and Ghaziri (2007) posit that brainstorming; free exchange of ideas and holding of healthy debates and discussions should be encouraged. They point to the introduction of e-governance to enable the civil service to move towards more customer-centered services as it brings

with it a redistribution of tasks and hence of knowledge. It is common knowledge that the Kenyan civil service is not particularly customer-centered and that service delivery is of uneven quality and availability. Citizens receive services as and when the civil servants have the time and ability to render them and also that service delivery is often delayed and of poor quality. However, the scenario has slightly improved upon the introduction of Huduma centers. Opinions direct to the view that if the Kenyan government was to introduce e-governance, there would be better redistribution of tasks and knowledge and a move towards customer-centered services and enhanced service delivery. Knowledge management would be one of the major pillars enhancing service delivery in the Kenyan 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 of introducing practical knowledge management practices into the 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.

1.2. 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. The Government of Kenya has since 1992 put initiatives in place to improve service delivery. Key among them is the enactment of the public procurement and disposal act (2005), to streamline the procurement efforts partly by trying to channel resources where within the government in a timely manner and avoiding wastage of resources. The Kenya government has also increased the anti-corruption efforts implementation through the Anticorruption and Economics Crime Act (2003), aimed at reducing corruption. In the year 2010, the new constitution was promulgated to create a decentralized government wherein the two of the three arms of the government namely the legislative and the executive were devolved and to the 47 counties and the legislative remained in the National Government. The intention amongst other primary intentions was to enhance and improve service delivery through devolution, the byproduct of which was creation of counties. This caused power devolution with key government functions being entrusted on county governments, though the policies were still cascaded downwards from the national to the county governments. The counties are as profiled.

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.

2. Objectives

i. To establish what employees in the national government understand by the term tacit knowledge

ii. To establish the policies that have been put in place to enable effective management and sharing of tacit knowledge

iii. To determine the extent to which specific tools of internal organization's best practices are used in government departments.

iv. To recommend to the national government the interventions that can enhance Tacit Knowledge Sharing.

3. Guiding Theory

The study is guided by the following theory.

Knowledge Economy Theory

The theory was penned by Piaget (1959) and is concerned with the production and distribution of knowledge as commodity function consumption within the organization's value chain. The concept of knowledge results from the recognition of the role of knowledge and technology in economic growth. Knowledge as embedded in human beings is considered as human capital which is central to economic development. Knowledge in this theory is considered as part of the most important assets in an organization, is non-imitable and in most cases, is a resource that defies the vagaries of time. The theory uses capital assets which are firm-specific resources and are indispensable in a firm's value chain (Nonaka, Toyama, & Byosière, 2001). These scholars' views, point to the role played by knowledge as it interplays with other resources to create value that contributes to organizational performance.

The knowledge assets according to the theory acts as inputs that after processes and procedures are performed on them, the results are increased productivity. Boisot (1998) notes that knowledge economy theory involves organizational processes and unconscious cultural knowledge that blends together to add value to the whole value chain of resources. The theory advocates for value gained through networks out of partnering of individuals to achieve competitive concentration of resources with a view of sharing knowledge which is said to decline with network length or distance (Inkpen & Tsang, 2005).The knowledge sharing network improves on skills and competencies and gives an organization enduring knowledge advantage that lasts beyond employee turnover, death, dismissal or resignation and offers the organization minimal or inconsequential knowledge loss.

The theory calls for continuous KM that is motivated by the need to diversify KM across individuals to the degree that a reasonable magnitude of employee turnover does not disrupt organizational operations because the knowledge required for continuity had been continuously shared way before the time it requires to be used (Beazley, Boenisch, & Harden, 2002). This study upholds similar views and behoves the Government the responsibility of crafting policies that can harness tacit knowledge for sustainable competitive advantage. However, the theory fails to recognize different types of knowledge-based capabilities like information systems that can be used to synthesize, enhance and expedite large-scale intra and inter firm management (Alavi & Leidner, 2001). It can also be criticized on the basis that there is no guarantee that knowledge cannot be imitated as happens in programming and plagiarism.

4. Methodology

The study employed the use of descriptive research design. The target population consisted of top level managers and line staff of 6 non-devolved ministries.

Study Sample

The study utilised purposive sampling to select 1 top level manager and 4 line staff from 6 non-devolved ministries. In this respect, six departments were purposively selected which are

labor, sports, national public works, national health, national education and housing. Efforts were made to stick as much as possible to the departments already picked in the same study for the analysis of the relationship between tacit knowledge sharing and public sector performance in devolved governments. The sample was as indicated below.

Table 1: Study Sample

	Top level managers	Line staff	Total
Labor	1	4	5
National Education	1	4	5
Sports	1	4	5
National Public works	1	4	5
Housing	1	4	5
National Health	1	4	5
Total	6	24	30

5. Findings

Out of 30 questionnaires administered to the national government officers, 21 questionnaires were returned giving a return rate of 70 percent which can be termed as good.

5.1. Employees Understanding of the Term Tacit Knowledge Sharing

The respondents were asked to indicate their understanding of the concept of tacit knowledge sharing. The result is indicated in table 2.

Table 2: Understanding of Tacit Knowledge Sharing

	Frequency	**Percent**
Knowledge acquired informally	6	28.6
Involve the act of exchanging views and ideas	3	14.3
Sharing ideas openly	2	9.5

Knowledge Acquired by people during normal interaction	2	9.5
A way of sharing knowledge by working together	1	4.8
Knowledge learnt through experience	4	19.0
On job training from colleagues	1	4.8

There is an indication that though there are varied meanings associated with the term, all the national government employees have a common understanding of tacit knowledge sharing as an informal knowledge acquired from other employees by the very nature of working together, experiences and during normal interactions.

5.2. Policies in place for TKS

The respondents were asked to indicate whether there were policies in place in their ministries that facilitate TKS and the following were their responses.

Table 3: Whether there were Policies in Place for TKS

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	8	38.1
No	13	61.9
Total	21	100.0

The results indicated in table 3 reveal that majority of the national government departments do not have policies in place for the management and sharing of knowledge which accounted for 61.9 percent. This is an indication that tacit knowledge sharing has not been institutionalized by the national government departments.

5.3. TKS Tools and Practices in the Ministries

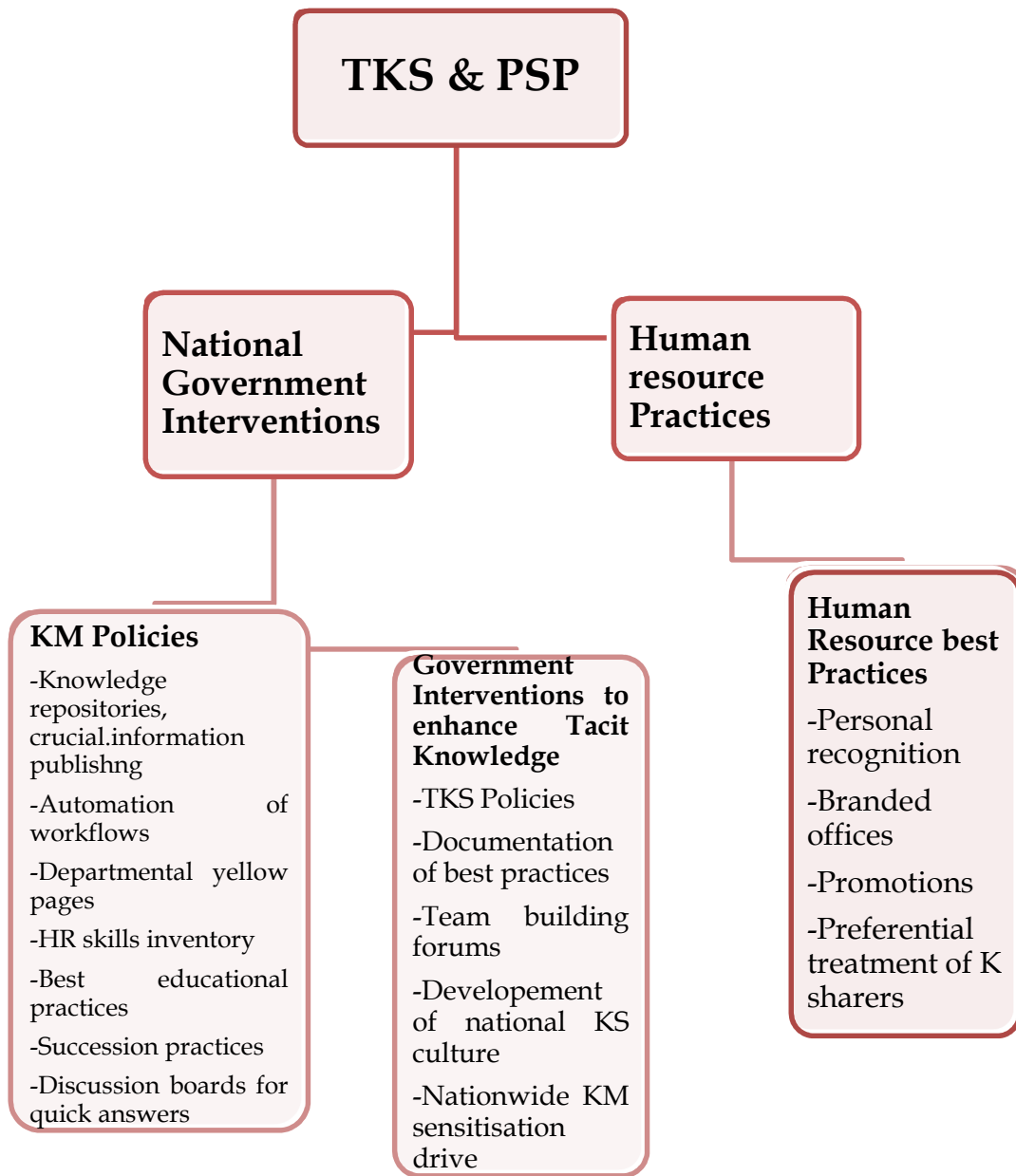**Table 5.3: Specific TKS Tools and Best Practices Used in Government Departments**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation

Induction and orientation of new hires/employees	21	1.00	5.00	3.0476	1.39557
Building of new and old hire capacity	21	1.00	5.00	2.1905	1.16701
Mitigation in the loss of experienced workers	21	1.00	4.00	1.5714	1.20712
Making stored data or information searchable and available knowledge on the intranet	21	1.00	2.00	1.4762	.51177
Valid N (list wise)	21				

The results indicate that induction and orientation of new hires/employees is highly rated (mean score=3.0476) followed by Building of new and old hire capacity (mean score=2.1905). This is an indication that national government inducts and orients new hires/employees though there is no policy in place to guide this practice/induction program. The Government departments were also found to take an initiative to build new and old hire capacity though very little effort is made to mitigate the loss of experienced workers. Making stored data or information searchable and available on the intranet was also scarcely done. Mitigation in the loss of experienced workers and making stored data or information searchable and available on the intranet had a mean score of 1.5714 and 1.4762 respectively. These scores are quite low and therefore gives the impression that once the experienced workers leave the departments, they walk away with their knowledge which is neither stored or searchable. The little that may remain is what the leftover workers may have imbibed through their self-initiatives of observation or self-mentorship.

5.4. Recommendations on Government interventions in enhancing TKS

The respondents were also required to recommend to the national government the interventions they can use to ensure tacit knowledge is managed and used in a bid to improve public sector performance. the results are shown in figure 1 in the next page.

TKS & PSP

National Government Interventions

Human resource Practices

KM Policies

-Knowledge repositories, crucial.information publishng

-Automation of workflows

-Departmental yellow pages

-HR skills inventory

-Best educational practices

-Succession practices

-Discussion boards for quick answers

Government Interventions to enhance Tacit Knowledge

-TKS Policies

-Documentation of best practices

-Team building forums

-Developement of national KS culture

-Nationwide KM sensitisation drive

Human Resource best Practices

-Personal recognition

-Branded offices

-Promotions

-Preferential treatment of K sharers

Figure 1: Recommendations on how Tacit Knowledge Sharing can be enhanced for PSP

6. Conclusion.

 The findings reveal that there are inadequate policies in place for management and sharing of knowledge through the means under consideration. The results of the tools of tacit knowledge internal organization's best practices used in the national government department indicated that while induction and orientation of new hires/employees is effectively done, mitigation in the loss of experienced workers is hardly done implying that there is no policy in place to guide knowledge retention. This makes knowledge traceability a herculean task and leads to the conclusion that the national government lacks in knowledge sharing policies and what exists is still in the infancy stage.

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