

Chapter 17

Barriers Impeding Knowledge Management Practices in the Public Sector: The Case of Devolved Governments in Kenya

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ABSTRACT

The 2017-2022 Kenya's Council of Governors strategic plan indicates that there is lack of a structured mechanism for systematic knowledge sharing and organizational learning among the county governments despite the council's effort to share information through statutory annual reports, devolution conferences, and quarterly committee meetings. The intention of this chapter is to assess the challenges faced by the Kenyan county governments in their quest to institutionalize knowledge management practices and to conceptualize a framework that can support continuous sharing of experiences, lessons, and innovations within and among the county governments in Kenya. Theoretical frameworks and models of knowledge management in governance, governments, and e-governments were considered and a novel theoretical framework for successful knowledge management initiatives among regional governments was formulated. The chapter provides recommendations for the council and other policy makers on how to manage knowledge management initiatives, while suggestions for future research directions are given.

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INTRODUCTION

There is a general consensus from literature on the strategic value of knowledge management initiatives within governments and industries. Organizational knowledge helps an organization to build and sustain its competitive advantage, while a country's knowledge helps in shaping a nation's economic strength and military prowess. A large amount of the existing literature on knowledge management is focused on exploring knowledge management initiatives in managerial and entrepreneurial domains (Kong, Chadee & Raman, 2013; Darroch, 2005; Sharma, Noorjahan, & Victoriano, 2013; Hislop, 2003). On the other hand, studies on knowledge management initiatives in county and regional governments in Africa are evidently lacking in literature, even though Gao, Chai and Liu (2018) indicate that there is no limit to where knowledge management can be applied. It has also been suggested that knowledge sharing is important in increasing public sector performance and delivery of better services to the public (Shajera, & Al-bastakiv, 2014).

Devolved governments such as the county and regional governments around the world have a constitutional responsibility to find sustainable ways through which they can meet material, social, and economic responsibilities of improving the quality of the lives of their constituents by providing high-quality services and decent work for their employees. Most of the county and regional governments in the developing economies are grappling with the growing volumes of information that they need to work with in order to meet their respective constitutional mandate (Mannie, Niekerk, Herman & Adendorff, 2013). It is important that the county and regional governments have appropriate structures for identification, acquisition, assimilation, transformation and exploitation of relevant knowledge to help them improve on the effectiveness and efficiency of their service delivery. But, many of these county and regional governments are yet to attain maturity in their knowledge management practices (Mannie, Niekerk, Herman & Adendorff, 2013).

A number of studies have revealed that knowledge is a key asset that if utilized well can help in efficient use of resources, strengthen an enterprise's competitive advantage further and enhance corporate success (Reich, 2007; Young, 2012; Myers, 1996). A study done by Mothamaha and Govender (2014) showed that application of knowledge management practices in the City of Johannesburg, South Africa, resulted in improved service delivery through quicker and more effective decisions. Studies also indicate that a modern knowledge-based economy has the ability to leverage knowledge as an economic resource and that knowledge has become more critical than capital or natural resources (Pawloski & Bick, 2012; Mannie, Niekerk, Herman & Adendorff, 2013; Kong, Chadee & Raman, 2013; Mosese & Mearns, 2016). Similarly, Beckley (2010) acknowledges that knowledge management significantly affect a country's ability to translate resources into economic and military strength.

Bate and Robert (2002) define knowledge management as any process or practice which aims to create, acquire, capture, aggregate, share and use knowledge to improve learning and organizational performance. Gaffoor and Cloete (2010) indicate that knowledge management holds significant benefits for public sector organizations. It is also prudent for the county and regional governments to consider implementing knowledge management initiatives as *effective functioning of governments rests on effective acquisition and dissemination of knowledge* (Misra, Hariharan & Khaneja, 2003, pp. 40). Due to poor governance, many county governments in Kenya are not able to effectively deliver services to their people, leading to marginalization (Commission on Revenue Allocation, Nairobi, Kenya, 2012). In a marginalized county, residents do not usually have access to a wide range of basic services such as food, water, health care, energy, education, and security. In addition, communications and transport

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