Building Blocks of Knowledge Management Enablers in the Hotel Sector in Kenya

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Abstract

This paper addresses the need to conceptualize knowledge management enablers for easy use in hospitality management in order to improve the information basis for decision making. It examines indicators used to measure knowledge management enablers and enhances understanding of the factors. The paper contributes to empirical knowledge pertaining to knowledge management particularly in the hospitality industry. Previous studies measured knowledge management enablers using social-technical theory and social-technical perspectives. The study employed both descriptive and explanatory research designs. The target population for the study was 756 employees from three selected hotels out of which 254 formed the sample size. Purposive, proportionate, stratified and systematic random sampling methods were used for the study to realize the objective of the study. Self administered questionnaire were used to collect data. Validity and reliability tests were undertaken. Cronbach's alpha was at the level of 0.934. Data was analysed using descriptive and factor analysis to test the strength of the indicators of knowledge management enablers. Findings from this study revealed that knowledge management enablers in the hotel setting can be measured using personal knowledge and social knowledge.

Keywords: Employee, Hotel, Indicators, Knowledge Management enablers, Perception

INTRODUCTION

Many factors drive changes in business such as a progressively filtered and demanding market place, business roles and understanding of knowledge rigorous work and the way people think, learn, and utilize knowledge (Brown and Duguid, 2000; Damasio, 1994 and 1999; Halpern, 1989; Nonaka and Takeuchi, 1995; Klein, 1998; Schön, 1983; Wiig, 1994). Over time, managers begin to focus on managing knowledge purposefully and in a systematic manner. Key factors in organizations performance include enablers, drivers, facilitators and mechanisms. Knowledge and other intellectual capital assets are the principal enablers of an organizations performance for they provide means to establish the proper course, content, and quality of actions. The standpoint of knowledge creates the potential to shift focus to elements that establish the valuableness of acts that should be executed (Wiig, 2000). Knowledge management deals with technical aspects of creating ways of disseminating and leveraging knowledge in order to enhance organizational performance (Easterby-Smith and Lynes 2003).

Knowledge management enablers were defined by Ichijo *et al.,* (1998) as managerial devices for deliberately and unswervingly creating knowledge. Boston and Heinen, (1977) classified knowledge management enablers as socio-technical theory and social-technical perspective which are independent but inter-related and interacting systems. From this perspective, technical arrangement comprises procedures, undertakings and expertise while

the social arrangement concerns itself with elements of people, associations among people, compensation methods and power compositions. Cliff & Nancy (2002), posit that management focus knowledge as process on how people communicate rather than on information and the way it is handled. People are complex and difficult to manage than information hence it is easy to understand why most organizations spend more money, time and resources on developing human capabilities for information handling than on developing those for interpersonal collaboration. People may be natural knowledge sharers, but within organizations, there are competing motivations between loyalty to the organization, team and to a career. King (1999), alluded that the main aspect of knowledge management comprises acquisition, explication and communication of task-precise specialized expertise in a way that is centered and relevant to a participant in an organization who obtains the communication. Knowledge management (KM) contributes to effective operations and establishes competitive advantage over competitors in the hospitality and tourism industry. When the proven knowledge during the field operations is re-used, knowledge developed during various formal and informal procedures can be incorporated in operations (Pyo, Uysal and Chang, 2002).

Knowledge management provides knowledge at hand in advance, in anticipation of the knowledge use (Pyo, Uysal and Chang, 2002). When the knowledge is in hand, the speed of operations improves greatly by eliminating knowledge searching time. When the knowledge is based on internal team cooperation, copying the competitive advantage by the competitors can be very difficult. Robert *et al.,* (2006) observed that today's economy is knowledge-based where the ability to create, distribute and apply knowledge are key drivers of worker productivity, company competitive advantage and industry growth. Knowledge workers are distributed around the world and are interconnected via the Internet. Intellectual property challenges often arise over who owns what knowledge, and when knowledge may be traded for personal gain. Over time, knowledge workers develop specialized work practices awhich presents a challenge in fostering effective communications between the practices. However, knowledge workers frequently differ on how open they share what they know with potential collaborators. Thus, it is necessary for scholars to study the need to apply knowledge management in organizations by identifying how and where it is applied and who applies the knowledge (Russ, 2010). Acquisition of skills by knowledge workers and increased pace of changes are the new norms in the workplace that require organizations to introduce new products or services, cut costs, reduce risks and reinvent themselves or otherwise face challenges in this unique economic environment.

Hospitality organizations must have a knowledge management infrastructure in place that helps deliver satisfactory service to customers, so as to secure repeat business for the establishment. With the infrastructure, some factors enable employees and managers to utilize knowledge effectively in order to reap the benefits of a performing organization. Hotel managers may not understand some of these factors and the key roles they play within an organization. For instance, managers of hotels may be interested in capturing knowledge possessed by some of its employees which they may not do well so as to preserve the knowledge for future needs in case the current employee left the organization. However, when they act in the light of factors that facilitate performance within the hotel, it may improve performance and growth. Successful implementation of knowledge generates the infiltration of its principles and practices into processes, routines, activities and employees which enhance organizational memory, ability to collect, analyze, disseminate and apply knowledge to a companys' advantage. As a result, knowledge competencies and assets affect present and future performance of companys'. Knowledge Management (KM) is a

business optimization strategy that deliberately and systematically chooses, filters, arranges, stores, wraps and disseminates information necessary to the operations and activities of an organization in a way that both employee performance and corporate competitiveness are enhanced (Bryan, 2003).

Knowledge Management usage influences individual work performance along with employee's decision-making productivity. Individuals' joint impact affects the performance of company sections and the organization as a whole, which sum up into the net benefit of the Knowledge Management Systems within the organization (Jennex and Olfman, 2006). The benefits that organizations gain arising from their KM initiatives comprise increased innovation and growth potential, organizational responsiveness, more efficiency in supply network, organizational internal quality, better decision-making competencies, improved responsiveness to customers, better product and service offerings, as well as enhanced effectiveness of employees, operations and processes resulting in company augmented performance (KPMG 2000; Croteau and Dfouni 2008; Law and Ngai 2008). Verweire & Lutgart (2004) assert that the business world is changing at an ever-increasing pace. The globalization of markets, the revolution in information and communication technologies, the increasing importance (and volatility) of financial markets and the war for talent are only a few of the change drivers in the current business climate. In this ever-changing world, today's managers are confronted with a number of daunting challenges in their quest for creating value. Business is getting more complex. Many creative methods and practices such as incessant improvement, empowerment, re-engineering and quality management are employed as a result of newly trained and energized employees.

Verweire & Lutgart (2004) further observe that Companies look for new forms of relationships with customers, suppliers, employees and other stakeholders. Intangible assets have become the major source of competitive advantage. As such, companies have been changing their operating assumptions to include the development of closer value chain relationships, customization of products and services, reliance on knowledge workers and an intense focus on innovation. At the same time, companies have been downsizing, de-layering and outsourcing strategically non-relevant activities. These new trends occurr against a background of intensified competition. Russ, (2010) observed that new economies are evolving and therefore, knowledge is considered a substantial and crucial component of business strategy. Thus, the ability to manage knowledge is rapidly becoming a significant skill for securing and maintaining organizational success and surviving in the new knowledge economy. The major concern is how the companies succeed in managing the knowledge in their organization so that it benefits the organization through enabling it to meet its objectives. The basic idea is that different companies manage their knowledge in different ways, the same way they differently manage their employees, financial capital, and other assets. Companies use different strategies to manage those assets: they diversify, they penetrate, and/or they develop new products. Knowledge management (KM) requires obtaining skills that will allow management to develop knowledge-based strategies.

In the new economy, value is shifting to service-related and knowledge intensive industries. Sectors of the economy for instance; health, education, finance, information systems, media and telecommunications have been growing strongly over a decade (Skyrme, 1999). The foundation of industrialized economies has shifted from natural resources to intellectual assets and executives are compelled to examine the knowledge underlying their businesses and how that knowledge is used (Hansen et al, 1999). Drucker, (1999), in his definition of knowledge work, placed attention on the differences between productivity of manual

workers and those of knowledge workers. The key enablers of the latter include abstractly defined tasks (vs. clearly defined, delineated tasks), flexible application of knowledge, workers' autonomy, continuous innovation and learning into job roles, assessment based on quality (not just quantity) of output and perceiving workers as organizational assets. Knowledge in organizations is a fundamental basis for competition, in terms of vital strategy and competitive resources (Ipe, 2003, Storey, 2005). It is a fundamental aspect, embraced by organizatons to build and retain competitive advantage (Beckman, 1999, Chuang, 2004). Knowledge enables organizations to gain and maintain competitive advantage (Argote and Ingram, 2000, Argote et al., 2000, Chou et al., 2005, Davenport and Prusak, 2000, Nonaka, 1998, Sabrina and Matthew, 2005).

Knowledge Management Enablers and the hospitality industry

Despite little empirical evidence in general on the concept of knowledge management and knowledge management enablers in most sectors, there is however especially a lack of applications and empirical evidence in the tourism and hospitality sector compared to other fields. Consequently, KM concepts seem to being expanded majorly from a manufactured and multidimensional viewpoint (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995) that according to Grizelj, (2003) do not seem to consider aspects of hospitality services supported on collaborations and the necessity to accept issues of inter-business. Moreover, the tendency within hospitality research is that empirical studies do not bring anything substantial or significant to the industry in general because the research is mostly case-based and operationally focused (Cooper, Sheperd, & Westlake, 1994). A review of empirical KM research carried out in the hospitality industry also reveals that research is limited, inconclusive, and low on generalization and testability (Hallin & Marnburg, 2008).

The hospitality industry may benefit from KM activities as the industry is becoming knowledge-based and knowledge-intensive due to the great influence and use of information technology (Kahle, 2002), and the nature of the service delivery rooted in the interaction between customers and employees (Kotler, Bowen, & Makens, 1999). Chain hotels and geographically dispersed hotels are likely to benefit from KM systems due to the requirements of an overall quality standard (Medlik, 1990). Scholars suggest that KM research within the hospitality industry should focus especially on studies of strategic importance that can benefit chain hotels, such as investigation of what domain-specific knowledge means for hospitality management and employees, how to store real-time contextual knowledge, and how to investigate employees' versus managers' knowledge abilities in forecasting business change (Hallin & Marnburg, 2008).

In recent years, management of chain hotels in particular has experienced a continual global pressure for organizational growth as a result of periods of cyclical up- and downturns, and thus decision-makers in hotels have to deal increasingly with complex problems. This complexity manifests itself in many forms such as coping with promotional activities, pricing strategies, innovation activities to stimulate customers' changing interests, control of capacity constraints, loans and fixed costs. Consequently, decision makers go through vast quantities of information to deal with day-to-day operations and to come up with the best and most effective course of action in their strategic decisions. For leaders of hospitality companies, the increasing complexity results in rising concerns about their capability to successfully manage the increasing ambiguity and vague information accompanying the environmental forces that drive changes. Hence, there is a need for further knowledge on how to improve the information basis for management in order to simplify and advance their decision-making processes.

Debowski (2006) opines that knowledge management reflects a concern for developing a well expressed and logical long-term plan for the intellectual assets of the organization. It is based on the recognition that the knowledge held by individuals is a valuable commodity in an organization. Each person possesses a unique knowledge set drawn from experiences and sources encountered over the years from where the organization may draw personal systems, professional resources, and internet and competitor information. This knowledge is generated as the various information sources are tested and combined with past experience and learning, making knowledge creative, dynamic and adaptable. Thus, people possess principles that have been tested over time and found to be true and other knowledge may be dynamic, constantly shaped by new experiences and insights.

Knowledge is developed through the adaptation and interpretation of information past expertise, experiences, errors and other influences drawn from individuals personal construction of reality and is constantly reshaped and consolidated through further levels of capability which can be accessed in work settings. This leads to explicit knowledge and tacit knowledge. Explicit knowledge the one that can be shared with others and can be documented, categorized, transmitted to others as information and illustrated to others through demonstrations, explanations and other forms of sharing. It is a key organizational resource which is increasingly important as the nature of work evolves towards a knowledge focus. On the other hand, tacit knowledge involves the knowledge that is drawn on the accumulated experience and learning of a person which is hard to reproduce or share with others. It is hard to duplicate, replace or interpret and is grounded on a blend of experience, research and induction that may have been refined over many years (Debowski, 2006).

The knowledge management approach is meant to meet two challenges recognized by large businesses as they seek a competitive edge in an expanding and information-intensive marketplace. One is to get a better handle on the runaway growth of useful information by taking control of the sources of that information and not losing information that has been located and captured. The other is to manipulate information to answer vital business questions in an increasingly complex and fast-changing world. This is the origin of what some people call the knowledge as object path. Its goal is to gather key data and configure them in ways that tell the organization how to proceed toward whatever it defines as success. It starts with data collection, storage, and management and applies the searching and parsing skills of virtual librarians and economists to the various data streams associated with purchasing, production, sales, marketing, and human resources (Cliff & Nancy, 2002).
In his view, Ricarda (2002) asserts that tacit knowledge contains cognitive and "technical" elements. Cognitive components such as models, methods and convictions assist people to identify with the surrounding. Technical elements enclose skills and embedded know-how for specific actions. The transfer of knowledge always requires finding redundancy and connections between the items of the individual mind and the transferred knowledge. Therefore, direct interrelations that are richer with information foster the transfer of identical or tacit knowledge. At the same time, firms competencies to outperform the marketplace lies in the ongoing generation and synthesis of collective organizational knowledge, for firms to add value from knowledge it is especially relevant to build up organizational knowledge. A companys' creation of knowledge takes into account the ability of the organization to build new knowledge, Organizational knowledge creation, involves the capability of a company as a whole to create new knowledge, circulate it within the organization, and exemplify it in its structure. Based on the above discussion, this paper

determines the indicators that can be used to measure knowledge management enablers in hotels.

METHODS

The study which was undertaken in 5-star hotels in Nairobi city utilized descriptive research design. There are 17 five star hotels in Nairobi city wherein three that are international chain-brand hotels were selected. Samples were drawn from a target population of 756 employees working in the selected hotels out of which 254 formed the sample size. Purposive, stratified and systematic random sampling techniques were employed wherein purposive sampling was used to select three hotels out of seventeen 5-star hotels in Nairobi; stratified sampling was used to select employees based on their departments (strata) while systematic random sampling was used to select the actual individuals who participated in the research. Data was collected using structured questionnaires containing closed-ended questions that were self administered to the hotel employees. Validity of the instruments ensured construct, content and face aspects of both the questionnaire and questions were justifiable. Reliability was measured using Cronbach's Alpha at a level of 0.7%. which according to Hair *et al*., (2005) is the generally agreed upon lower limit for Cronbach's Alpha but may decrease to =>0.60 in explanatory research and increase up to ≥0.80 in studies that require more stringent reliability. Descriptive statistics, specifically frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation were used to summarize data. Exploratory factor analysis was employed to reduce the indicators through principal component analysis maximum likelihood, principal axis factoring and weighted least square.

Measurement of Variable

Measurement items adopted from prior, according to Luarm and Lin, (2005) enhances content validity of the scale utilized. Therefore survey items for knowledge management enablers were adopted and modified from Wig, (2000). Questionnaire items used to measure knowledge management enablers were seven indicators and data collected used a five-point likert scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disgaree, 3=Neutral, 4=Agree and 5=Strongly Agree. The indicators include: 1) Being able to utilize own knowledge to work in the establishment; 2) Possessing valuable knowledge required for the establishment; 3) Learning from fellow employees in the establishment; 4) Being receptive to experiences from fellow colleagues; 5) Attempting to understand and tolerate other employees; 6) Using knowledge gained from academic institutions in the establishment; 7) Sharing experiences learnt from colleagues in the establishment

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Construct Reliability

Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the constructs used to measure KM enablers. The maximum value attained was 0.942 while the lowest value was 0.872 As shown on table 1. These results showed that the indicators used to measure the variables were reliable in explaining each of the indicators under study because they were all above the 0.7 threshold. KM enablers had seven indicators with an average value of 0.899.

Table 1: Reliability Results

Reliability Statistics	Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based On Standardized Items
Use knowledge to work	0.869	0.872
Have Valuable Knowledge required	0.884	0.885
Learn from colleagues in the hotel	0.915	0.917
Receptive to experiences from colleagues	0.887	0.889
Understand and tolerate other colleagues	0.914	0.914
Use academic knowledge	0.941	0.942
Share experiences learnt from colleagues	0.886	0.888

Source: Data Analysis

Knowledge management indicators

As shown on table 2 below, respondents were asked whether they use their knowledge to work for their establishments (M=3.97, SD=0.822). On whether employees have valuable knowledge required by their hotel to perform (M=4.03, SD=0.784). Pertaining to whether employees learn from their fellow colleagues at the work place (M=4.03, SD=0.852). As regards the receptiveness to the experiences of their fellow colleagues in the work place (M=3.98, SD=0.809). With regard to employees trying to understand and tolerate their fellow colleagues at the work place (M=3.97, SD=0.793). When asked whether they use knowledge gained from academic institutions in their work (M=3.89, SD=0.902). As regards employees sharing the experiences they learn from their colleagues in the work place (M=4.06, SD=0.856).

Table 2: Responses on knowledge management enablers

	Strongly Disagree		Disagree		Neutral		Agree		Strongly Agree		Statistics	
	f	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	f	%	M	SD
Employees use their knowledge to work for their establishments	2	0.9	7	3.3	42	19.6	107	50	56	26.2	3.97	0.822
Employees have valuable knowledge required by their establishments	2	0.9	5	2.3	35	16.4	114	53.3	58	27.1	4.03	0.784
Employees learn from their fellow colleagues in the establishments	3	1.4	5	2.3	41	19.2	98	45.8	67	31.3	4.03	0.852
Employees are receptive to the experiences of their fellow colleagues	3	1.4	6	2.8	36	16.8	116	54.2	52	24.3	3.98	0.809
Employees try to understand and tolerate their fellow colleagues	3	1.4	3	1.4	43	20.1	113	52.8	52	24.3	3.97	0.793
Employees use the knowledge gained from academic institutions to work for the establishments	3	1.4	15	7	36	16.8	107	50	52	24.3	3.89	0.902
Employees share the experiences they learn from their colleagues within the organization	4	1.9	5	2.3	33	15.4	104	48.6	68	31.8	4.06	0.856

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Factor analysis is a technique or more accurately a family of techniques which aim to simplify complex sets of data by analyzing the correlations between them. Factor analysis is designed to simplify the correlation matrix and reveal the small number of factors which can explain the correlations. A component or a factor explains the variance in the inter-correlation matrix, and the amount of variance explained is known as the eigenvalue for the factor (Foster, 2001). In this study, factor analysis was carried out to reduce the number of items on the knowledge management enablers variable for ease of measuring the variable.

This was administered on a five scale likert scale. Table 3 below shows the results obtained from the analysis. From the table, a KMO measure of sampling accuracy of 0.835 was obtained, which is well above the minimum 0.5 measure of sampling accuracy. That meant that the sample size used for the study was adequate for the variables used in the research

instrument. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity yielded a value of 815.47 at a significance level of 0.000. This was meant to test the adequacy of the correlation matrix and the findings were that factor analysis was adequate for the study.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test of knowledge management enablers

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.835
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	815.473
	Df	21
	Sig.	.000

The eigenvalues that were obtained after the variables for knowledge management enablers were analyzed. Using the criteria of picking those variables whose eigenvalues are greater than one, only two variables were obtained (personal knowledge and social knowledge). Personal knowledge represented 57.33% of the variance while social knowledge represented 17.15% of the variance explained. The two had a cumulative variance of 74.48%. The variables that were left out accounted for only 25.52%. This means that the variables discussing knowledge management enablers could be adequately represented by the two variables.

Table 4: Total Variance Explained for knowledge management enablers

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
Personal knowledge	4.013	57.331	57.331	4.013	57.331	57.331	3.094	44.205	44.205
Social knowledge	1.201	17.152	74.483	1.201	17.152	74.483	2.119	30.278	74.483
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.									

A rotated component matrix (table 5) clearly indicates the two factors after Varimax rotation method with Kaiser Normalization was done. The two components explain the group of the variables on knowledge management enablers after the principal component analysis was conducted in this study. The rotation converged in three iterations.

Table 5: Rotated Component Matrix[a] for knowledge management enablers

Rotated Component Matrix[a] for knowledge management enablers

	Component	
	Personal Knowledge	Social Knowledge
Employees use their knowledge to work for their establishments	.891	
Employees have valuable knowledge required by their establishments	.870	
Employees learn from their fellow colleagues in the establishments	.851	
Employees are receptive to the experiences of their fellow colleagues	.711	
Employees try to understand and tolerate their fellow colleagues		.683
Employees use the knowledge gained from academic institutions to work for the establishments		.866
Employees share the experiences they learn from their colleagues within the organization		.810

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

a. Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

CONCLUSIONS

The findings from this study found that, in the hospitality sector, two indicators namely personal knowledge and social knowledge can be adequately used to measure knowledge management. Personal knowledge comprises using individual knowledge for the organization, having valuable knowledge required by the hotel, learning from colleagues and being receptive to knowledge from others. This means that in the hotel industry, individual efforts are required for fruitful use, dissemination and effective benefits to be realized from knowledge. On the other hand, social knowledge requires understanding, tolerance, sharing experience (inter-personal abilities) and utilizing externally gained knowledge for internal purposes. For effective social knowledge to be realized, it means that social environmental aspects are crucial in building effective knowledge-based establishments. Consequently, as established in this study, the hotel sector, which heavily relies on people, their skills, attitude and participation, requires knowledge enabler components related to human aspects that is personal and social knowledge.

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