The Impact of Information Management Practices on the performance of County Governments in Central Kenya: A Case of Nyeri County

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Abstract

Information management is critical in influencing an organisation's ability to sustain a long-term competitive advantage. This chapter, resulting from a research study, examines the impact of information management practices on the performance of county governments in Central Kenya using the Nyeri County government as a case study. The study specifically sought to determine the information management practices used by the Nyeri County government; and establish the effectiveness of these information management practices in supporting government activities. The study was designed as a survey and targeted 82 management and administrative county staff in the six sub-county offices of Nyeri County (in Tetu, Kieni, Mathira, Othaya, Mukurweini, and Nyeri Town) and the Nyeri County governor. The study adopted census sampling design due to the small number of the potential respondents and also because this method was bound to enhance the reliability of the findings. The choice of a census design maximised the confidence level while at the same time greatly reduced the margin of error. Questionnaires and interview schedules were used as the main data collection instruments. The study found out that effective use of information management practices has enabled the Nyeri County government to be more responsive and consistent in service delivery as well and projected an image of good faith in a bid to audit and improve governance. These practices were effective mainly because they improved service delivery in the county office, and maintained convenient, secure and efficient storage and retrieval of county government information in the county government offices. The findings of this study may be used by the governors as the base upon which to review the county accountability and transparency principles and practices.

Keywords: *Information management, strategies, practices, performance, County Government of Nyeri, Kenya*

Introduction

Sharma (2010) defines information management as the application of management procedures to gather information, communicate it within and outside an establishment, and refine it to allow managers to make faster and improved decisions. All over the world there is an increasing determination to utilise effective information management approaches to enhance good governance. The concept of good governance has recently been associated with many organisations such as private corporations, nongovernmental organisations, and of course, government agencies (O'Neill, 2009). In public administration good governance is regarded as being part of the new paradigms. Part of it is in the public administration of the new governance paradigms which emphasise the responsibility of government towards its citizens in terms of controlling the quality of service to citizens in accordance with the superior service delivery, transparency and accountability (Okot-Uma, 2001). As they endeavour to accomplish great administration, governments have swung to new and rising technology and are seeking to bridle the potential offered by these innovations to change government, democracy, government-related exchanges and additionally all the social and financial societal elements (Okot-Uma, 2001).

Across Europe, governments progressively perceive the fact that data is a critical part of good administration (Hendriks, 2012). As governments endeavour to enhance administration conveyance, use assets proficiently, react to residents' needs and be open about basic leadership procedures and systems, they have understood the need to oversee and use data viably. In Africa, Boisdeffre (2006) asserts that governments and their departments have found it hard to give an exact, complete, and straightforward record of their budgetary position to parliaments or to other concerned individuals, including funders and the overall population. This absence of data has thwarted straightforwardness and the implementation of responsibility in government, and has added to the apparent administration issues.

Consequently, many African countries have been obliged to push for adoption of effective information management practices.

In Kenya, effective information management has been largely implemented by the central government; not the 47 county governments. According to King'ori and Otike (2010), it has been greatly feared that corruption, among other vices such as general misappropriation of public funds are not only bound to be devolved to but are also likely to be multiplied at county levels. One of the most effective ways of sealing any potential loopholes through

which crucial information could be lost is to ensure that all the county governments have and apply effective information management practices. Consequently, this chapter examines the impact of information management practices by county governments in Kenya with specific reference to Nyeri County government. Nyeri County government comprises the following departments: administration, corporate services and stakeholders management, land, housing physical planning and urban development, energy, water, environment and natural resources, roads, public works and transport, cultural, sports, youth and social services, education, labour and manpower development, agriculture, livestock, cooperative development, trade and industry, finance and economic planning and health services. These departments provided information pertinent to the study.

Information Management and Service Delivery

There is a connection between enhanced public service delivery and effective information management. Information management is a crucial component of the reform agenda of any public sector; the efficiency of which entails enhancing the public service efficacy and effectiveness (Kemoni, 2008). In Kenya, information management has remained a neglected function in most administration units especially in public institutions. This is potentially hazardous to newly formed county governments. There is therefore a need to identify how the use of effective information management practices can impact county government operations and enhance public service delivery and build trust and confidence of the members of public that they serve. The study therefore focused on the concept of information management within the context of governance with the aim of creating a resonance between information management practices and the effectiveness of county governments. The specific objectives of this study were to determine the information management practices in the Nyeri County government as well as establish the effectiveness of the same in enhancing the performance of the county government.

Organisational Information Theory

This chapter is based on the Organisational Information Theory (OIT). This is a communication theory that offers strategic insight into the distinctive ways information is distributed and utilised in organisations. The theory was developed by Karl Weick in 1976. Its central principles are anchored on the belief that organisations are process, rather than, structurally driven (Weick, 1976). OIT stresses on decreasing levels of communication equivocality or

ambiguity which typically exists in vibrant environments that are information-rich. With an interdisciplinary framework, organisational information is applied in institutional frameworks to eradicate both uncertainty and intricacy from messaging in the workplace (Daniels & Spiker, 2008). It is also used to build upon previous findings from overall systems philosophies and theory. Critics of the theory affirm that OIT does not significantly deal with conflict or hierarchy which are the two major elements related to organisational communications (Taylor & Every, 2000). On the whole, by allowing the study to contemplate the organisation in this alternate framework, the theory provided the authors with a strong basis from which to examine the information management practices and their effectiveness in supporting good governance and performance by county governments.

Review of Literature

Governments, just like all other establishments, need to keep information about their decisions and dealings so as to meet the demands for accountability and to satisfy their own information requirements. According to Budhiraja (2005), as governments progressively lead their everyday work through ICT applications, records emanating from such exchanges should be handled, overseen and safeguarded in a composed framework, which keeps up their uprightness and validity.

Information management systems have fundamentally altered the nature of public administration, to the extent that they now underpin the basic functioning of most public programmes and contribute to the most significant innovations in the delivery of public-sector services (Dada, 2006; Holden, 2003). Examples of such services include filing of tax, identity management, government jobs application, obtaining/renewal of certificates and licenses, registering to vote, and in some cases votes casting (Baqir & Iyer, 2010). Gichoya (2005) and O'Neill (2009) contend that with the development of information management practices, and e-Government, it is feasible to enhance proficiency and viability of inside organisation inside government and to re-find taxpayer supported organisation from government workplaces to areas nearer to the subjects. These locations may be cyber cafés, telecentres or personal computers in the office or at home.

County governments in Kenya perceive information management systems as important tools for conveying services to residents and businesses. There are a number of electronic governance systems. These systems mostly focus on collecting revenue grounded on Local Authorities Integrated Financial and

Operations Management System (LAIFO MS). LAIFO MS was used by the local authorities before the establishment of county governments (Mokaya & Njuguna, 2013). The ICT Authority is a government agency under the Ministry of Information Communication and Technology (MoICT) created in August 2013 to moderate governance information management. The role of the ICT Authority in county governments is to support counties to attain self-sufficiency in their processes and service to citizens through effective information management. Effective information management assists county governments to promote information management approaches for faster development and equal services to citizens. These include the establishment of communal and collective infrastructure such as data-centres and agencies that offer every government service to citizens; business expansion which includes creation of jobs, entrepreneurship and innovation; and providing better services to citizens (ICT Authority of Kenya, 2014).

Methodology

This study employed a survey research design. This is a design characterised by organised data collection from members of a specified population. This design also follows processes such as identifying a target population, development of data collection tools, selection of an appropriate sample, administration of data collection instruments as well as descriptively analysing and presenting data through tables, frequencies, percentages and means (Gall, 2004). The survey research design was selected because it was deemed ideal for assessing the current status of information management practices and their impact on the performance of the county governments. In this study, the target population were all the 82 management and administrative county staff in the six sub-county offices of Nyeri County located in Tetu, Kieni, Mathira, Othaya, Mukurweini, and Nyeri Town and the Nyeri County governor. The researchers used a census sampling approach whereby all the staff were invited to participate in the study as respondents. The census sampling approach was used due to the small number of the potential respondents and also because this method was bound to enrich the findings. Another advantage of the census method is that it maximises the confidence level while also reducing the margin of error (Barton, 2001). Thus, the respondents of the study were all the 15 (12 management; 3 administrative) staff members based at the Tetu sub-county; 11 (9 management; 2 administrative) from Kieni; 14 (11 management; 3 administrative) from Mathira; 11 (9 management; 2 administrative) from Othaya; 15 (11 management; 4 administrative) Mukurweini; and 16 (11 management; 5 administrative) from Nyeri Town.

A summary of the distribution of the respondents is presented in Table 1. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from all the county government staff in their respective stations. An interview guide was used to collect data from the governor.

Table 1: Summary of respondents according to duty station and job cadre

Station	Management	Administration	Total
Tetu	12	3	15
Kieni	9	2	11
Mathira	11	3	14
Othaya	9	2	11
Mukurweini	11	4	15
Nyeri Town	11	5	16
Total	**63**	**19**	**82**

The data collected was coded using SPSS version 22 for Windows and analysed using descriptive statistics. The results of the quantitative data from the coded closed-ended questions in the questionnaires were presented using tables, frequencies and percentages. Additionally, the data was interpreted in line with the research objectives. On the other hand, the qualitative data obtained from open-ended questions in the interview guide was analysed and categorised in themes in accordance with the research objectives and was reported in prose.

Findings and Discussions

This section presents and discusses the findings of the study.

Response rate

The researchers distributed 82 questionnaires to the county staff. Out of these, 79 were received back. This represents a 96.3% response rate. According to Owens (2002), a response rate of over 70% is deemed to be representative. The high turnout was achieved because the researchers administered the questionnaires in the offices of the respondents. The Nyeri County governor and his deputy were unavailable for the interview. Instead, the governor mandated the County Director of Communication to be interviewed in his place. The researchers shared the interview guide with the County Director of Communication for consultation with the governor before the interview. This was in an effort to ensure that his responses represented the views of the governor.

Background information of the respondents

The researchers considered the background information of the management and administrative county staff who took part in the study. A majority of the participants in the study, 44 (55.7%), were female while 35 (44.3 %) were male. Regarding the age of the participating staff members, the majority of them, 41 (51.9%), were between 31 years and 40 years, 24 (48.9) were between 41 years and 50 years, 9 (11.4%) were between 20 years and 30 years, while 5 (10.2%) were aged 50 years and above. Pertaining to working experience, the close majority, 42 (53.3%), had an experience of 5 years and above, 25 (51.1%) had an experience of 1 to 2 years, while 12 (24.5%) had an experience of 3 to 4 years. These findings show that the majority of the staff members were relatively mature and sufficiently experienced in their field of occupation. As such, they were in touch with the previous and current trends in information management, meaning they were able to provide accurate and reliable data on the impact of information management practices used by the Nyeri County government. The findings also demonstrate that the majority of county staff are female. This may be attributed to the fact that most of the male population work in the major cities away from Nyeri. It was also observed that although there were more female than male employees in Nyeri County, the male members of staff dominated the senior positions. This is a replication of the general trends in Kenya and other developing countries where ladies are either jobless or employed in low cadre positions.

Information management practices in the Nyeri County Government

The study sought to determine the information management practices in the Nyeri County government. To capture this objective, the participating staff members were first asked to indicate whether there were particular information management procedures in their offices. All the 79 respondents (100%) indicated that there were specific information management procedures in the offices. The participating staff members were further asked to indicate these particular procedures. Their responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Staff members' response on information management practices in the county government offices

	Practices	Frequency	%
a)	Financial information management	72	91.1
b)	Dissemination of government reports to citizens	70	88.6
c)	Internal administration data organisation	65	82.3
d)	Classification of application documentation	65	82.3
e)	Filing of vacancies and tenders	53	67.1

These findings reveal that a great majority (91.1%) of the staff members who participated in the study indicated that there are procedures governing financial information management. The other identified practices include dissemination of government reports to citizens (88.6%); internal administration data organisation (82.3%); classification of application documentation (82.3%); and filing of vacancies and tenders (53, 67.1%).The county director of communication explained that the information management practices in the county government were designed to ensure the effective archival of vital information for business continuity; governance data recovery; timely and efficient provision of information; organisation and accountability of records; as well as training and communication on key directives.

These findings imply that information management practices in the county government are geared towards responsiveness and consistency of government activities and interventions. They also indicate that the government uses information management practices to project an image of good faith in a bid to audit and improve governance. The findings are in concurrence with the assertion by Hendriks (2012) that an organisation with a solid foundation of proven successful records management practices, for instance, will control and manage records effectively and promptly and demonstrate proven practices of integrity through consistent implementation. Thus the presence and implementation of effective information management practices enhance transparency and corporate image. Therefore, the researchers conclude that effective information management practices in public institutions like county governments contribute to better service delivery, transparency and public perception.

Effectiveness of information management practices in the Nyeri County Government

The study was also interested in determining the effectiveness of information management practices in the Nyeri County government. Staff members participating in the study were first asked to indicate whether information management procedures in their offices were effective or not. All the 79 respondents (100%) indicated that information management procedures in their offices were effective. This consensus in positively assessing the effectiveness of information management practices is perhaps attributed to fact that most staff in the public sector organisations and governments operate under a *de facto* official secrets policy requiring them not to project their employer negatively. Nonetheless, this finding could also be an outcome of the recent growing acceptance of information as a critical resource in organisations and the efforts which have been made to enhance its management. It may have also been a result of the application of the recently enacted right of access to information laws in Kenya which require public and private institutions to organise information in their custody in ways which enhance its access and use. Furthermore, the fact that the functions of the county government are devolved to the sub-county levels also implies that the information generated or collected at this level is easier to manage.

The participating staff members were then provided with a number of information management practices and asked to indicate the extent to which they were effective in their offices. Table 3 shows their responses.

Table 3: Effectiveness of information management practices in the County Government

	Practices	To a greater extent		To some extent		Not at all	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
a)	Information management practices facilitate the county government's delivery of universal service to citizens	46	58.2	26	32.9	7	8.9
b)	Information management procedures assist the county government to achieve autonomy in their operations	39	49.4	28	35.4	12	15.2
c)	Information management practices guarantee convenient county government services to the citizens	34	43.0	19	24.1	26	32.9
d)	Information management procedures nurture business development in the county government through job creation and innovation	32	40.5	31	39.2	16	20.3
e)	Information management procedures foster accelerated achievement of the county government's development agenda	23	29.1	13	16.5	43	54.4

Table 3 shows the participating staff members' response on the extent to which information management procedures were effective in their office. Concerning whether information management practices facilitate the county government's delivery of universal service to citizens, a majority 46 (58.2%) of the staff members indicated that they facilitated to a greater extent; 26 (32.9%) pointed out that they did to some extent whereas 7 (8.9%) were of the view that it they did not facilitate at all. This implies that a whopping 91.1% of the respondents were of the view that the information management practices embraced by the county staff facilitate the government to deliver universal services to the citizens. These findings underscore the role of information in articulating and delivering public services. Effective information flow and exchange in or between government institutions enhance the demand and supply of services to the public.

Pertaining to the view that the information management procedures assist the county government to achieve autonomy in their operations, 39 (49.4%) of the staff members observed that they did, to a greater extent; 28 (35.4%) were of the view that they did, to some extent whereas 12 (15.2%) indicated

that that they did not assist at all. This implies that a large majority (84.8%) of the staff acknowledges that their distinctness as a county government is based on the information they generate, collect and use. These findings also underscore the prominent role which effective information management plays in ensuring better service delivery to the public. There is no better way to demonstrate the autonomy of the county government than the services it offers to its citizens.

With respect to whether information management practices guarantee convenient county government services to the citizens, 34 (43%) of the staff members were of the opinion that they did to a greater extent; 19 (24.1%) pointed out that they did, to some extent whilst 26 (32.9%) observed that they did not guarantee at all. It is noteworthy that although the majority (67.1%) believe that information management practices guarantee convenient county government services to the citizens, there is a sizable (32.9%) minority which is of a contrary view. This response could be attributed to the fact that most of information services are generally obtained by the public from the county government offices thus limiting the level of convenience the public experiences with government services. It is also important to point out that even where there are electronic services which can be accessed remotely, a large majority of the public still lacks the skills or tools to make the best use of these facilities and therefore continues to rely on physical services. The situation is expected to improve gradually with the advancements in the information sector in Kenya.

Regarding the perspective that information management procedures nurture business development in the county government through job creation and innovation, 32 (40%) pointed out that they did to a greater extent; 31 (39.2%) observed that they did to some extent whereas 16 (20.3%) indicated they did not nurture at all. It is evident from the findings that 79.2% agree that information management procedures nurture business development in the county government through job creation and innovation. This is significant because most county governments operate as welfare units to which citizens come for handouts. Counties will develop better if the citizens are empowered through effective information management practices to develop business ideas and innovations. Thriving and innovative businesses will result in jobs and the resultant economic development in the county. These findings underscore the crucial role information plays in socioeconomic development. Therefore, the authors submit that the extent to which county governments attain their development goals will be determined by the effectiveness of their information management practices.

On whether information management procedures foster accelerated achievement of the county government's development agenda, 23 (29.1%) were of the opinion that they did to a greater extent; 23 (16.5%) observed that they did to some extent whereas 43 (54.4%) were of the opinion that they did not foster it at all. Here, the majority (54.4%) hold the view that information management practices do not foster accelerated achievement of the county government's development agenda. This implies that there is need to improve the information management practices and link them closely to the county's development agenda.

The county director of communication explained that information management practices 1) ensure that risks to county government information are minimised; 2) guarantee that county government data is managed appropriately; 3) enable careful handling of county information to prevent damage and deterioration; and 4) ensure that county government information is identified, located and retrieved easily. The findings indicate that effective information management practices improve service delivery in the county office as well as maintain convenient, secure and efficient storage and retrieval of county government information. These findings concur with Baqir and Iyer (2010) who observed that affordable, secure capacity frameworks that give fast and quick recovery of information will guarantee the accessibility of data in case of disasters and additionally for future reference particularly when delivering service to the general public.

Conclusion

The study reveals that county governments in Central Kenya have developed guidelines and systems for financial information management; dissemination of government reports to citizens; internal administrative data organisation; as well as classification and filing of application and tender documents. These findings imply that information management practices in the county government are geared towards responsiveness and consistency of government activities and interventions. All the respondents also concurred that information management practices in their offices were effective. The findings also indicate that the information management practices facilitate the county government's delivery of universal service to citizens; information management practices assist the county government to achieve autonomy in their operations; information management practices guarantees convenient county government services to the citizens; and information management practices nurture business development in the county government through

job creation and innovation. However, the information management practices do not currently foster accelerated achievement of the county government's development agenda. Therefore, there is need to improve the information management practices to link them closely to the county's development agenda.

Recommendations

From the foregoing, the authors make the following recommendations:

1. The county government should closely link the information management practices to its development strategy and agenda. This close linkage will ensure that the information management practices foster an accelerated realisation of the development agenda. This recommendation should be implemented by the governor and the director of communication immediately.

2. The county government should develop an information management strategy. Although there are several guidelines and established procedures which govern information management in the county, these may not be effective without a documented strategy which directs them to contribute to specific strategic outcomes. The governor and director of communication should implement this recommendation immediately.

3. The county government should develop and implement information management practices which facilitate convenient access to information and services by the public. This can be achieved through digitisation of information products and digitalisation of information management processes. The county director of communication can implement this in collaboration with the ICT division.

4. The county government should maintain the existing guidelines and practices on information management. However, these should be updated to reflect the emerging tools, technologies, techniques and trends. This will ensure that these practices continue to serve the existing and emerging stakeholder information needs and wants. The county director of communication can implement this in collaboration with the ICT division.

5. The county government should also continuously build the capacity of its staff to competently oversee the implementation of the information management practices so as to enhance their effectiveness.

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