

A Review of Knowledge Management Education and Training in Kenya

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Abstract

Knowledge management has emerged as a discipline in the recent past. In spite of its growing popularity, confusion still exists on what the discipline is really about and whether it is actually distinct. This confusion extends to the nature and scope of competencies knowledge management practitioners are expected to have. The lack of information on the availability and content of knowledge management education and training programmes partly contributes to this confusion. There is need, therefore, to understand the extent to which knowledge management training needs are met in Kenya. The objectives of the study on which this chapter is based were to review the content of knowledge management education and training programmes and curricula in Kenya; the methodologies used to deliver the curricula; and their effectiveness in developing the essential competencies knowledge management specialists require. Primary data was collected through content analysis of academic and professional knowledge management education and training curricula deployed by organisations in Kenya. Additional data was collected from the trainers and graduates of the knowledge management courses through interviews. More data was collected from professional human resource recruitment consultants through key informant interviews. The findings of the study indicate that access to knowledge management education and training programmes in Kenya has increased in the past five to seven years. However, there are gaps in the scope, depth and delivery of the programmes. There is need to review the programmes to cover all the core skill areas besides using delivery models which build hands-on skills. Such interventions would enhance the potential of the courses in meeting the knowledge management capacity needs in Kenya. These findings may be used by training institutions to improve their curricula content and delivery methods. The findings may also be used by recruitment firms as well as employers to develop appropriate job descriptions for knowledge management specialists in Kenya.

Keywords: *Knowledge management, curriculum, education, training, Kenya*

Introduction

Many definitions and perspectives of knowledge management exist. Kwanya *et al.* (2015) define knowledge management as the multifaceted mix of strategies, techniques and tools which organisations, groups or individuals utilise to generate optimum value from their intellectual assets. Beijerse (1999) explains that the essence of knowledge management is to achieve organisational goals through strategy-driven motivation and facilitation of workers to develop, enhance and use their capability to interpret data and information by using available sources of information, experience, skills, culture, and character. Thus, organisational knowledge management involves identifying, capturing, structuring, leveraging and sharing an organisation's intellectual assets to enhance its performance and competitiveness. Brooking (1999) further argues that knowledge management is not only a collaborative and multidisciplinary process; it is also human-centred. It is no wonder that Gery (1991) explains that knowledge management uses a "surprising mix of strategies" such as storytelling, peer-to-peer mentoring and techno-based knowledge systems, among others. Ruggles and Holtshouse (1999) further explain that the key attributes of knowledge management include generating new knowledge; accessing valuable knowledge from outside sources; using accessible knowledge in decision making; embedding knowledge in processes, products and services; representing knowledge in documents, databases and software; facilitating knowledge growth through culture and incentives; transferring existing knowledge into other parts of the organisation and measuring the value of knowledge assets and/or the impact of knowledge management.

Organisations can use effective knowledge management to enhance their efficiency, continuity and market position. They can also use the principles of knowledge management to respond appropriately and promptly to emerging customer needs and wants; identify and mitigate risks; streamline operations; encourage innovation and creativity; enhance team collaboration and coordination; improve change management and adaptation; avoid resource wastage and duplication; as well as improve key competencies through effective knowledge creation and transfer (Mosoti & Masheka, 2010; North & Hornung, 2003). Organisations achieve these benefits by creating, growing and perpetuating knowledge assets such as ideas, information, memory, technical knowhow, image and reputation, business processes and techniques, as well as intellectual and commercial property rights (Abrahamson & Goodman-Delahunty, 2014; Gold, Malhotra & Segars, 2001; Mosoti & Masheka, 2010). In spite of its potential benefits, many organisations, especially in Africa, have not embraced knowledge management adequately. This is because of organisational challenges such as inadequate infrastructure, meagre financial resources, unsupportive political goodwill, incompetent human resources, and derisory policy frameworks, among other factors (Mbhalati, 2014; Ondari-Okemwa, 2004).

Education Versus Training

The terms education and training are often used interchangeably. This is inaccurate because they are not synonyms. Although they may overlap in various perspectives, they are still distinct in many others. Welch (2014) argues that training is short-term and aimed to give the learners skills to perform specific tasks. Education, on the other hand, is long-term and builds the capacity of the learners to perform a wide variety of tasks. He further explains that training focuses on “how to do” while education includes an understanding of theories and other concepts not directly or necessarily linked to a particular “doing”. Therefore, in training more time is used to practise and refine the skill being imparted while in education more time is spent on learning about the subject of study. It is also important to note that training uses course outlines while education is based on detailed curricula.

In the context of this chapter, training is offered to improve the practice of knowledge management. Training courses are short and used to address specific practice or competency areas and not the whole spectrum of skills in knowledge management. Therefore training is a performance-based undertaking in which success is judged by the ability “to do”. Education, on the other hand, is scientific in nature and covers several related concepts. The focus of education programmes is to build the capacity of learners to understand knowledge management concepts. Education is an academic undertaking whose success is determined by the ability of the learners “to understand”. Knowledge management, as a professional practice and academic discipline, requires both types of capacity building approaches to mature. There is need for people who understand the theory, models and other fundamental principles of knowledge management to do the “thinking”. There is also a greater need for people with the practical skills to apply the concepts. Therefore, training and education constitute the two sides of the knowledge management capacity building coin which are permanently joined and must remain so.

Rationale of Study

Societies can benefit from effective knowledge management by building human and organisational capacity in the area. Unfortunately, academic literature on knowledge management education is scanty. Perhaps, this is because knowledge management is still in its academic infancy stages (Dalkir, 2011; Despres, 2011). The situation seems not to be any different even in developed countries. For instance, Bedford (2013) conducted a study in the

United States of America which revealed that while knowledge management has progressed as a discipline in terms of curricula, it is still wanting in terms of research, faculty credentials, programme administration and programme goals. In Africa, Ondari-Okemwa and Minishi-Majanja (2007) conducted a study which revealed that the majority of Library and Information Science departments in South Africa had offered courses in knowledge management for the past ten years or so at the time of their study. They also found that already one university was offering a complete degree programme in knowledge management at the time. The study also concluded that the number and content of courses offered by these departments on knowledge management were diverse and varied. Therefore, they suggested that the scope of the courses should be deepened to include more topics. Overall, they concluded that there is need to strengthen knowledge management offerings within library and information science education going forward. This study, however, did not investigate the suitability of the courses in meeting the job market needs at the time.

Evidence from the literature reviewed indicates that there is no study which has specifically investigated the status of knowledge management education and training in Kenya. Nonetheless, a study by Kwanya *et al.* (2015) on knowledge management jobs in the country identified skills necessary for knowledge managers and emphasised the need for suitable education programmes to build capacity in these areas. Thus far, no empirical study has analysed the effectiveness of the existing knowledge management education and training programmes in meeting the skill needs in the job market in Kenya. As the country gears towards achieving a knowledge economy status by 2030, it risks missing this target due to a lack of suitable capacity building programmes in knowledge management locally. One way of mitigating this risk is by ascertaining the status and effectiveness of current knowledge management education and training programmes in the country. The current study sought to bridge this gap by investigating the availability of knowledge management education and training programmes in Kenya; the content of the professional and academic curricula deployed in the country; the pedagogical methods used to deliver the curricula; as well as the overall effectiveness of the content and delivery methods currently employed in knowledge management education and training in Kenya.

Methodology

The study, leading to this chapter, was designed as an exploratory survey. This is a methodological research approach used to investigate emerging research problems which have not been clearly defined (Saunders *et al.*, 2007). The cardinal purpose of exploratory research is to gain familiarity with a phenomenon or acquire new insight into it without necessarily making conclusions about it (Brown, 2006). Stebbins (2001) argues that exploratory researchers utilise discovery and serendipity to explore and gain valuable insight into the research problems. The author found this approach appropriate for the study because knowledge management is an emerging concept globally and more so in Kenya. The research design was also considered appropriate because of the limited literature on the topic of study.

The population of study was all universities and other institutions offering academic and professional capacity building programmes in knowledge management. Nineteen universities offering undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in knowledge management were identified from the Kenya Universities and Colleges Central Placement Service (KUCCPS) online database. The author accessed and analysed curricula of 11 programmes. Similarly, the author analysed course outlines of seven (7) companies offering professional training in knowledge management. Data were collected from these organisations through content analysis of their curricula or course outlines. Additional data were collected through key informant interviews with six (6) academic leaders (chairpersons) of the university departments offering the knowledge management courses; three (3) lead facilitators of the professional knowledge management courses; ten (10) graduates of the academic and professional programmes; as well as three (3) professional human resource recruitment consultants. The selection of the academic leaders and lead facilitators was based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study. The graduates of the programmes were identified through information-oriented purposive sampling with the help of either the chairpersons or lead facilitators. The human resource recruitment consultants were also selected purposively from the Institute of Human Resource Management database. Separate interview guides were used for each category of respondents. The collected data were analysed using descriptive statistics because it enabled the author to summarise, interpret and describe the data within the context of the study. Table 1 summarises the details of the respondents.

Table 1: Details of the respondents

Category	Number	Selection	Data collection technique
Undergraduate and postgraduate academic curricula	11	KUCCPS database	Content analysis
Knowledge management outlines of courses offered by professional training firms	7	Census	Content analysis
Academic leaders	6	Information-oriented purposive sampling	Key informant interviews
Lead facilitators of professional training firms	3	Information-oriented purposive sampling	Key informant interviews
Human resource recruitment consultants	3	Information-oriented purposive sampling	Key informant interviews
Graduates from knowledge management programmes	10	Information-oriented purposive sampling	Key informant interviews

Findings and Discussion

The findings indicate that knowledge management is steadily emerging as an academic discipline and professional practice in Kenya. However, each of the respondents had a different perspective of what it entails or the skills needed to succeed in it. This clearly indicates that knowledge management is yet to mature as an academic discipline or profession in Kenya. It also demonstrated the need for extensive research and capacity development to enhance the professionalisation of knowledge management in the country. The detailed findings are presented and discussed hereunder.

Availability of knowledge management education and training in Kenya

Five public universities have substantial knowledge management programmes in Kenya. These are The Technical University of Kenya which has Knowledge Management as one of the specialisations in its ongoing Bachelor of Science in Information Sciences programme. The university has also launched Master of Science in Information and Knowledge Management

programme in September 2016. Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology also runs a Master of Science in Information and Knowledge Management programme while Kisii University as well as Egerton University offer courses leading to Master of Knowledge Management. Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology as well as the University of Kabianga have also launched Bachelor of Science in Information Science and Knowledge Management programmes. These programmes were introduced between 2011 and 2016. The fact that there are specific academic programmes on knowledge management in Kenya demonstrates the market need for professionals in the area.

Several other universities running library and/or information science programmes have also integrated knowledge management courses in their curricula. These universities include Maasai Mara, Meru University of Science and Technology, Laikipia, Karatina, Garissa University College, Rongo University, Kenyatta, Moi, Chuka, University of Nairobi, Kenya Methodist University, Mount Kenya University and Catholic University of Eastern Africa. The integrated courses are generally introductory in nature. They include fundamentals of knowledge management, knowledge taxonomy, introduction to knowledge management, and knowledge organisation (classification and cataloguing). This integration was also done around 2011 when the programmes were either reviewed or launched. These courses are generally considered to be inadequate in terms of content and delivery.

The author also found seven (7) consultancy firms offering short courses in various aspects of knowledge management in Kenya. The firms include Knowledge Management International, Regional Institute of Information and Knowledge Management, Kenya Institute of Management, Information Africa Organisation, Indepth Research Services, African eDevelopment Resource Centre, and Kenvision Techniks. The findings also revealed that a number of research institutions in Kenya also conduct specialised training in aspects of knowledge management for their staff and partners from time to time. The institutions included Kenya Forestry Research Institute (KEFRI) and Kenya Bureau of Standards (KEBS).

These findings indicate that courses on knowledge management have been available in Kenya through academic and professional training programmes for the past five or so years. Therefore, Kenyans are able to access relevant and affordable education and training on knowledge management locally. The findings also reveal that the history of knowledge management education in Kenya is quite short compared to other countries, even in sub-

Saharan Africa. For instance, Ondari-Okemwa and Minishi-Majanja (2007) in a study found that knowledge management programmes were introduced in South Africa in the early 2000s. Therefore, knowledge management as a practice and academic discipline in Kenya needs more time to develop and mature. Actually, only the first or second cohorts of students enrolled in the programmes have graduated thus far. These graduates are new in the job market and have not had an opportunity to impact the practice. It means that it will take a few more years before the knowledge management education and training programmes can have a meaningful impact in Kenya.

Courses offered

The academic courses offered at the undergraduate level include introduction to knowledge management, philosophy of knowledge management, knowledge management in organisations, knowledge economy, metadata management, knowledge taxonomy, expert knowledge systems, enterprise content management, ontology, and business information intelligence. These courses are offered alongside general education and core information science units including cataloguing, indexing, abstracting, classification, ICT applications, programming, web design and development, computer applications, networking and data communication, electronic records management, information preservation, conservation of information materials, communication skills and entrepreneurship education. The courses offered in the postgraduate programmes include indigenous knowledge management, e-learning, knowledge management theories, knowledge management processes, knowledge auditing and mapping, knowledge management strategies, organisational learning, knowledge seeking behaviour, bibliometrics, content curation and aggregation, and knowledge management systems. These postgraduate courses are also offered alongside research methods, entrepreneurship, project management, strategic management, organisational behaviour, social media and cloud computing, information literacy, and emerging issues in information and knowledge management.

The courses offered by the professional training firms include fundamentals of knowledge management, knowledge services, conducting knowledge audits, building knowledge culture, identifying knowledge needs, knowledge leadership, knowledge management strategies, knowledge management models, implementing knowledge management in organisations, knowledge management maturity model, knowledge management systems, knowledge economy, knowledge management processes, knowledge management

frameworks and standards, knowledge governance, knowledge transfer, e-learning, organisational learning, and tacit knowledge management. Most of the courses took three to five days and targeted participants from diverse backgrounds; not necessarily people with a background of or currently performing tasks in knowledge management.

These findings indicate that there is a wide variety of courses offered by different programmes in terms of scope and depth. These courses, if delivered effectively, are adequate to build essential skills in knowledge management. There is no standard of what should be in the various levels of academic and professional programmes. Similarly, there is no standard in terms of the number of knowledge management courses a programme requires to be credible. There is need for concerted efforts by the institutions and other stakeholders to determine the number and nature of courses which knowledge management programmes should offer. Given that most of the programmes were launched recently and have not been reviewed, this matter should be one of the major issues that the reviewers should consider. There is also a need to align the courses more closely to the Kenyan context.

Delivery of knowledge management course content

An analysis of the course content delivery methods revealed that all the universities used lectures, tutorials, group discussions and seminars (for postgraduate programmes). The examination of the courses was 30% continuous assessment and 70% written exam for the undergraduate programmes and 40-60 for the postgraduate programmes. All the professional courses were delivered through lectures (presentations) and group work. These findings indicate that most of the courses were theoretical in nature and were delivered using the traditional modes. Similarly, it was observed that the courses were delivered onsite. This implies that the learners needed to be physically present in the lecture sites to interact with the trainers and the other students. Three issues emerge from these findings: 1) there was less focus on the practical elements of knowledge management thus the graduates are likely to lack hands-on skills; 2) there was no flexibility in the way the courses were delivered in terms of making it possible for learners to take them without having to be present in a brick and mortar space; and 3) the role of the trainer was more prominent than that of the learner. These issues bring doubts about the effectiveness of the courses in building adequate capacity in knowledge management in Kenya.

A mix of part-time and full-time lecturers delivered the courses. The majority of the lecturers were originally trained in either information science or information and communication technology. Although, many of them had not been trained specifically in knowledge management, they were applying skills obtained from the relevant courses in information sciences or information and communication technology. The researcher observed that the use of part-time lecturers provided the advantage of fusing industry experience into the courses. However, it also brought with it demerits associated with lesser commitment and availability to work with the learners outside the scheduled lecture hours.

The researcher recommends that academic departments offering courses on knowledge management should integrate more practical sessions to build the capacity of the graduates to fit into their new roles easily and competently. The use of part-time staff, especially from the industry should be encouraged as a means of tapping into their field experience. However, there should be structured processes of identifying, selecting and assigning part-time staff. The departments are also encouraged to explore the possibility of using open and distance learning models where appropriate to expand the reach of the courses. This could benefit learners who are stationed outside the major urban centres. The use of visiting or guest lecturers, especially from institutions which have a history of offering knowledge management courses, is also encouraged as a means of benchmarking the courses with the best practice elsewhere.

Job market needs for knowledge managers

The recruitment consultants explained that the job market for knowledge managers has been small but is growing rapidly. They explained that part of the reason the market for knowledge managers in Kenya is still small is because the practice is new in the country. Similarly, many employers still do not understand what it is all about. This confusion is exemplified by the wide variety of job descriptions and titles associated with the profession. They explained that they expected the market to grow steadily as more institutions become better aware of the role of knowledge management in enhancing organisational performance. Asked to identify the skills most institutions expected knowledge managers to have, they explained that the skills varied between organisations. However, there was consensus that the skills spanned information technology, information organisation, communication skills, research, monitoring and evaluation, creativity and innovation, business product development, marketing, report writing, web publishing, content creation and management, statistics and data management, as well as leadership and principles of management.

Gaps in knowledge management education and training in Kenya

Asked to point out the gaps in the training of knowledge managers in Kenya, the recruitment consultants and the graduates of the programmes concurred that the greatest challenge is lack of hands-on orientation. They explained that the graduates required further training to get the essential skills to perform their roles. The consultants also explained that soft (human) skills are also lacking in most graduates. This is because the training programmes have focused more on the technical and technology skills. They suggested that there should be a balance of these skill areas to ensure that the graduates are able to fit into their new roles with least additional training. Another area where most of the graduates scored low is the capacity to align knowledge management to organisational strategic plans. The consultants observed that some graduates have the right technical and technological skills but no idea how to use these to align knowledge management tasks to the organisational mission and vision. Lack of alignment of the courses to the Kenyan context was another gap identified by the consultants. They explained that however competent the graduates are in other areas, they would not be useful if they are unable to fit these in the Kenyan context.

Recommendations

The respondents suggested a closer fit of the courses to the Kenyan context; a regular review of the programmes to include new trends in content; the adoption of open and distance learning model of training; use of guest lecturers to enrich the perspectives of the programmes; and inclusion of modules on soft skills. They also suggested that knowledge management courses should cover: 1) knowledge management theories, models, principles and myths; 2) knowledge management systems; 3) knowledge management processes; 4) knowledge management technologies; 5) organisational learning; 6) knowledge architecture; 7) applications of knowledge management in society; 8) knowledge leadership and championship; 9) strategic management; 10) community and partnerships; 11) indigenous knowledge management; 12) knowledge impact analysis and reporting; 13) advocacy, networking and alliance building; 14) intellectual asset management; and 15) legal and ethical issues in knowledge management. Therefore all substantive training programmes should include these.

Conclusion

The findings of the study indicate that access to knowledge management training in Kenya has increased in the past five to seven years. However, there are gaps in the scope, depth and delivery of the programmes. There is need to review the programmes to include the core skill areas which are currently not included as well as using delivery models which build hands-on skills. Such interventions would enhance the potential of the courses in meeting the knowledge management capacity needs in Kenya.

Practical Application

The findings of this study may be used by organisations offering knowledge management education and training services to review and/or design programmes which meet the needs of the job market more closely. The findings may also be used by relevant government agencies to develop policy on training needs for knowledge management. The same may also be used by human resource experts to develop job descriptions and requirements for knowledge management specialists in Kenya. Academic researchers may also use the findings for scholarly work on knowledge management education and training in Kenya and beyond.

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