

**COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE AND ORGANIZATIONAL
LEARNING IN WORLD VISION KENYA**

BY

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D61/75791/2012

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**A RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF BUSINESS
ADMINISTRATION DEGREE, UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI**

SEPTEMBER 2016

DECLARATION

This research project is my original work and has not been presented to any other academic institution for award of a degree.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is my humble and great pleasure to acknowledge the assistance of those who helped me at different stages in the preparation of this project. I express my sincere appreciation to Dr. J. M. Njihia for his professional advice, patience, guidance and constant encouragement that has resulted in the successful completion of this project.

My special appreciation is extended to all staff in World Vision Kenya who were involved in this study for letting me use their valuable time, my immediate supervisor and colleagues who provided moral and professional support.

Finally, I thank the Lord for his abundant blessings upon me and for giving me the strength and resources to successfully complete my MBA studies.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this work with a deep sense of reverence to my very supportive parents, Mr. Michael K. Ndei and Catherine Leah Kalanzo, my life partner, Mr. John M. Thumi and my friend and colleague, Dorcas Wangu for their unwavering support, encouragement, patience and understanding throughout my entire study period.

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ABSTRACT

Organizational Learning significantly relies on application of knowledge for a purpose. In organizations, Learning can be viewed from a community based approach where organizations create knowledge in their own systems called Communities of Practice. The study objective was to investigate the impact of using Communities of Practice for Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya. The study was framed using the Social Network Theory which focuses on how individuals and groups interact with each other inside their network and the Social Exchange Theory, a model that is used for interpreting interactions between individuals and groups that are entirely based on rewards and punishments. To collect the required data, a case study was done using in-depth interviews. The unit of study was World Vision Kenya, a humanitarian organization based in Kenya. A one-on-one interview was conducted with relevant employees in the organization whose engagement in the Communities of Practice is critical. Data analysis was carried out by application of content analysis whereby emerging themes were derived from the responses given during the interviews. The research established that Communities of Practice are critical in Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya as they effectively promote knowledge sharing between members and help to effectively steer the organization's strategy in capturing, analysis, dissemination and application of learning and good practice. The Communities of Practice also provide a solid e-learning platform and opportunities for employees and key stakeholders who may have the same interests or work related problems. The issues of geographic separation, lack of skilled Community of Practice leaders, lack of capacity to use Community of Practice technology, competing work priorities and cultural issues were identified as some of the most pressing and emerging challenges. The study findings highlighted various recommendations that will help strengthen the use of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya. The recommendations include implementing the best practices in application of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya across all the Communities of Practice in the organization, employment of skilled Communities of Practice Coordinators who have the knowledge required to effectively manage a Community of Practice and finally, the organization's management team should play a leading role in championing the use of Communities of Practice by making their use compulsory and allocating sufficient time within normal working hours for staff to collaborate, share knowledge and participate in Community of Practice activities.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the Study

Organizational learning is an important aspect of any organization in the world today. Most organizations seek to improve efficiency gains, increase productivity and profit while developing leaders at all organizational levels. An organization with a learning culture values practices and systems that support employees and the organization to increase their knowledge, performance levels, skills and competencies. This in turn, helps to encourage continuous improvement and promote the realization of business goals, new ways of thinking and change management (Argrylis, 2014)

There are plenty of discussions on the scope and processes of learning (Botha et al. 2008). Organizational learning is knowledge for a purpose and learning from the process and from the outcome (Brown and Duguid 2001). There are two approaches to organizational learning. The first approach views the organization as a whole and examines learning from a cognitive perspective whereas the second approach looks at learning as community based, where organizations create knowledge in Communities of Practice (Lave & Wenger 1998).

According to Wenger and Fenton (2014) the concept of Community of Practice is the foundation of a knowing and learning approach that informs efforts to create learning system in organizations. Communities of Practice have helped organizations to create a culture of learning

and enhance knowledge sharing across geographical boundaries since their inception (Senge 2006)

1.1.1 Communities of Practice

There are many similar definitions of Communities of Practice. Wenger (2000) defines Communities of Practice as groups of people who have common interests and passion that make them interact regularly with the objective of improving the quality or simplifying their work. Communities of Practice currently provided a useful and mutually beneficial approach to knowledge and learning (Wenger & Trayner, 2015)

Communities of Practice provide a significant perspective of informal learning and hence exist outside formal training organizations. The communities help to address common problems or shared areas of interest for members. Members of Communities of Practice are usually looking to address work issues or simply learn how to improve their work processes. Communities of Practice usually don't depend on any technology platform and allow for members to have physical meetings at the workplace or outside or virtual meetings where members interact with each other on virtual platforms (Bates, 2016)

1.1.2 Organizational Learning

Senge (1990) describes a learning organization as the kind of organizations where employees continually grow their skills and knowledge to create the results they plan to achieve, where new and innovative ways of thinking are built and where employees continually learning as a team. Such organization help to manage change better by being flexible and continuously applying new

knowledge to their work. For effective Organizational Learning to take place organizations need to invest in capacity building efforts for all their employees, to allow them to learn at all levels. While all individuals in organizations have the capacity to learn, this might not happen effectively if the organizational structures are not conducive for learning. Similarly, employees may lack the learning tools and resources that will help them to grow their knowledge and skills they require. Organizations that would like to improve their performance must continuously shift the way of thinking of its staff in order to achieve their desired results (Senge, 1990).

Organizational Learning can also be defined as a process where organizations capture, share and apply knowledge that promotes culture change and improves organizational performance and effectiveness (Yang, 2009). What set apart learning organizations from other traditional organizations is master of 5 basic disciplines according to Senge (1990). Senge argues that there are 5 disciplines that are critical for any learning organization. The disciplines include Systems Thinking, Personal Mastery, Mental Methods, Building Shared Vision and Team Learning (Senge 1990).

1.1.3 World Vision Kenya

Developing countries around the world especially in Sub-Saharan Africa continuously experience a immense change in the role that is played by humanitarian organizations. The humanitarian organizations have moved from being small development players to fully focusing on poverty and development in communities in Africa. In most cases, some humanitarian organizations have more funding from donor agencies than the governments in the countries they operate. This is the case in Kenya where growing donor funding is as a result of corruption and inefficient

governmental systems. Most donor funds have over time shifted their financial support from governments to humanitarian organizations where accountability is established (Brass, 2010).

World Vision Kenya is a Christian humanitarian and development organization working in Kenya to support communities to conquer poverty and injustice. It opened its first office in Kenya in 1974 and currently has slightly over 1000 employees working in its various branch offices in Kenya. (WVK, 2016). The organization has been selected for this study because it has effectively implemented Communities of Practice as the key Organizational Learning tool. In the last 10 years, World Vision Kenya has actively used Communities of Practice to capture, create and disseminate knowledge to develop individual and organizational skills and competencies with the aim of achieving the organization's strategic goals and objectives. (Kalanzo, 2014)

1.2 Research Problem

Knowledge has replaced the old ways of doing business in today's competitive environment. In this context, Communities of Practice have found a significant position as an Organizational Learning tool (Pandey & Dutta 2013). Organizational learning promotes individuals and teams to learn what is key and relevant to their area of expertise and also helped to direct information to the right target group. With Organizational Learning, teams are encouraged to work together and support each other in learning to ensure that all the team members are achieving their individual learning goals for the benefit of the team, something that traditional learning systems did not achieve as they allowed for redundancy and had no systems that efficiently promoted learning.

World Vision International, through its Global Knowledge Management department introduced and formalized Communities of Practice in 2005. Their Knowledge Management team developed guidelines and standards to support this process. The organization currently has 27 Communities of Practice that support the different organizational departments. The Communities of Practice are empowered to enhance and promote organizational learning (Kalanzo, 2014)

A research conducted by World Vision's Global Knowledge Management team in 2015 showed that Communities of Practice were very beneficial to the organization because they helped to connect staff with one another and build relationships with each other. They provided a space for communication through use of virtual workspaces and social networking tools and encourage dialogue between staff by providing a platform to discuss work topics and solve problems. The communities also support the organization to collect, organize and distribute existing knowledge and finally, they stimulate learning by providing a platform where questions can be posed and where more knowledgeable or more established members can find a vehicle to mentor others (Kalanzo, 2014)

Borzillo (2008) investigated around 50 Communities of Practice in Europe to find out the factors that contributed to their success. He observed that successful Communities of Practice were effective systems that revolved around exploring new ways of doing business and optimizing existing ones. Although the Communities of Practice are independent networks, their structure has to be guided by strategic organizational objectives and it is therefore good practice to align

Community of Practice structures with usual business processes that are useful and relevant to the members (Wenger and Snyder, 2000).

APQC (2000) investigated the success factors for Communities of Practice by examining the Community of Practice formed by Xerox's technicians. APQC found out that the community was established by a group of employees who shared the same interest and passion which mainly revolve around solving routing copy machine problems. Over the years, the organization has discovered that the Community of Practice supports value creation and provides learning resources for its technicians both locally and internationally. Participation in the Community of Practice is voluntary but technicians in the company are encouraged to participate in the community's activities because of the proven value add (Corsoa & Giaobbea, 2013)

The World Bank in an effort to improve its efficiency embarked on a project to replicate its good practice in development projects by sharing this knowledge with key clients and stakeholders. Their main objective was to achieve their strategic global goal of poverty reduction and improving the quality of life of people in poverty stricken countries. The World Bank hence funded a study in 2012 that investigated and established the impact of its 80 Communities of Practice on operational effectiveness. The study showed that, the benefits of implementation of the Communities of Practice were much more than enhancing operational effectiveness as the communities helped the organization to have a faster work turn around, improved customer

service as well as improved relationship management with key stakeholders (Wenger & Snyder, 2000)

A study was conducted in Rongo University this year to investigate existing knowledge sharing success factors and challenges in selected public universities in Kenya. The study found out that even though the universities in Kenya are required to train, generate and disseminate knowledge, most of them do not realize that shared knowledge is the key method of generating value for the organizations. The study also observed that effective knowledge sharing can be effectively achieved through the establishment of Communities of Practice as the communities provide forums where staff can capture and disseminate knowledge. This knowledge can in turn play a significant role in shifting universities from self-governing professionalism to an integrated body that shares knowledge (Mugalavai & Muleke, 2016)

Despite the studies highlighted above that demonstrate evidence of research in the successful application of Communities of Practice in various organizations and the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning, World Vision Kenya has faced significant challenges in getting its staff to participate in Community of Practice activities. The organisation has invested a lot of time and resources towards the successful management and coordination of the Communities of Practice and even so, the participation in the Communities of Practice is facing a lot of challenges. That said, the Communities of Practice continue to be the key Organizational Learning tool in World Vision Kenya (Kalanzo, 2014). This study will therefore seek to fill the

gap by answering the following question. What is the impact of using Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya?

1.3 Research Objectives

This study seeks to achieve the following three objectives:

- a. To investigate the best practices of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya
- b. To establish the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning at World Vision Kenya
- c. To establish the challenges faced by World Vision Kenya in application of Communities of Practice

1.4 Value of the Study

The findings from this study will be important to various key stakeholders which include policy makers in World Vision Kenya, Humanitarian Organizations in Kenya, Private & Public Companies as well as academic institutions.

The detailed knowledge on best practices and challenges in application of Communities of Practice will help World Vision Kenya to develop strategies geared towards strengthening of the Communities of Practice in the organization and will also provide reference material for reviewing the various Communities of Practice in the organization. These findings will also be beneficial to other humanitarian organizations in Kenya who are looking into establishing of Communities of Practice as it will provide information that will help them to effectively plan and develop Communities of Practice in their respective organizations.

The findings on the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning will help World Vision Kenya to reflect and strategize on how to improve Organizational Learning in the organization. This information will also be useful to academic institutions that are planning to move away from traditional learning methods as the findings provide detailed information on an alternative method of learning.

For both private and public companies looking into new ways of sharing knowledge and learning within their organizations, the findings from this study will be very beneficial as they will help the companies with relevant material that will be useful to them as they plan into implementing informal learning systems in their companies.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERARURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents a review of the relevant literature on application of Communities of Practice in organizations. The main areas that are reviewed include the theoretical foundations; best practices in application of the Communities of Practice, challenges facing application of the communities and impact of the Communities of Practice on organizational learning.

2.2 Theories of Organizational Learning and Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are widely considered to be effective Organizational Learning Tools (Wenger & Trayner, 2015). This study will therefore review various theories that explain the essence of Communities of Practice and Organizational Learning. These theories include the Social Network Theory and the Social Exchange Theory.

2.2.1 Social Network Theory

Social Network Theory is the study of how individuals or groups in an organization interact with each other inside their network. Understanding the theory becomes easy when you investigate each element starting with the largest element, which is networks, moving down to the smallest element, the actors (Claywell, 2014)

Senge (1990) defines organizations that learn as organizations where individuals build and grow their skills and competencies so as to effectively achieve their business goals and objectives. He further argues that there are 5 disciplines that can be used to effectively introduce Organizational

Learning in an organization. The 5 disciplines include: System Thinking, Personal Mastery, Mental Models, Building Shared Visions and Team Learning. Senge (1990) adds that learning organizations encourage all employees to expand their thinking, come up with new ways of doing their work and work as a team to realize organizational goals.

2.2.2 Social Exchange Theory

Social exchange theory is a representation of a model used to interpret the society as a sequence of interactions between individuals that are based on rewards or punishments. According to this theory, interactions between individuals are determined by the rewards or punishments that the individuals expect to receive from the people they are interacting with (Crossman, 2016).

There are many different theories about why individuals or groups help one another. According to social exchange theory individuals only help each other when they have something positive to benefit from the interaction. The benefits they derive from the interaction can either be tangible or intangible but all that specifically matter is that they receive something positive in return for their help (Cook & Rice, 2013).

2.3 Best Practices in Application of Communities of Practice

Organization can follow various best practices that can help them to develop effective Communities of Practice with active members who have a desire to share knowledge and learn from each other (Yanow, 2013). Some of the best practices are highlighted below.

First, identification of a set of guidelines to ensure Communities of Practice support interactions between members based on knowledge sharing and mutual learning is critical. The guidelines should include information on how to plan and coordinate meetings within the Community of Practice and encourage Community of Practice members to build and nurture their capacity in their respective areas of expertise (Etienne & Snyder 2000)

The structure and size of the Community of Practice should also be defined by the Community of Practice leaders. The leaders should ensure that the communities have an ideal number of members for key Community of Practice meetings or events. It is always advisable to keep the group small if members plan to discuss sensitive or confidential information about their area of work. Diversity of members is preferred in some organizations and therefore the Community of Practice leaders should establish the membership features from the onset (Borzillo, 2007)

Meetings and events in the Community of Practice should always be guided by shared learning objectives. The objectives should capture feedback on learning needs and requirements for all Community of Practice members. Community of Practice leaders should request for the input of all members before the meetings so as to effectively capture their needs and also use this information to design meeting agendas and drive relevant discussion topics in the Community of Practice (Wenger & Trayner, 2015)

Community of Practice leaders should merely be facilitators in the community and allow for members to own the Communities of Practice. According to the basic principles of Adult Learning, adults are aware of what they want and need to learn and therefore they can take full

ownership for their learning. The extent to which members plan and organize discussion topics may vary in Communities of Practice. The members should be allowed to identify relevant topics of discussion and suggest community activities. Members who are more established in their areas of work can also be given opportunities to share their knowledge with junior employees or answer any questions that they may have (Borzillo, 2007).

There should be open forums or platforms that allow Community of Practice members to interact or collaborate with each other between meetings. Organizations should invest in platforms that support two-way communication for the purpose of collaboration. The platforms should allow for practitioners to share and exchange knowledge. This helps to improve the quality of engagement and learning within the Community of Practice (Wenger & Trayner, 2015)

Finally, there are many platforms that can be used to host virtual meetings for the Communities of Practice. The platform selected should be simple and intuitive to allow members to use them with ease and should also capture all the members' needs and requirements for example, where members want to see each other during meetings a platform with video components would be of great value (Yanow, 2013). With the platform selected, as good practice, Community of Practice leaders should always test the platform before they are widely used by the members so as to ensure that the platform(s) are up to the required task (Wenger & Trayner 2015).

2.4 Impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning

Learning is a social experience where knowledge is integrated into the culture and processes of the Community of Practice. Individuals often learn by doing and when Community of Practice

members share their learning with each other, they empower each other and significantly contribute to Organizational Learning as a whole. The most successful learning environments are developed when the specific learning needs for individuals are achieved through interaction and knowledge exchange with practitioners in the same field who are experiencing the same problems or challenges (Botha et.al, 2008)

For Organizational Learning to be effective there should be targeted information directed to relevant people. Irrelevant information is of no value to individuals and hence limits efficiency within an organization. Communities of Practice help to address this by organization information resources for Practitioners and hence helping them to know where to go for information that is relevant to their work (Silberman, 2013). For organizations to effectively sustain Organizational Learning, they should invest in building and nurturing groups within the Communities of Practice that help to capture and disseminate learning (Wenger, 2008).

Communities of Practice can be defined as groups that learn and where members are given a forum to collaborate, learn and teach each other. Knowledge sharing and exchange empowers Community of Practice members to build and nurture their knowledge, skills and competencies. This in turn, helps the members to fulfill the expectations placed on them by their supervisors (Wenger & Snyder, 2000).

Finally, Communities of Practice provide a vehicle for development and maintenance of coaching or mentoring relationships between new employees and established technical specialists within the organization. This helps to decrease the learning curve as the established

practitioners provide the junior employees with relevant information that is suitable for their area of work as opposed to the employees setting out to search for relevant information within the organization (Lesser & Everest, 2001).

2.5 Summary of Literature Review and Research Gap

Communities of Practice play a leading role in supporting learning and innovation in organizations which helps organizations to gain and maintain a competitive edge (Swam et al. 2002). Many studies conducted in the past have indicated that Communities of Practice provide a significant substitute in development teams especially in development of new products (Ardichvili et al. 2003).

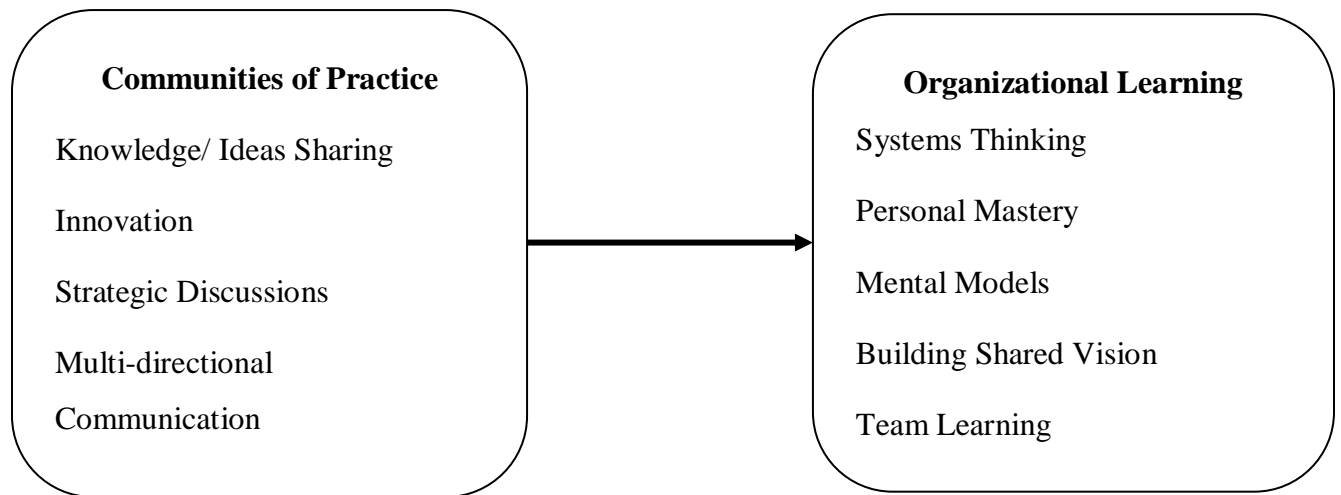
There is an ongoing debate on the best way to improve Organizational Learning. Some researchers argue that the simplest way is not through capturing and sharing of knowledge but rather concentrating on effective ways through which new knowledge can be shared, improved and applied in innovation (Mittendorff et al. 2006).

Too much bureaucracy within organizations limits free knowledge sharing within Communities of Practice as the communities are not empowered by traditional management approaches.

Ardichvili et al. (2006) suggest that organizational management should focus on development of learning environments that support knowledge sharing and exchange.

2.6 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework provides a graphical explanation of the main items under this study. It primarily focuses on the relationship between Communities of Practice and Organizational Learning.



Communities of Practice are conceptualized to share knowledge, promote innovation, and provide a forum for strategic, multi-directional communication between members. These elements empowers members to participate in learning activities (Wenger & Trayner, 2015)

Organizational Learning is conceptualized as a collection of 5 disciplines that are common in learning organizations. The 5 disciplines include a shared vision, mental models, personal mastery, team learning and systems thinking within organizations. An organization that applies all the 5 disciplines is considered to have effective Organizational Learning (Senge, 1990). Since this study is an open ended inquiry, it will allow for emergent meanings based on the findings.

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights the method used by the researcher in investigating the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya. Among the essentials discussed in this section are the study selection, data collection and analysis techniques.

3.2 Research Design

This study used the Case Study Research Design. A case study was appropriate for this work because data was collected from one organization and also because case studies help to capture reality in detail. Zainal (2007) argues that case studies not only help to give details on real data but also help to explicate the complexities in realistic situations which may not be effectively captured through experimental or survey research.

3.3 Case Study Selection

This study will entirely focus on World Vision Kenya. The organization has been selected for the study because of evidence of implementation of Communities of Practice. The organization established the Communities of Practice 10 years ago and even after committing a lot of resources towards the effective management and coordination of the communities, participation in Community of Practice activities is quite minimal.

3.4 Data Collection

There were two types of data used in this study i.e. Primary data which was collected using in-depth interviews with open ended questions and secondary data which consisted of consisted of the organization's Knowledge Management strategy, concept papers and annual reports. An interview guide was used by the researcher during data collection.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected was sorted to ensure completeness. The data was analyzed using content analysis in order to recognize emerging and common trends. Content analysis was selected because it is an effective method for handling open ended questions (Cooper & Schindler, 2003) Data was organized from the interview notes through reading, editing, cleaning and entering the data into a computer. Content analysis was then used to arrive at analytical conclusions. Relationships emerging from the theoretical statements from the interview guide were created to produce major themes that determined the influence of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya.

CHAPTER FOUR: DATA ANALYSIS, RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

The study had three objectives which were to investigate the best practices of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya, to establish the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning at World Vision Kenya and to establish the challenges faced by World Vision Kenya in application of Communities of Practice. This chapter discusses and interprets the results of findings obtained through the use of an open ended and in-depth interview with employees from World Vision Kenya who play a significant role in the Communities of Practice. There were a total of fifteen respondents interviewed in this study. They included the Knowledge Management Director, Finance Director, 2 Community of Practice Coordinators, HR Manager, Humanitarian and Emergency Affairs Manager, ICT Specialist, Accounts Manager, Risk Manager, 2 Field Officers, Sponsorship Coordinator, Administration Officer, Communications Officer and Operations Coordinator from World Vision Kenya.

4.2 Organizational Profile of World Vision Kenya

The section was intended to establish the number and nature of Communities of Practice in the organization. World Vision Kenya currently has 27 Communities of Practice with numerous and diverse Interest Groups. Leadership and membership in the Communities of Practice is voluntary and open to all staff in the organization and sometimes to external practitioners. Some Communities of Practice receive financial support from their departmental board(s) based on work plans that link their work to their respective departmental strategy. In addition, the Communities of Practice have advisory groups within the organization that are brought together

by the need to share knowledge and innovation with the primary objective of improving or enhancing the quality of their work. . Some Communities of Practice in the organization were developed for the primary purpose of engaging with external stakeholders which includes partner humanitarian agencies.

4.3 Best practices of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya

The following text represents the findings on objective one of the study which was to investigate the best practice of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya.

4.3.1 Informing Community of Practice Members of the value add of Communities of Practice

The respondents indicated that having information on the value they will derive from the Community of Practice participation helps to motivate them to participate in Community of Practice activities. One respondent observed that he only joined Communities of Practice that clearly outlined the benefits members received from being a part of the community. The benefits in his opinion would either benefit him as an individual or his department. Some Communities of Practice in the organization align themselves to the organizational strategic objectives to add value to their members work. The most successful Communities of Practice in the organization according to the respondents, were the communities that tied back their work to the organization's strategic objectives and mandate.

4.3.2 Competent Community of Practice Coordinator

The respondents indicated that having a competent Community of Practice Coordinator is a critical factor to the success of individual Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya.

There was a shared observation that Community of Practice coordinators should have good knowledge and understanding of their area of expertise to allow them to drive relevant discussions in the Community of Practice that contribute to achievement of organizational strategic objectives. A respondent further added that one of the most successful Community of Practice in the organization i.e. Health, has a very skilled and committed Community of Practice Coordinator who has impressive facilitation skills that are required to effectively manage a Community of Practice.

4.3.3 Knowledge sharing on suitable communication channels

All the respondents noted that targeted communication channels facilitate effective knowledge sharing and collaboration within the Communities of Practice. The respondents highlighted that it is good practice to host Community of Practice information resources in different interfaces as Community of Practice members have varying preferences. A respondent added that some Community of Practice members prefer to view the community resources in the document library, some like wikis and blogs, and others only participate in Community of Practice webinars. For knowledge sharing in the Community of Practice to be effective, there is a need to balance all the knowledge sharing interfaces so as to effectively reach a big section of the Community of Practice.

4.3.4 Capacity Building Plans for Community of Practice Members

Community of Practice coordinators should ensure that all their members are fully trained on how to access and apply the resources available in the Communities of Practice. The respondents

highlighted the importance of building the capacity of members on how to use technology adopted by Communities of Practice. One respondent indicated that they do not actively participate in Community of Practice discussions as they do not have knowledge on how to use the discussion board provided by Communities of Practice. He further added that, it would be of great value if his Community of Practice coordinator would organize training forums to bring members up to speed with the technology used in the Community of Practice.

4.3.5 Well prepared agenda of relevant topics to be covered in the Community of Practice

It is good practice for Community of Practice leaders to prioritize challenges or problems to be solved by the Community of Practice members. They should then plan community events and activities geared towards providing a forum for members to share knowledge and ideas on how to solve emerging work problems. Up to ninety percent of the respondents agreed that the Communities of Practice that prepare relevant discussion topics and share this information with the members in advance are very effective. This is because they provide the members ample time to research and brainstorm on the topics before the community meetings allowing them to provide informed, valuable and relevant feedback during Community of Practice discussions.

4.4 Impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning at World Vision Kenya

Secondary data collected from World Vision Kenya's annual report indicates that Communities of Practice have played a leading role in knowledge sharing and learning in the organization. The Communities of Practice have involving members from different sectors and location hence providing a forum for the organization to grow and nurture its knowledge (WVK, 2016).

The following text represents the findings on objective two of the study which was to investigate the impact of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya.

4.4.1 Creation of knowledge and development of skills

The respondents highlighted that they have been empowered through knowledge sharing in the Communities of Practice. A respondent highlighted that they have developed new skills through interaction with established Practitioners in the Communities of Practice. The respondent added that interaction with more experienced technical specialists helps Community of Practice members to resolve problems in their area of work while building their capacity.

4.4.2 Provide access to new thinking and innovation

Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya have provided forums for members to collaborate and learn from each other. This engagement provides members with access to new knowledge, innovation and relevant updates in their areas of expertise. According to one of the respondents, the most significant value derived from Community of Practice engagement is enabling new employees to learn more about the organization through interactions with more skilled and experienced technical specialists.

4.4.3 Change Management

The Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya link employees with a common interest. The communities usually develop around technical or sectoral areas and have membership from diverse organizational thematic areas. The respondents identified Communities of Practice as effective change management tools as they provide a platform where technical specialist meet to

discuss internal and external work changes. According to the respondents, these discussions help Community of Practice to anticipate and prepare for change in their work areas.

4.4.4 Sharing of Knowledge and Best Practices

World Vision Kenya, through Communities of Practice, has a platform for sharing valuable knowledge and transferring of best practices across the organization. Up to ninety percent of the respondents indicated that through the Communities of Practice, they have a platform to capture and document best practices in their specific areas of work. A respondent shared that they have been able to improve their quality of work through accessing and applying the best practices shared in the Community of Practice.

4.4.5 Decreasing the learning curve for new employees

Finally, the respondent indicated that Communities of Practice have provided a forum to develop mentoring and coaching relationships between junior employees and established practitioners. A respondent who is relatively new in the organization added that the Community of Practice mentorship relationships have significantly helped new employees to easily understand how their jobs fit into the wider organizational strategy and how their roles impact and relate to other employees and business processes.

4.5 Challenges faced by World Vision Kenya in application of Communities of Practice

The following text represents the findings on objective three of the study which was to investigate the challenges faced by World Vision Kenya in application of Communities of Practice.

4.5.1 Physical Geographic Separation

World Vision Kenya has slightly over one thousand development staff members working in 56 Area Development Programmes in Kenya. According to the respondents, physical geographic separation makes it difficult for Community of Practice members to collaborate with each other. One respondent observed that Communities of Practice are at times forced to resort to technologies that are not real substitutes for face-to-face interactions to keep their members connected.

4.5.2 Lack of skilled Community of Practice Coordinators

Some Community of Practice coordinators in World Vision Kenya lack knowledge on area of expertise or facilitation skills required to effectively manage the Community of Practice. One respondent highlighted that the Community of Practice leaders who are not skilled usually have difficulty in guiding discussions within the community and creating valuable connects between technical practitioners.

4.5.3 Technology problems

The respondents observed that Communities of Practice members have varying capacity when it comes to using tools and technology selected for their Community of Practice. The respondents identified lack of technology know how as one of the factors limiting Community of Practice participation in the organization. A responded indicated that the platform used for Communities of Practice is quite complex and not easily understood by members who do not have an IT background.

4.5.4 Competing work priorities

One of the great limiting factors of a Community of Practice' effectiveness at sharing knowledge is the time members have to participate in Community of Practice activities. The respondents indicated that they do not have time to effectively participate in Community of Practice discussions and meetings because of other competing priorities that require their urgent and focused attention. This in turn, has a negative impact on knowledge sharing and ultimately learning in the Community of Practice.

4.5.5 Cultural Issues

Cultural differences were identified as a factor that inhibits effective knowledge sharing and learning in the organization by a few of the respondents. One respondent claimed that people from different cultural and professional backgrounds have different ways of relating to one another and this presents significant challenges in the effective running of Communities of Practice in the organization.

4.6 Discussion of findings

The study objectives were to investigate the best practices of Communities of Practice, establish the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning and to investigate the challenges in application of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya. On the first objective, the study revealed that there are a number of best practices in application of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya. All the best practices are internal and revolve around the skills and competencies of the Community of Practice coordinators. It was evident

that the best practices highlighted in the study can only be achieved if there is a competent and committed Community of Practice Coordinator. The best practices revealed in the study include: raising awareness on the value add of Communities of Practice to members, employing skilled Community of Practice coordinators, sharing knowledge on suitable communication channels, investing in capacity building/training efforts for members and finally setting relevant agenda topics for the Communities of Practice that are aligned to the organizational strategic objectives.

For the second objective, which was to establish the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya, the study revealed that there are significant positive contributions that Communities of Practice have made towards Organizational Learning. Some of the contributions include creation of knowledge and development of skills, providing access to new thinking and innovation, change management, effective sharing of knowledge and best practices and decreasing the learning curve for new employees. It is evident from the findings that the Communities of Practice have provided a relatively cheap substitute to organizational traditional learning which included planning and delivery of detailed training courses in a classroom setting. However, the level of learning in Communities of Practice is very basic and cannot be effectively measured and hence the Communities of Practice do not fully support Organizational Learning within the organization. That said, there are some positive impacts of using the Communities of Practice for Organizational Learning but not necessarily the impacts that were expected in the study.

For the third objective, which was to investigate the challenges in application of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya, the study revealed that there are many challenges the organization currently faces in the management and coordination of its 27 Communities of Practice. Some of the challenges include physical geographic separation, lack of skilled Community of Practice Coordinators, technology problems, competing work priorities and cultural issues. Lack of skilled Community of Practice coordinators was highlighted as the greatest challenges facing the Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya. For the Communities of Practice to be effective it was also revealed that the leadership team in World Vision Kenya should play a championing role and ensure that they participate in Community of Practice activities from employment of skilled and competent Community of Practice Coordinators to managing the performance of the communities. It is interesting to note that the challenges faced by World Vision Kenya in the application of Communities of Practice are very similar to those highlighted in the literature review of this study.

CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides the conclusions collected from the study findings and recommendations made thereafter. The conclusions and recommendations were highlighted from addressing the research question and achieving the study objectives which was to investigate the best practices of Communities of Practice, to establish the impact of Communities of Practice and to establish the challenges faced in application of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya.

5.2 Summary of Findings

Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya are guided by a five-year organization wide Strategic Plan (the current one is 2013 - 2017). This forms the outline from which Community of Practice activities are focused towards. The respondents were quite informed on Community of Practice purpose, value and how they contribute to the organization's strategic mandate.

For the first objective which was to investigate the best practices for Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya, a number of best practices were identified by the study. They include: include raising awareness on the value add of Communities of Practice to members, employing skilled Community of Practice coordinators, sharing knowledge on suitable communication channels, investing in capacity building/training efforts for members and finally setting relevant agenda topics for the Communities of Practice that are aligned to the organizational strategic objectives. Some of these findings are similar to what was highlighted in the literature review especially setting relevant agenda topics in the Communities of Practice and sharing knowledge on different suitable communication channels.

The second objective was to establish the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning. The study revealed that the Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya have a positive impact on Organizational Learning in the following ways. They support the creation of knowledge and development of skills; provide access to new thinking and innovation, support change management process, promoted effective sharing of knowledge and best practices and decrease the learning curve for new employees. All these findings were similar to the impact of organizational learning highlighted in the literature review of this study.

For the third objective which was to investigate the challenges in application of Communities of Practice, the study revealed that World Vision Kenya currently faces some of challenges in the application of Communities of Practice. The challenges include physical geographic separation, lack of skilled Community of Practice Coordinators, technology problems, competing work priorities and cultural issues.

For the Communities of Practice to positively impact on Organization Learning, World Vision Kenya needs to apply the best practices highlighted in the study across all the 27 Communities of Practice, leverage and scale up the positive factors contributing to Organizational Learning in the Communities of Practice and finally address the challenges highlighted in the study findings.

5.3 Conclusion

Communities of Practice play a critical role in Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya as they support the creation of knowledge and development of skills, provide access to new thinking and innovation, support the change management process, promote effective sharing of

knowledge and best practices and decrease the learning curve for new employees. While it is evident that the Communities of Practice have a positive impact on Organizational Learning, the learning that takes place in the communities is minimal and quite basic and hence World Vision Kenya needs to strengthen their Communities of Practice so as to make them effective Organizational Learning tools. This can be achieved through application and scaling up of the best practices highlighted in the study findings as well addressing the challenges the Communities of Practice currently face. With the support of the management team and with suitable Community of Practice Coordinators in place, the Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya have a great potential of optimizing Organizational Learning in the organization.

5.4 Recommendations

The study findings have highlighted various best practices in application of Communities of Practice in World Vision Kenya. Implementation of the best practices across the 27 Communities of Practice in the organization will help World Vision Kenya to effectively achieve its Organization Learning goals and objectives. The recommendations below have been made from following the study results. First, the study reveals that lack of skilled Community of Practice leaders inhibits strategic collaboration in the communities. World Vision Kenya's management team should ensure that the organization employs Community of Practice leaders with the right knowledge, skills and competencies to ensure effective management of the Communities of Practice.

The study also reveals that the reason why some Community of Practice members do not participate in community activities is lack of capacity to use the systems and tools used in the

community. To address this problem, World Vision Kenya needs to invest on capacity building efforts for all the staff to ensure that they can effectively participate in Community of Practice activities.

It was also evident that a good majority of staff do not effectively participate in Community of Practice activities because of competing work priorities. To address this, World Vision Kenya should make Community of Practice participation compulsory by including it in performance goals and allocating time within normal working hours for staff to collaborate, share knowledge and ideas in the communities.

The study forms a substantial asset to World Vision Kenya. Of particular importance, the organization is highly encouraged to document this research for posterity as it provides best practices in application of Communities of Practice. In addition, the study findings can be used in the evaluation of Communities of Practice in the organization.

5.5 Limitations of the study

The only limitation of the study emanated from the time factor available for the interviews. Directors and other senior managers did not have sufficient time to give exhaustive feedback on the interview questions because of competing work priorities. The interviews were conducted on the last month of the organization's financial year when most employees are busy with end of year processes. The data collected in the study was therefore not exhaustive as some of the respondents were in a hurry to complete the interview process.

5.6 Suggestions for further research

The study has established gaps in the literature that may require further research in the future.

Due to its potential for optimizing Organizational Learning, the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning requires a detailed study. With the right resources, it is important to carry out a comparative analysis of Communities of Practice in other NGOs in Kenya framed against the Social Network Theory which studies how individuals or groups in an organization collaborates with each other inside their network.

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APPENDICES

Appendix I: Interview Guide

The impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya

Dear Respondent,

The purpose of this interview is to collect data from World Vision Kenya. The information will be used to study **the impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning in World Vision Kenya**. The data will be used for academic purposes only and will be treated with strict confidence.

Section A: Profile Information

1. What is your Job Title?
2. How long have you worked for World Vision Kenya?
3. Are you a member of a Community of Practice in the organization? If yes, which one? If no, why not?

Section B: Communities of Practice

1. Do you think Communities of Practice are effective organizational learning tools?
2. What are the factors that drive you/ or not to participate in learning activities in the Communities of Practice?
3. In the Communities of Practice, which activities are you engaged in?

4. Are there any challenges you face when participating in Community of Practice activities?
5. Are there any benefits or value you derive from Community of Practice participation?

Section C: Impact of Communities of Practice on Organizational Learning

1. Do you have an understanding of World Vision's vision and how your role contributes to this?
2. Does World Vision's information system allow for efficient and effective exchange of information within the organization?
3. Does World Vision have formal mechanisms and systems that ensure transfer of best practices among various areas of work?
4. Are you equipped with the right knowledge and skills to be a subject matter expert in your area?
5. Does the management team in World Vision promote and support innovative ideas, experimentation and creative processes?
6. Are you a member of a team that shares experiences, insights, knowledge and skills with each other?
7. In your opinion, does the organization provide platforms where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured?