

## ORGANISATIONAL KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT: A CASE STUDY OF THE MINISTRY OF GENDER EQUALITY AND CHILD WELFARE (MGECW) IN NAMIBIA

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### Abstract

*This paper reports on a study carried out on organisational knowledge management (KM) practices in the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGECW) in Namibia. The objectives of the study were: to explore knowledge sharing (KS), knowledge acquisition (KA), knowledge capture (KC), knowledge dissemination (KD), and knowledge transfer (KT) at MGECW; to determine barriers and enablers to organisational KM; to examine the work culture and attitudes of personnel which affect organisational KM and its practices; and to investigate how management supports organisational KM practices. The case study used a mixed methods approach. Two instruments were used to collect data, namely semi-structures interviews and questionnaires. The results reveal that organisational knowledge (OK) in the MGECW hinges on tacit and explicit OK and respondents had a comprehensive understanding of OK and KM, however, the management of OK was found to be informally practiced without KM structures in place and no structural procedures to encourage employees to share their OK. Organisational KD and KT practices showed a strong preference for the use of fax machines, telephones and face-to-face meetings as forms of dispensing and transferring OK. Some enablers of organisational KM in the MGECW included positive leadership (senior management), technology (improved ICT infrastructure), organisational culture, employee commitment and involvement, trust, social networking and teamwork. The study found lack of skills and technical support in ICT; poor ICT infrastructure; lack of motivation and reward systems; negative attitude of employees towards organisational KM practices; poor record management; lack of time and funds for training and equipment as barriers of organisational KM.*

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## **Introduction**

In a knowledge-based society (KBS) organisational knowledge (OK) is a key resource for organisational success. Frost (2010, para. 7) defines organisational knowledge as “all the knowledge resources within an organisation that can be realistically tapped by that organization”. Organisational KM encompasses the collective practices or systems of leveraging OK or human intellects to induce innovation. After Namibia’s independence in 1990, the country initiated diverse innovative developmental programmes and policies on becoming a KBS. One of the objectives of the developmental programmes is transforming Namibia into a KBS, by leveraging OK and technology for the benefits of the people (Office of the President, 2004). Mchombu (2010, p. 20) states: “Namibia has become a pioneering country by incorporating clauses of KM in Vision 2030”. Through the case study of the Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare (MGEWCW), within Namibia, the study makes a small contribution to better the understanding of organisational KM practices in the public sector in order to advance organisational KM. Organisational KM practices are not only central to private organisations but also the public sector, which has realised that its adoption is not an option but a must. Darroch (2003) states that it is essential to have organisational KM practices, and the precise organisational KM practices ought to be acquired for the public sector organisations. Appreciating and recognising the value of organisational KM is not an option for the public sector in Namibia but a must. Organisational KM allows an organisation to use OK advantageously and aid in handling the pressure of competition. Nonaka (1994) argues that in an economy where the only certainty is uncertainty, the only source of lasting competitive advantage is applying or improving organisational KM.

There are several definitions of organisational KM. According to the e-Knowledge Centre (as cited in Mchombu, 2007, p. 26), organisational KM is “a disciplined approach to managing all the OK processes found in human collectives (a set of people with common goals). Andreu and Sieber (1999); Chikati and Mpfu (2013); Desouza and Paquette (2004); Pan and Scarbrough (1999) argue that organisational KM is a procedural way of developing a set of standards and its application to enhance organisational performance set around experience and skills. Furthermore, organisational KM is a specifically specified systematic process for acquiring, organising and communicating both tacit and explicit OK of employees so that other employees may make use of OK through sharing in order to be more effective and productive (Alavi & Leidner as cited in Siakas & Georgiadou, 2010; Kanter, 1999; Spiegler, 2000). Organisational KM embraces models, processes, and technologies to reinforce the fortification, growth, and exploitation of OK as an asset (White, 2004); Chikati and Mpfu (2013); Davenport and Prusak (1998); Nonaka (1994); and Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) observed that OK emanates from information and experience, including justified beliefs of an employee.

Moreover, the epistemological standpoint of social relation on OK denotes that OK is socially constructed, as an employee in groups participates in a dialogue and in relation to shared tasks or problems (Moradi, Saba, Azimi, & Emami, 2012). OK contains magnitude in context. Blackler (1995) and Stankosky (2005) observed that OK is multifaceted, complex and is contextual in dimension from its state of description, situated and abstract, unfolding in (a) communities of practice (b) organisational settings. Communities of practice (COP) represent a group of individual employees with a common interest on one hand. On the other hand, organisational settings define how OK flows within the organisation. Gholipour, Jandaghi and Hosseinzadeh (2010); Rai (2011) proclaim that OK is an essential tool for supporting the growth of innovative ideas as a competitive benefit for organisations. OK exhibits in two folds either as tacit or explicit (Alavi & Leidner, 2001; Bratianu, n. d.; Chikati & Mpofu, 2013; Huber, 1991; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wiig, 1999). Tacit OK (TOK) is personal and experience-bound, the most key OK, while it is hard to illustrate or capture, thus employees know more than they tell (Polanyi, 1983; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). To illustrate this, Mchombu (2007, p. 25) argues that “a master craftsman after years of experience develops a wealth of expertise at his fingertips, but he is often unable to articulate the scientific or technical principles behind what he knows.” Therefore, tacit OK is more difficult in identifying, prioritising and capturing than explicit knowledge (Mchombu, 2007). In spite of the perceived prominence to organisational KM practices for organisational success, its definition continues to be slightly ambiguous. The following emanate from the various definitions: it is an organised process to create, leverage and share knowledge.

### **Problem statement**

The importance of OK in organisations, both the private and public sectors has been highlighted by several studies (Abbas & Khamal, 2011; Al-Athari & Zairi 2001; Baquero & Schulte, 2007; Chris, 2009; De Long & Fahey, 1997). The same studies have shown that organisational KM practices, i.e. organisational knowledge acquisition (KA), knowledge dissemination (KD), knowledge sharing (KS), knowledge transfer (KT), and knowledge capture (KC) hinge on different factors i.e. organisational culture and structure, leadership, and technology. The literature showed that not many studies on organisational KM had been conducted in Namibia and in the public service in particular, hence there was need to conduct this case study of the MGECW in Namibia. This study thus focused on examining organisational KM practices in relation to the barriers and enablers, i.e. culture, structure, technology and measurement of KM in the MGECW in Namibia.

### **Objectives**

The overall objective of the study was to explore the KM in the MGECW through an investigation of organisational KM practices. Thus, the study sought to address the following sub-objectives:

To explore knowledge sharing, knowledge acquisition, knowledge dissemination, knowledge transfer and knowledge capture in the MGECW, Namibia;

To determine barriers and enablers to organisational KM in the MGECW, Namibia;

To examine the work culture and attitudes of personnel which affects organisational KM and its practices in the MGECW, Namibia; and

To investigate how management supports organisational KM practices

### Literature review and conceptual framework

This study focused on five segments of the organisational KM process, which are to acquire, capture, share, disseminate and transfer OK. These segments made up the study's conceptual framework which guided the study and determined the focus of the literature review presented here. Laudon and Laudon (as cited in Chigada & Ngulube, 2015, p. 2) state that organisational "KM practices help organisations to refocus on using OK that exists already, by creating an environment for innovation rather than limiting themselves to best practice solutions only". Thus, in this study, these segments of organisational KM practices were seen as a direct or indirect contrast of each organisational KM practice. OK is generated based on mutual understanding of employees and the organisation's objectives through organisational KM practices as depicted in Figure 1 below:



The considerable interest in setting up and managing of an OK database for organisational reuse, share, capture and dissemination are important elements of organisational KM. Olson and Reuther (1987) argue that OK able employee/s or consultant/s have stored rich representations of facts, objects, attributes, as well as sets of inference rules that connect these constellations of facts for usage in problem-solving situations. These facets need to be acquired by the MGECW from individual or

groups of employees. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995, p. 59) argue that “individuals create OK, the organisation create a context for individuals to create and amplify OK”. According to Nonaka and Takeuchi (as cited in Chigada & Ngulube, 2015, p. 3) “80% of organisational knowledge in organisations lies in the brains of people who possess know-how, secrets and personal skill that will never be shared if no one works on it”.

Organisational KM authors and scholars such as Argote and Ingram (2000); Carlile and Reberich (2003); Hooff and Weenen (2004); and Vito, Garavello and Schiuma (1999) define OK transfer as a way of identifying accessible OK that already exists and acquiring it and subsequently applying this OK to develop new ideas or enhance the existing ideas to make a process/action faster, better or safer for the organisation. Basically, “transfer of OK is not only about exploiting accessible resources, that is, explicit OK, but also about how to acquire and absorb it well to make things more efficient and effective in organisations” (Liyanage, Ballal & Elhag, 2009, p. 9). Organisational KD and KT are used interchangeably, referring to knowledge dissemination, organisational knowledge transfer and knowledge distribution (Demarest, 1997; Garvin, 1993; Gupta & Govindarajan, 2000; Huber, 1991; McAdams & McCreedy, 1999).

Organisational KS is also considered as an important element of organisational KM, based on two factors: to transfer tacit OK among individual employees (socialisation); and as a precedent of OK creation, enhancing innovation (Healthcare Improvement Scotland (HIS), 2012). Andreeva and Kianto (as cited in Rahmani et al., 2013); and Bircham-Connolly (as cited in Sandhu, Jain & Ahmad, 2011) argue that organisational KS helps organisations to use internal and external OK, through conveying the best practices from one division to another. Moreover, organisational KS contains three genes - KS is time-consuming, power and KS involves trust (Siakas & Georgiadou, 2010).

Rahmani et al., (2013, p. 96) observed two forms of organisational KA, internal OK acquisition and external OK acquisition. A study by Ruggles (1997) showed that managers were doing better compared to middle management employees in terms of transferring OK within the organisation. Similarly, Bierly, Kessler and Christensen (2000, p. 603) assert that “OK is acquired through an experience where “education, training, and seasoning of a person can help them along the path to wisdom. These experiences can aid in understanding the broader context of issues, seeing how new OK can be integrated into existing ones, and assign a value to different types of knowledge. Thus this study attempted to address these issues of organisational KA in the Namibian context.

Furthermore, studies on organisational KM practices such as Hansen (as cited in Zhou, Siu & Wang, 2010) found that organisational KC problems are essentially search and transfer problems. However, Parsaye (as cited in Dalkir, 2005, p. 83) points out that “three major approaches used to capture or

acquire OK from individuals and groups, which are; (a) Interviewing of experts (structured interviews, stories), (b) learning by being told and (c) learning by observation.” In other words, OK is based on the experience from local employees or consultants hired by the organization; hence the great importance of having a systematic process of capturing OK. Bresnen, Edelman, Newell, Scarbrough and Swan (2003) observed that the processes of OK capture, transfer, and learning in project settings rely heavily upon social patterns, practices, and processes in ways which emphasise the value and importance of adopting a community-based approach to managing OK.

However, after examining motivation and barriers to participation in virtual knowledge-sharing communities of practices, Ardichvili, Page and Wentling (2003) found that, when employees view OK as a public good belonging to the whole organisation, OK flows easily. In addition, when employees are hesitating to contribute towards OK sharing, it is because of fear of criticism. The same study found that there is a need to develop various types of trust, ranging from individual based trust to institution-based trust. Studies in China and Denmark (Chen, Elnaghi & Hatzakis, 2011); Lilleoere & Hansen, 2010); and Yao, Kam & Chan, 2007) found that organisational KM and KS ideas were welcomed in all government departments and that tacit organisational KS took place but it was hampered by Chinese organisational culture. Other exploratory studies in Asia (Thai public organisations) and Europe (Irish organisations) (Liao, Liu, To & Lin, 2009); Paroutis & Al Saleh, 2009); Vuori & Okkonen, 2012) on motivation for knowledge sharing using Web 2.0, found that elastic rewards (recognition and respect) were the most significant influences on motivation to contribute knowledge. Olatokun and Elueze (2012), on attitudes towards KS in Nigeria, observed that expected associations and contributions were the major determinants of lawyers’ attitudes towards OK sharing. Expected rewards were not significantly related to lawyers’ attitudes towards knowledge sharing.

Another descriptive thought for this study is that of permeability by McDermott and O’Dell (as cited in Wang & Noe, 2010) who emphasise on the dimension of organisational culture in two folds, such as sharing of OK which is strongly associated with a pre-existing central value of the organisation and that linkage for sharing OK is built on prevailing webs of employee use in their daily activities. An exploratory study by Jarvenpaa and Staples (2000) revealed that personal propensity to share information, experiences comfort with the use of computer technology, perceptions about the quality of content found in information systems, and the degree of task interdependence experienced by each employee were significant predictors of participation in computer-mediated information exchange. Wasko and Faraj’s (2000) study of three computer-related Usenet newsgroups serving as cross-organisational communities of practice showed that people participated because they wanted to feel part of and promote a professional community they valued, and because doing so helped them stay up to

date with current ideas and innovations. However, a study by Lam and Lambermont-Ford (2008) revealed that within a specialised organisation, the social problem of OK sharing may be surmounted through the traditional stimulus, with the establishment of epicurean motivation via extrinsic incentives like training and career progression.

Critical achievement issues can develop to critical failure factors if they are not correctly implemented or monitored (AL-Hussain, 2012). Gholipour et al. (2010, p.1864) argue that organisational “KM enablers (or effective factors) are the overall organisational activities that positively affect knowledge-creation, these activities include; facilitating relationships and conversations as well as sharing local knowledge across an organisation or beyond geographic and cultural borders”. De Long (1997); Handzic and Zhou (2005); Hasanali (2002); Lee and Choi (2003); Rai (2011); and Ryan and Prybutok (2001) reiterate that organisational KM enablers and barriers are organisational culture (OC), leadership, technology and measurement, senior management leadership and commitment, employee involvement, teamwork and information systems infrastructure. Luggner and Kraus (2001) stress that organisational KM barriers arise due to organisational working environments. Organisational enablers are thus aimed at nurturing management of OK regularly which kindles sharing, creation, dissemination, capturing and acquisition of OK to facilitate KM within an organisation. However, organisational KM scholars Hedlund (1994); Jarvenpaa and Staples (2000); Jones, Chonko and Roberts (2003); Lee and Choi (2003); Nelson and Coopriider (1996); Szulanski (1996); Sun and Scott (2005) identify mistrust as a key barrier to OK exchange. Creation of a high level of trust reduces the risk in OK exchange. However, Hansen and Nohria (2004); Toben, Weber and Wunran (2002) assert that barriers related to employees could unfold as organisations fail to understand collaboration in three different ways: (a) *unwillingness to seek input and learn from others*, (b) *inability to seek and find expertise* (both individual and the organisation), (c) *an unwillingness to help*, and (d) *inability to work together and transfer knowledge*. The study investigated all these factors which are said to hinder and enable organisational KM operations in an organisation in the MGECW, Namibia.

### **Research methodology**

The case study used a mixed methods approach through a concurrent triangulation strategy. The qualitative approach using interviews as data collection method gathered data from 16 senior managers. This approach offered an in-depth understanding on organisational KM in Namibia. The quantitative approach used questionnaires which were administered to 80 middle managers and looked at the key dimensions of organisational KM practices in the MGECW. From a population of five hundred and forty-four (544) employees of the MGECW, 20 qualitative respondents were selected using purposive sampling methods. The 80 questionnaire respondents were selected using simple random sampling

using the current employee register for a sampling frame. Data collected through structured interviews was analysed through content analysis, and data collected with questionnaires was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) 22.0 to generate descriptive statistics. The interview data confirmed or refuted what was coming from the questionnaires. Consent was attained from the MGECW and research participants. From a population size of five hundred and forty-four (544) employees of the MGECW, 80 questionnaires were distributed and 16 out of 20 planned interviews were conducted. Seventy six (76) of the questionnaires were returned, reflecting a response rate of 95%, and sixteen (16) structured interviews were conducted, reflecting 80%. This indicates a high response rate from the respondents. Moreover, ten (10) out of 76 questionnaires returned were rejected, thus 66 (75%) questionnaires were used in the study. Fincham (2008) and Babbie (1990, 1992) state that a response rate of 50% or 60% is adequate for a survey, and 80% is very good.

### **Results and discussion of findings**

Data from the questionnaires and interviews is integrated where appropriate. The findings from both the questionnaires and interviews revealed that OK in the MGECW hinges on tacit/implicit OK and explicit OK. Senior managers in the MGECW had a comprehensive understanding of OK and organisational KM. Moreover, on defining organisational KM, 16 senior managers, described organisational KM as the process of managing OK in the organisation for the organization - for future reference. One senior manager said: *"It is when knowledge is harvested from employees and channelled to other employees to reach and help to achieve certain goals set by the organisation"*. In addition, an interesting aspect from senior managers was that 10 out of 16 senior managers mentioned that they had heard of a *knowledge-based economy*, and seven of the senior managers indicated that the MGECW adopt organisational KM practices in informal ways. The findings also show that employees relied considerably on documented information (*explicit OK*), past experiences (*tacit OK*) and consultants (specialists) in a thought field. However, there were no programmes put in place to educate and bring awareness to the understanding and the importance of knowledge management to the MGECW. The understanding of OK by the respondents relates to definitions by various scholars (Bhatt (as cited in Keramati & Azadeh, 2007); Bhatti, Khan, Hussain, Ahmed, & Rehman (2011); Davenport & Prusak, 1998; Li & Song, 2009; Mchombu, 2007; Nonaka, 1994; Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995; Wiig (as cited in Gordon & Smith, 1998)). These scholars indicated that OK entails the understanding which embodies facts, evidence, information, belief, experience and skills or technical know-how vested in theory and hands-on terms of individual employees.

### **Organisational knowledge sharing**

Organisational KS was found to be high amongst middle management employees of the MGECW, with 66 (100%) of middle management respondents strongly agreeing that KS improves the employee's



learning ability. Fifty-six (85%) of middle management respondents mentioned that through organisational KS they had learnt of new ideas which had broadened their OK base. They believed that an organisation's organisational KS is a source of OK, where employees accumulate a massive volume of new skills, understanding and experience. The results also show that OK sharing was favoured by most and sharing was considered beneficial to themselves and others and 47 (71%) of middle management respondents indicated that they had a general willingness to share their OK, while only 17 (26%) mentioned that they were unwilling to share OK. Even though there was a high willingness to participate in organisational KS in the MGECW, Hansen and Nohria (2004) and Susanty and Wood (2011) caution that it is significant for organisations to understand that employees are influenced by intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to share OK. However, it was also found that more than half (34 - 51.5%) indicated that they were not motivated to engage in organisational KS. The benefits of OK sharing were not evident at an everyday practical level in many organisations, as the literature review had suggested (Clayton & Fisher, 2005). Results show that 47 (71%) of middle management respondents indicated that the MGECW consulted and collaborated with other organisations, compared to 27.3% (18) who said consultations did not take place between the MGECW and other organisations. Thirty-eight (58%) of middle management respondents indicated experts are normally invited to share their knowledge with employees through training and conferences. In this regard, reference can be made to Loucks-Horsley, and Hewson, Love and Stiles (as cited in Hew & Hara, 2007, p. 297), who found that "OK among professional practitioners was enriched by typically traditional learning approaches such as formal training workshops or seminars".

### **Organisational knowledge capture**

Twenty-four (24 - 36.4%) of middle management, mostly from regional offices, indicated that the MGECW did not capture any OK from customers and NGOs. Interviews revealed that five (31%) senior managers would not point to any documented best practices for the core skills in their respective departments. Eggleston (2012, para. 1) caution that "If strategies are not in place to effectively capture OK, then organisations waste time, money and resources". This study also found that the record keeping of OK in the MGECW was not up to date, twenty-two (33.3%) said that the MGECW keeps records for future reference compared to a two-thirds majority (66.7%) of middle management who indicated that the MGECW does not keep records. Nengomasha (2009) found that in the Public Service of Namibia employees lacked records keeping skills and this hindered sharing of explicit organisational knowledge. Results from senior managers show that the MGECW does not have a central electronic database where all the information or OK is stored. In the absence of an electronic central database, senior managers said they always encourage employees to capture and document OK individually on their computers. The findings support the argument by Hari, Egbu and Kumar (2004) that OK capture

is the most challenging process in the organisational KM cycle. ICT was acknowledged as an important tool in storing OK in an electronic database for easy access. Wagner and Sternberg (as cited in Smith, 2001, p. 318) present methods used to encode OK in the organisation such as *selective encoding*, *selective combination*, and *selective comparison*. It was also highlighted by almost all senior managers that it was management's responsibility to determine and foster an environment for KC in the MGECW for operational efficiency. This study found that the MGECW missed out on OK, which was not captured from regional offices.

### **Organisational knowledge acquisition**

In this section, the respondents were asked to indicate forms of organisational KA that the MGECW was engaged in. The results show that 58 (88%) of middle management indicated that they kept themselves updated with ministerial issues, while only 8 (12%) said that they did not keep themselves updated with ministerial issues. Results show that website, memos, telephonic discussion and face-to-face consultation, including attending conferences/workshops were mostly used by the MGECW to keep employees up-to-date. Results also revealed that the MGECW relied mostly on communal traditional practices of acquiring OK such as training, workshops/conferences/ seminars or round table meeting discussions, notice board and skills transfer from expatriates via formal meeting consultations. Platforms for organisational KA such as hiring experienced external consultants in areas of interest to facilitate workshops/conferences/ seminars and training were used by the MGECW. The findings are in line with Dutton and Starbuck (1979) who found that face-to-face meetings, workshops and conferences were more effective for organisational KA. However the study also revealed that it was hard to acquire OK from employees across large regional distances due to poor ICT infrastructures. Several authors (Hamel, 1991; Huber, 1991; Matusik & Hill, 1998; O'Dell & Grayson 1998; Powell, 1998; Wagner, 2006) suggest that OK acquisition through improving ICT infrastructure and promoting a positive organisational KA culture and climate in the organisation to reduce KA bottlenecks.

Results shows that, even though some senior managers felt that their subordinates were well informed and involved in the organisational acquisition of OK, there is a need to sensitise employees, particularly those at regional offices, on the importance of OK acquisition. Results show that 19 (29%) of middle management respondents prepared for next mid-term review, departmental meetings or workshops, by reading from ministerial annual reports, workshop reports and minutes of previous meetings, while only 14 (21%) of middle management respondents from regional office indicated that they would prepare from ministerial annual reports and workshop reports. Snyder and Wilson (as cited in Wagner, 2006, p. 71) argue that "in organisations, expert reports contain valuable OK and harvesting employees and external expert OK and making it available is important". The findings reveal that middle management employees who had worked longer in the MGECW had vast experience

which was not properly utilised. This indicates an oversight on the aspect of tapping into this valuable OK. It was discovered from the data that there was a discrepancy between formal and informal interactions for OK acquisition in the MGECW. Formal gatherings were principally intended for the prescribed exchange of explicit OK in the MGECW and informal gatherings were mainly used for informal personal exchange. Another interesting aspect found through interviewing senior managers was that, in spite of the evidence of an “*open-door policy session*” as one senior manager had alluded to, where senior managers always allowed their subordinates to consult with them, the actual situation was that new employees were not given enough guidance after orientation. Conference attendance was seen and highly rated as one platform that provided the opportunity to acquire more OK, especially on the international scene, compared to locally organised conferences. Reference can be made to Bhojaraju (2005); Hew and Hara (2007); and Huysman, Creemers and Derksen (1998) who found that organisational learning approaches (internal and external learning), such as formal training workshops, seminars, training feedback, workshops, meetings, and conferences feedback, staff publications and experts discussions are the best organisational knowledge acquisition practices.

#### **Organisational knowledge dissemination and knowledge transfer**

Both data from the questionnaires and interviews established a very strong preference for the use of fax machines, telephones and face-to-face conversation as forms of dispensing and transferring of OK in the MGECW. These traditional channels of communication facilitated organisational knowledge dissemination (KD) and knowledge transfer (KT) practices in the MGECW. One can comprehend that communication among senior managers and their subordinates was based on using these particular tools to allow the flow of OK from the Head Office to regional offices. This was not surprising as 16 (80%) senior managers acknowledged the use of these channels of communication to dispense OK. The results from senior managers show that in the MGECW, the community of practice for organisational KD, and KT, was not in place to facilitate the KD and KT. The findings are in line with O’Sullivan and Azeem (2007), who argue that geographically scattered offices of the organisation would benefit from a community of practice as it assists increasing organisational interface, discussions, OK sharing, dissemination and transfer through ICT. It was found that middle managers and senior managers always engaged in face-to-face discussions (workshops/conferences, meetings) to transfer OK amongst themselves. Handzic and Zhou (2005) emphasise that numerous mechanisms have been developed to help with the facilitation of KM in organisations to help employees communicate and ensure access to organisational knowledge. Dalkir (2005) argues that it offers connecting professionals across platforms across distance and leveraging best practices in reducing time to talent. Luggar and Kraus (2001, p. 490) argue that organisational knowledge transfers unfold in two ways, i.e. “the incalculable human factor” and “always face a question-and-answer exchange”. The survey also found that the MGECW

did not engage in any forms of job rotations. It was further found that communication was mainly from top to bottom. The most common methods used to dispense organisational KD per qualification in the MGECW, is shown in Table 1 below, indicating a substantial percentage of middle managers who assisted their colleagues during tasks. These issues are confirmed by Mbatha and Ocholla (2011); Smith and Rupp (2002); and Tingoy and Kurt (2009) who established that communication tools help to develop loyalty among employees and common forms of communication tools, such as conferences, seminars, face-to-face/telephone contacts, copy machines and printers, computers, scanners, e-mails, fax machines, mobile phones, and meetings are important to disseminate OK in an organisation.

**Table 1: Distribution per qualification on frequently used communication channels in the MGECW N=66**

			Highest Qualification					Total
			Standard 10 Grade 12 Certificate	Diplo ma	B. A Degree	BA Degree Hon	Othe rs (MA)	
Frequently used communication channels in the MGECW	Telephone	Count % Frequently used communication channels in the MGECW	1 1.5%	6 9.1%	8 12.1%	8 12.1%	1 1.5%	24 36.4%
	Fax Machine	Count % Frequently used communication channels in the MGECW	5 7.6%	4 6.1%	10 15.2%	4 6.1%	2 3%	25 38%
	Face to Face Conferences, Meetings, Interviews	Count % Frequently used communication channels in the MGECW	1 1.5%	3 4.5%	7 11%	1 1.5%	0 0.0%	12 18.2%
	None of the above Mention	Count % Frequently used communication channels in the MGECW	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	4 6.1%	1 1.5%	0 0.0%	5 7.6%
<b>Total</b>		Count % Frequently used communication channels in the MGECW	7 11%	13 19,7%	28 43.4%	14 21.2%	3 4.5%	66 100%

A total of 43 (65%) of middle managers with a degree favoured face-to-face (conferences/workshops and meetings) and using telephones. Four (16%) of middle managers who held diplomas, and 5 (20%) with Standard 10, or grade 12, preferred using fax machines. This seems to indicate that the more educated respondents seemed to favour verbal communication.

#### **Enablers and barriers of organisational KM in the MGECW**

The study sought to establish the enablers and barriers of organisational KM in the MGECW. Questionnaire data shows that 40 (60.9%) of middle managers were in agreement that ICT infrastructure positively influences and enables KM practices, while 26 (39.1%) of middle managers were in disagreement. Qualitative data from interviews with senior managers confirmed quantitative data that ICT enables and facilitates organisational KM practices, although there were indications of a shortage of

ICT equipment in the MGECW. The results showed that 64 (97%) of middle management respondents were in agreement that organisational KM collaboration rests on managers and their subordinates in an organisation. Sixty 60 (91%) of respondents in the MGECW believed that departmental collaboration contributed to organisational success. Thirty-five (53%) of the middle management respondents were in agreement that the MGECW management provided learning opportunities for employees. Forty-one (62%) of the middle managers indicated that the MGECW encouraged innovation. These middle managers were willing to let employees engage in new undertakings compared to 25 (38%) who indicated that innovation and new undertakings by employees were not encouraged. Furthermore, data from questionnaires also shows that 47 (71%) of middle management employees said that trust positively influenced organisational KM practices in the MGECW. Fifty-three (80%) of middle management respondents were in agreement that supportive organisational high level professional social networking influenced organisational KM practices. These issues are pointed out by authors such as AL-Hussain (2012); Bollinger and Smith (2001); Blankenship and Ruona (2007); Horak (2001); Jensen (2008); McDermott (1999); and Wiig (1997, 1997). However, several organisational KM barriers were evident from both quantitative and qualitative data. Senior managers felt that not all employees in the MGECW were skilled enough in using ICT equipment and lacked Internet connections that catered for all employees at regional offices. The senior managers acknowledged that a lot still needed to be done to get the right information and knowledge on ICT usage, especially those at the lower levels of the hierarchy. Forty-five (68%) of middle management respondents indicated that the MGECW did not have high tech-speed computer systems in place, while 21 (32%) were in agreement that the MGECW had high tech-speed computers. The study further found that the challenges experienced by the MGECW are due to dynamics of employees, technology, organisational workplace culture (such as personalities, beliefs, values desired skills, including everyday behaviour and leadership (unsupportive and lack of interactions). A study by Nengomasha (2009) revealed poor connectivity, a lack of ICT skills as a hindrance to efficient and effective records keeping which, in turn, would enhance the dissemination of explicit knowledge.

All senior managers acknowledged that training was a key part of improving employee performance. Employees require skills to perform functions of the MGECW. These results were in agreement with middle management respondents of which 51 (78%) indicated that employee skills were key in enhancing their performance, while 15 (22%) gave no response. On the other hand, forty-nine (74%) of middle management respondents indicated that there was a lack of motivation, no structural reward system and poor level of employees engagement in place in the MGECW to promote organisational KM practices. Senior managers said that there was a lack of time, motivation and organisational workplace culture such as lack of rewards and recognition, lack of or willingness to send employees to

training/courses by the MGE CW. The study also found that 61 (92%) of the middle managers were in agreement that there was a lack of motivation , reward systems, poor communication skills, infrequent interaction with senior managers and employees including lack of sharing information at the MGE CW. However, the study also revealed that 54 (82%) of middle managers indicated that the MGE CW managers lacked commitment towards organisational KM; besides that 37 (56%) of respondents indicated that managers always created a social enabling environment for OK exchange via conferences, workshops, and meetings, compared to 29 (44%) who indicated that managers did not create a social enabling environment for organisational KM practices. Thirty-five (53%) of middle management employees indicated that the indexing and search system did not offer access to the stored OK database, compared to 31 (47%) who indicated that the indexing and search systems offered access to the stored knowledge database. Table 2 below indicates barriers raised by middle management employees on motivation and reward in the MGE CW.

**Table 2: Issues raised on motivation and reward systems as barriers**  
**N=66**

	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative percentage (%)
No reward	12	18.2	18.2
Low salaries	18	27.3	45.5
No feedback	11	16.7	62.1
Lack of motivation	10	15.2	77.3
No response	15	22.7	100.0
Total	66	100.0	

The study found that issues such as low salaries (27%), no reward system (18%), lack of feedback (17%), and lack of motivation from supervisors (15%) were raised as possible organisational KM barriers in the MGE CW. It was found that twelve senior managers felt that the attitude of employees was a barrier towards organisational KM practice. This study also found lack of time as a barrier towards organisational KM practices. Forty-seven (47) 71.2% of middle managers believed that senior managers were fully occupied and did not have time to share their experiences compared to 19 (28.8%) who said senior managers always had time with middle management. Furthermore, 35 (53%) indicated that the MGE CW had a systematic organisational KM practice, while 31 (47%) indicated that systematic organisational KM practices did not exist in the organisation. Forty-eight (73%) of middle management indicated that feedback was generally not received from their supervisors due to a lack of strategic and continuous communication, while 18 (27%) indicated that they received feedback from their supervisors. All senior managers complained of a lack of funds for training and equipment. The barriers identified by this study have been pointed out by authors such as AL-Hussain (2012); Gholipour et al. (2010); De Long (1997); Handzic and Zhou (2005); Hasanali (2002); Lee and Choi (2003); Rai (2011); Riege (2005); and Ryan and Prybutok (2001).

## **Conclusions and recommendations**

The aim of the study was to explore organisational KM in the MGECW through an investigation of organisational KM practices. The objectives of the study were to explore Knowledge Sharing, Knowledge Acquisition, Knowledge Dissemination, Knowledge Transfer and Knowledge Capture in the MGECW in Namibia; to determine barriers and enablers to organisational KM in the MGECW, Namibia; to examine the work culture and attitudes of personnel which affects organisational KM and its practices in the MGECW, Namibia; and to investigate how management supports organisational KM practices. Conclusions are drawn within the key issues highlighted in the objectives.

**Presence and Awareness of KM in MGECW** - Senior and middle managers showed an understanding of the benefits of OK in improving learning ability. All respondents revealed that carrying out responsibilities was based on individual employees' past experiences, training and skills and codified OK such as previous reports and training manuals. There is a need for the MGECW to encode tacit OK from individual employees into written materials to form intellectual assets.

**Organisational knowledge sharing (KS)** - The majority of middle management had a willingness to share OK, working in groups and using ICT tools to support organisational KS.

**Organisational knowledge capture (KC)** - Tacit OK was captured informally and explicit OK was systematised for organisational use even though there was a lack of an electronic formal database. Also coming from the study is that the MGECW was not engaged in any form of capturing OK via forms of organisational KC such as exit interviews. In this regard, MGECW is encouraged to implement exit interviews as they offer an opportunity for the MGECW to allow the capture of OK skills and experience from the retiring or departing employees.

**Organisational knowledge acquisition (KA)** - The majority of the staff members of the MGECW acquired OK and kept themselves updated with ministerial issues through the website, memos, telephonic discussions and face-to-face consultations such as colloquiums, workshops, and meetings. The respondents felt that visiting the MGECW website and having telephonic discussions saved them time to acquire OK considering distances between Head Office and regional offices. It is also important to take note that in the MGECW, OK was acquired mostly through formal practices such as conferences, workshops, and training. Moreover, the findings of this research showed that it was hard to acquire OK from employees across large regional distances due to poor ICT infrastructures. It is recommended that MGECW improves ICT infrastructure to facilitate KA across regions. Proper orientation for new staff is recommended as it was found that in spite an open-door policy by management, new staff members were poorly inducted and there was inadequate orientation into the job.

**Organisational knowledge dissemination and transfer** - KT and KD seemed to happen in an irregular and informal manner and at the same time faced challenges. The findings show that KD and KT

depended upon a number of factors which include, amongst others, individual factors, attitude towards organisational KD and KT; and cost and benefits of organisational KD and KT. Organisational transfer of OK among employees in the MGECW was through formal discussions conducted in formal and informal meetings, seminars and training programmes. In addition, inadequate ICT infrastructure necessarily impeded practices of KD and KT in the MGECW. Some issues which emerged from middle management employees include, amongst others, lack of access to or underdeveloped network, lack of ICT skills by some employees, poor Internet connectivity. A recommendation emanating from this finding is for MGECW to empower staff with ICT and records keeping skills.

**Enablers and barriers of organisational KM in the MGECW** - findings show that KM enablers in MGECW included motivation, encouragement by management; provision of learning opportunities for staff; social networking, Departmental collaboration and trust. The barriers identified lack of online platform and ICT skills, poor records management, ICT infrastructure, and poor level of employee's engagement, insufficient of funds for training, lack of time, rewards and a lack of support from the MGECW's top management. Structures to support KM were not in place. There were no efforts from top management to harness OK for the benefit of the entire MGECW. Departments were not given the responsibility for the promotion and implementation of KM practices by top management. The findings of organisational KM practices in the MGECW further revealed that OK sharing, acquisition, dissemination, transfer and OK capture should be revamped in the Ministry.

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