
A MODEL FOR THE RESOLUTION OF ZIMBABWE'S ECONOMIC CRISIS: A KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT SOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

The critical role of KM in government includes leveraging of knowledge for attaining objectives of productivity and competitiveness of a national economy through social capital competitiveness, leveraging knowledge for improving internal processes, formulation of sound government policies and programmes and efficient public service delivery for increased productivity, and broad collection of organisational practices related to generating, capturing, disseminating know-how and promoting knowledge sharing within the government and with the outside world. Common challenges and concerns that affect public sectors worldwide are identified as driving efficiencies across all public services, improving accountability, making informed decisions, enhancing partnerships with stakeholders, capturing the knowledge of an ageing workforce, and improving overall performance. This paper sought to explore the existence, or otherwise, of knowledge management (KM) enablers in the Zimbabwe government that include organisational culture, organisational structure, and strategic leadership. The study used face-to-face interviews and document analysis as data collection tools. Results revealed that the country's leadership was paralysing KM practices with an organisational culture that did not recognise and reward employee effort in promoting KM behaviour. The organisational structure of the government did not facilitate KM practices, while top leadership played no role of formulating and driving KM policies and practices in government operations.

Key words: Knowledge management, strategic leadership, organisational structure, organisational culture, knowledge generation' knowledge sharing.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Global Competitiveness report (2015) shows that Zimbabwe is lowly ranked on position 124 out of 144 countries in terms of competitiveness (Herald, 6 June, 2015). This is actually an improvement from position 131 in the previous year's ranking. The most highly ranked African countries are Mauritius (39), South Africa (56), Rwanda (62), Botswana (74), and Namibia (88). Zimbabwe's policy inconsistency and discord within government have in some instances negatively impacted on its competitiveness and its ability to attract investment, especially the much revered foreign direct investment. According to Brett (2005), in the 1980s, Zimbabwe was amongst only five countries, including Benin, Sierra Leone, Morocco, and Senegal, which had diversified export economies.

The policy of land seizures and the chaotic disruption on the farms is likely the main reason the staple maize production fell by three-quarters. This impacted negatively on rural incomes, exports, and food security. In terms of food production, Zimbabwe was once the 'bread basket' of the SADC region but now requires massive food aid. In addition to the frontal attacks on agriculture, the rest of the economy suffered from the undermining of property rights and absurd macroeconomic management. The government has run huge budget deficits (22% of GDP in 2000) and printed money to cover the gaps—with the predictable results of high inflation (which hit 620% in November 2003). Overall, manufacturing has shrunk by 51% since 1997 and exports have fallen by half in the past four years. Political troubles combined with the abandonment of sensible economic policy also closed off most of the aid tap, scared away most foreign investment, and chased much of the talented workforce out of the country (Clemens and Moss, 2005).

Commenting on the situation on Zimbabwe in June 2015, one former senior minister had this to say "We seem to be in agreement that there is poverty in the country; service delivery has deteriorated and the economy is not performing. There is a democracy deficit in the country. We want freedom of speech and expression ----" (Herald, 9 June 2015).

According to the African Development Bank (AfDB) (2015), government borrowing has remained the main driver of domestic credit growth since November 2013 as the country's fiscal space remains constrained due to subdued economic activity. It further postulated that high informalisation of the economy and weakening commodity prices, among other factors, has been a challenge to the country's revenue base. "Total domestic credit growth for the period decelerated to 3.7% in February 2015 from 8.49 in February 2014 on the back of slow economic growth, high credit risk and serious liquidity shortages" (Herald 9 June 2015). The AfDB stated that during the same period, the stock market was characterised by a decline in turnover value by 45.64% underpinned by low foreign investor confidence on the local bourse on the back of a slowdown in general economic activity.

This study presupposes the existence of gaps in KM practices of the Zimbabwe government owing to poor overall performance, bad reputation, human capital flight, inappropriate organisational structure and culture, and absence of strategic leadership to drive a KM agenda that would reinvigorate the economy. The paper seeks to identify and develop a model that can be used by the government to harness knowledge in order to add value to business processes.

2. LITERATURE OVERVIEW

According to Jain (2009), public sectors around the world are striving to be more efficient and effective in order to deal with the needs of their citizens which are constantly evolving. This is made even more critical due to the fact that public sector customers are increasingly becoming more demanding in terms of higher service quality. The common problems afflicting governments, especially in Africa, in terms of service delivery are: loss of knowledge with the retirement of older employees, problems of retaining vibrant staff, reduced budgets, bureaucracy, and political exigencies (Kandadi and Acheampong, 2008; Knudsen, 2005; McNabb, 2007). All these problems challenge public sectors in terms of driving efficiencies and effectiveness of their services. Demands and expectations encompass transparency, improved accountability, informed decision and policy making, enhanced partnerships with stakeholders, connecting silos in various public sector divisions and capturing the knowledge of an ageing workforce (Robertson, 2004; Riege and Lindsay, 2006).

2.1 The knowledge management (KM) concept

According to Evans, Dalkir and Bidian (2013), KM consists of the systematic processes for acquiring, organizing, sustaining, applying, sharing, and renewing all forms of knowledge, to enhance the organisational performance and create value. It is about creating knowledge and then managing that knowledge effectively. KM is about managing an environment where employees can effectively create, share, and use knowledge so that organisational performance is enhanced ultimately leading to customer satisfaction (Vanini and Bochert, 2014). If the environment does not allow the systematic creation, sharing and use of knowledge, the organisation will not perform well on the market leading to loss of competitive advantage.

In the 21st century knowledge economy, knowledge has become a crucial factor of production in the same manner as land, labour, and capital and is widely accepted as a strategic resource and the key to organisational survival and success (Neumann and Tome, 2011; Reilly, 2009; Chang and Chuang, 2009). Business success in a knowledge-based economy hinges on proper harnessing and management of knowledge as a strategic resource that gives an organisation a competitive advantage over its rivals (Halawi, Aronson, and McCarthy, 2007) and this applies to managing governments. Government leaders need to establish an enabling environment by effectively managing knowledge thus ensuring the effective generation, dissemination, and application of knowledge in order to build efficiency and effectiveness (Virtanen, 2013).

2.2 Importance of KM in government

Aizstrau (2014) avers that public administration institutions create and work with immense amount of information every day and a major part of this knowledge is embedded in the bureaucracy of the civil service, so the need to manage this knowledge in an effective way is an important task for government departments. He adds that although elements of KM can be found in almost every public administration, careful management of information and knowledge, that is, the creation, sharing and application of knowledge in an effective way is critical particularly during a crisis (as is the case in Zimbabwe).

In support of the importance of KM in government in the 21st century, Misra, Hariharan, and Khaneja (2003) argue that knowledge is an essential resource of the government and the performance of government rests significantly on the acquisition and use of this precious resource. This view is buttressed by Willem and Buelens (2007) who opine that most public sector organisations have knowledge as their core product, provide knowledge to the public as their main activity, or have mainly knowledge workers, that is, experts who develop and/or provide knowledge. They further posit that government institutions work with huge amounts of information that is being used or created every day and there are also large amounts of tacit and explicit knowledge embedded in the bureaucracy and civil servants. This, therefore, makes the need to effectively manage these knowledge reservoirs critical. Willem and Buelens (2007) further postulate that, in view of the size and variety of government organisations, there is an existing critical mass of knowledge within government itself. They believe that, whereas in the private sector knowledge is a competitive advantage, the public sector operates in an environment in which, for reasons of wider public interest, transparency is widely encouraged and the bulk of knowledge is widely accessible if there is transparency in the way government operates.

2.3 Sources of knowledge in government organisations

Knowledge in government organisations is embedded in several sources which include (Misra et al., 2007):

- Ministers;
- Legislators;
- Civil servants;
- Documents - files, agenda, records of proceedings, minutes, government orders, notifications;
- Laws, rules and regulations;
- Archives;
- Physical systems, and
- Citizens and non-citizens, e.g tourists.

These sources are believed not only to be widely dispersed but to also exhibit a great variety in content hence knowledge provided they are easily accessible to the people.

2.4 Dimensions of KM applicable to government organisations

Effective KM is the effective management of the interaction among information technology (as an enabler), methods (process), and organisational culture (values and behaviours) (Misra, 2007). People in an organisation, processes and technology will at all times be acting either as enablers of (facilitating effective KM), or barriers to (impeding effective KM), effective KM practices of knowledge creation, sharing, utilisation, and retention. Barriers need to be identified and eliminated, while existing enablers are enhanced and more new ones created. This is often where the biggest KM challenges are encountered. These dimensions are discussed briefly below:

2.4.1 Information Technology (IT)

IT has been considered the groundwork for implementation of KM practices and tools, leading to easier and faster adoption of KM practices (Bordoloi and Islam, 2012). IT is regularly cited in KM literature as a vital KM infrastructural capability, enabling core KM activities such as knowledge creation, knowledge flow and knowledge application (Hafeez-Baig and Gururajan, 2012; Pandey and Dutta, 2013). It is the essence of this paper to establish, through interviews and document reviews, whether these IT aspects exist in the Zimbabwe government implying the presence or absence of a critical KM enabler.

2.4.2 Organisational culture

Organisational culture refers to the way things are done in the organisation and how people treat one another (McKinlay and Williamson, 2010). This means employees will eventually share and exchange knowledge and ideas with each other in the organisation because it is natural phenomena rather than being forced to do that. This determines how people behave in their organisation and how they interact with one another. Elements of culture that organisational leadership should pay particular attention to in order to enhance KM practice include collaboration (social networks), trust, people, and reward systems. These are discussed in more detail below.

Collaboration

Leadership needs to establish a culture of collaboration in organisations whereby people work in groups (Communities of Practice - CoPs) assisting each other in accomplishing their job tasks (Saenz and Perez-Bouvier, 2014). Jang and Koi (2014) believe that CoPs enable members to collectively participate in problem-solving, and share information, insights, and comments, increasing work efficiency, and improving the work performance of the individuals and the organisation at large and these serve as a springboard for knowledge exchange. Success of a business entity depends largely on the quality of its relations and collaboration with other organisations so that interaction with such entities enables an organisation to acquire resources that include knowledge (Saenz and Perez-Bouvier, 2014). This paper sought to establish the existence or absence of collaboration (stakeholder engagement/involvement) in the government of Zimbabwe through in-depth interviews.

Trust

Saenz and Perez-Bouvier (2014) aver that in the context of knowledge-sharing, the missing link that exists in organisational culture is trust which leads to the concentration of knowledge among a privileged few. He believes that top management needs to create an environment where trust exists and where an employee believes that his/her knowledge will not be misused and that sharing it will result in significant value from reciprocal knowledge sharing now and/or in the near future. This study sought to establish whether this is happening in the government of Zimbabwe. Jang and Koi (2014) opine that employees are not likely to share knowledge if they do not trust one another. In creating a desire to share knowledge as a guiding principle in organisational survival, there is the unresolved issue of trust which is arguably one of the most crucial success factors for creating a culture that facilitates knowledge sharing (Riege, 2005). Through in-depth interviews, this paper sought to establish if trust existed among selected employees of the Zimbabwe government and whether the employees trusted their leadership.

People

Neumann and Tome (2011) argue that the effective flow of knowledge in an organisation is only sustainable through people yet not much emphasis has been placed on this dimension with so much faith being placed on IT. It is the people who help design technology, and not the other way round, so as to enhance KM processes which in turn enhance organisational efficiency and effectiveness. It therefore becomes improper to emphasise the importance of technology ahead of people in enhancing KM practices (Neumann and Tome, 2011). Employees should, therefore, regard the active creation, distribution, and application of knowledge within their organisations as a significant component of their own responsibilities and achievements (Schilling and Kluge, 2009). This study therefore sought to establish whether employees (people) of the

Zimbabwe government possess the requisite competencies and work experience to make them competent at their level of operation. The study also sought to establish whether the Zimbabwe government adequately remunerates its employees (compared with those in similar institutions in the country or in the region), particularly the well-qualified, so as to avert staff turnover which results in the loss of expensive and revered tacit knowledge and also in order to motivate them to generate and share knowledge.

2.4.3 Strategic leadership

Strategic leadership plays a critical role in implementing KM for three reasons (Jain and Jeppesen, 2013):

- a. Establishment of vision for the organisation as well as developing an action plan for the implementation of that vision.
- b. Identification of opportunities that generate knowledge.
- c. Championing and influencing cultural and organisational transformation since KM involves modifying processes, practices, and organisational structures.

Senior management support is vital in changing the behaviour of people and for introducing perspectives in KM. Leadership is one critical factor in the successful implementation of KM initiatives. Since knowledge management involves changing practices, policy and often organisational structure, the senior leader must set the framework for the transformation. This paper sought to establish whether the leadership of the Zimbabwe government has put in place a vision that applies KM in resolving the country's economic challenges, and whether it is championing a KM strategy for the same purpose.

3. METHODOLOGY

The qualitative research approach was adopted for this study wherein qualitative data was collected from in-depth interviews focusing on a smaller, carefully selected and knowledgeable sample with enough knowledge on the existence or absence of KM enablers in the government of Zimbabwe. Data was collected from participants through face-to-face interviews. Two participants from D grade were selected for interviews from each of the five departments. All in all, ten participants (section heads) were selected, two from each department. These were selected on the basis of their seniority in the civil service and knowledge of government operations. Documents were also used to obtain data on the presence or absence of KM enablers in the Zimbabwe government. Documents that were used included official national and international reports such as the Africa Competitiveness Report and the Auditor-General Report, newspapers, and so on.

This study adopted a case study design. The government of Zimbabwe was treated as a single case study and five government departments in Kadoma were used as a case study meaning the adoption of a holistic approach whereby the cases were studied as one unit.

4. FINDINGS

Research results on the dominant themes are discussed below under organisational culture (employee rewards, freedom to initiate new ideas, access to information, trust), organisational structure (IT, physical infrastructure such as buildings, electricity supplies, formal networks), and strategic leadership (KM vision and strategy).

4.1 Organisational culture

Participants were interviewed on the impact of organisational culture of the government on KM. On whether there was any link between rewards and knowledge creation and sharing, all interviewees stated that, since KM was unknown in their institutions, there was no deliberate link between rewards and knowledge creation and sharing. They all believed that rewards were rather linked to a pre-determined grading system across the entire civil service irrespective of one's desire and action to empower others through sharing knowledge. This runs contrary to the research of Yu, Kim, and Kim (2008) who found out that incentives and rewards awarded for generating and sharing knowledge play a very important role in inciting determination in employees to achieve set organisational goals, as well as motivating employees to want to repeat rewarded action.

On whether employees were free to generate and use knowledge in their departments, that is, experiment with new ideas, trial and error, and whether they were penalised for that or not, all the participants indicated that employees in their organisations were not free to experiment with new ideas and do things according to existing situations. They alluded to specified ways of doing business which were, in most cases, inefficient and bureaucratic based on government circulars emanating from head office in Harare, the capital city. All section heads interviewed indicated that they were not even allowed to comment on goings-on in their areas of jurisdiction but were supposed to refer to head office all the time. Those who did things in different and even better ways were punished.

On access to crucial information in government, all interviewees indicated that there were huge gaps in terms of accessing important information from central government. For example, only a week before payment of civil servants, heads of sections interviewed had no idea as to whether the bonuses for civil servants were going to be paid and, if they were going to be paid, when they were going to be paid. All they had was speculation and newspaper reports claiming that funds were being mobilised for payment of civil servants bonuses and that they were going to be staggered with some civil servants getting their bonus in November and some in December. Such kind of speculation and lack of information created uncertainty and anxiety among civil servants and demoralised them resulting in poor performance. One leader of a civil servants association retorted:

“We want to meet the government before the end of the year and hear from them when exactly the civil servants should expect their bonuses. We appreciate the assurance by the government that its workers will get their money but it's not enough, we need to know the dates.”

This contrasts the researches of Riege (2005) who discovered that effective communication was critical in as far as it enables employees to effectively express their thoughts and information thereby facilitating effective telling and re-telling of stories in ways that capture the imaginations of fellow employees and inspire collective action from the organisation's members.

The issue of civil servants bonuses shows that there was no transparency from government and that even leaders of the civil servants were not involved in such a critical issue concerning the welfare of government employees. This lack of transparency of the Zimbabwe government was confirmed by the Africa Competitiveness Report (2015) which ranked Zimbabwe on position 141 out of 144 countries in terms of competitiveness on flexibility of wage determination and 115 on transparency of government policymaking. This may have contributed to large numbers of well-qualified state employees leaving the country to settle in neighbouring countries like South Africa and Botswana, and also oversees mostly the United Kingdom. For example, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) (2013) put the number of emigrants out of Zimbabwe at roughly four million, with South Africa hosting the majority of them with an estimated two to three million Zimbabwean nationals living in that country, followed by the UK with about 200 000 Zimbabweans legally living in the country. Such migrations imply that the country has failed to retain talent which has serious negative implications on the productivity of labour and economic development. Failure to retain talent and reduced labour productivity were confirmed by the Africa Competitiveness Report (2015) which ranked Zimbabwe on position 120 out of 144 on capacity to retain talent, and position 143 on pay and productivity competitiveness. Such figures do not bode well for the country's ability to attract the much needed foreign direct investment (FDI), thus perpetuating the country's economic crisis.

When asked whether trust existed between employees and top leadership of government, all the participants stated that there was serious lack of trust at all levels in government institutions. They stated that there was particularly mistrust between top leadership and well qualified and experienced civil servants whom the latter suspected of undermining them arguing that they held senior positions through political patronage and did not deserve them. The majority of the interviewees indicated that there was mistrust between top leadership of government and well-educated civil servants whom the leadership suspected belonged to opposition parties and were responsible for tarnishing the image of the government while propping up opposition parties. The lack of trust for the country's top leadership was confirmed by the results of the Africa Competitiveness Report (2015) which ranked Zimbabwe at position 132 out of 144 in terms of public trust in politicians, 117 in favouritism in decisions of government officials, and 109 in diversion of public funds. Such kind of mistrust prevents full cooperation and implementation of government policy leading to unnecessary delays and discourages the much needed FDI.

As confirmation of lack of trust between top leadership of the government and the people in general, a survey by the International Crisis Group (2012) revealed that a total of 51% of respondents trusted the country's leadership 'a lot' or 'somewhat', while 46% trusted leaders 'just a little' or 'not at all'. The same survey results indicated the level of trust in government institutions as follows:

- Office of the President – 58%
- Parliament – 49%
- Traditional leaders – 58%
- Judiciary – 27%
- Attorney general's office – 38%
- Police – 60%
- Military – 61%

The survey, which confirms the results of the interviews, shows that key government institutions in Zimbabwe enjoyed low levels of trust from the people with none of them reaching 70% yet civilians need to have 100% trust in all the listed institutions. But more worrying are the levels of trust for the judiciary and the Attorney-general's office which are both responsible for justice delivery. The poor performance of government on justice delivery was confirmed by the results of the Africa Competitiveness Report (2015) which ranked Zimbabwe on position 120 out of 144 in judicial independence and 120 on efficiency of legal framework in challenging regulations. A low ranking of trust for the country's police force was confirmed by results of the same report which ranked the Zimbabwean police at position 122 on reliability of police services.

4.2 Organisational structure

On the aspect of infrastructure such as buildings and IT, participants were of the view that these did not promote KM practices because they were inadequate. Top leadership of the Zimbabwe government did not ensure the existence of formal networks in order to facilitate effective dissemination of knowledge. Interviewees were asked how effective their formal networks (internet, intranet, staff associations, and formal staff meetings) were in facilitating dissemination of information. The majority of the interviewees alluded to shortage of effective formal networks for knowledge creation and dissemination. They believed that, while staff meetings indeed took place, their effectiveness as an avenue to share knowledge was restricted because participants were not free to contribute new ideas and express their own views especially if they ran contrary to those of the country's leadership. The purposes of those meetings were merely to be informed of decisions and policies from the top with no opportunity to proffer suggestions from the lower levels of society. Most government departments covered had inadequate infrastructure such as computers, internet and intranet, and buildings for office space. This implied low levels of technology development for the 21st century knowledge economy.

One participant stated:

“There is inadequate dissemination of knowledge due to lack of effective formal networks. Most employees do not have access to internet and when it is available it is very slow. In any case, most of the time there is no electricity hence no internet. There is no intranet to be used for internal communication because of lack of electricity”.

Another participant added:

“Internet access to share and store knowledge is severely restricted due to the shortage of computers as well as load shedding which means that for the greater part of the day, there is no electricity. Some of the computers are very old and outdated and were donated by some schools in developing countries. This means access to current trends and development is severely restricted and carrying out research is very difficult. Most employees cannot afford to buy laptops due to poor remuneration”.

Most of the participants indicated that their departments did not have functional meeting rooms for official staff meetings. They did not have staff canteens with employees having to go to nearby shops for. There were no tea rooms for staff to take tea. This meant that crucial avenues for knowledge sharing were blocked.

Results of the interviews were confirmed by the Africa Competitiveness Report (2015) which revealed Zimbabwe's poor performance in terms of physical infrastructure out of 144 countries as follows:

- Quality of overall infrastructure - 121
- Quality of roads - 100
- Quality of air transport infrastructure - 116
- Quality of electricity supply - 131
- Mobile telephone subscriptions - 99
- Fixed telephone lines – 119

These are the kind of infrastructure responsible for the economic prosperity of the four Asian Tigers namely Hong Kong, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, and also Japan. In support of technology as one of the key drivers of economic development of East Asian countries, Fischer and Rotemberg (1994) calculated the technical efficiency change (a measure used to denote the technological development of a country) of the mentioned Asian countries as follows: Hong Kong (2.0%), Japan (1.0%), Taiwan (0.8%), and Thailand (0.1%). This was quite remarkable considering that the estimated average rate of technical efficiency change for Latin America stood at -1.4% and Africa at -3.5%, which shows the Asian countries' ability to keep pace with the world's shifting technological frontier (Fischer and Rotemberg, 1994).

The Africa Competitiveness Report (2015) further outlines the challenges facing Zimbabwe in terms of technology development by highlighting its lack of competitiveness in this area as follows (out of 144 countries):

- Availability of latest technologies - 101
- Firm-level technology absorption - 111
- FDI and technology transfer - 133
- Individuals using Internet - 105
- Fixed broadband Internet subscriptions - 111
- Internet bandwidth, kb/s per user - 127

This further highlights the country's lack of competitiveness from a technological point of view implying that it cannot attract investment from technologically advanced countries of the world hence the economy cannot grow significantly.

4.3 Strategic leadership

Participants were asked if top leadership of the Zimbabwe government appreciated the skills and abilities of its staff. The majority of the participants believed that there seemed to be a lack of understanding of the skills and capabilities of senior government employees as was evidenced by a mismatch between the skills of an officer and his/her area of deployment. The participants indicated that this was the case even at ministerial levels where, for example, a lawyer was given charge of a finance portfolio and other examples. Cases were cited of senior civil servants who had risen through the ranks but were perennial under-achievers with nothing to show for their senior positions. Some were alleged to be responsible for the demise of the once thriving parastatals which were now almost extinct.

Participants stated that the performance of some senior government employees heading some state institutions was pathetic resulting in poor service delivery, huge losses, and demise of investor confidence. They believed that this explained the sorry state of most quasi-government institutions which were on the verge of collapse such as the National Railways of Zimbabwe (NRZ), Zimbabwe Electricity Supply

Authority (ZESA), Cold Storage Company (CSC), Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), Zimbabwe Newspapers (Zimpapers), Zimbabwe United Passenger Company (ZUPCO), Zimbabwe Iron and Steel Company (ZISCO), Grain Marketing Board (GMB) and others as well as state universities. The participants indicated that at the country's independence in 1980, these organisations were thriving profitable institutions (business ventures), but today, they are almost dying, saddled with huge debts and failing to pay the few employees who remain. For example, according to the Auditor-General Report (2013), the GMB was owed \$31 400 000 by the government for storage and handling charges relating to the current and prior intake periods as at March 31, 2013; ZBC's debt stood at over \$6 000 000 as at December 31, 2012, while that of the Zimbabwe Revenue Authority (ZIMRA) was more than \$240 000 0000 backdating back to 2009.

These huge debts were largely because of bad governance due to undeserving heads being appointed based on patronage. A number of these parastatals were headed by former military commanders with no corporate governance knowledge and experience. The Auditor-General Report (2013) confirms the issue of bad governance by averring that there were numerous cases of improperly constituted and understaffed Boards of Directors and board committees in most parastatals. For example, out of the eight board committees at the National Social Security Authority (NASSA), one board member was a chairperson in four of them. For the whole of 2012, NetOne operated without a substantive Board, while the Securities Commission and the Investor Protection Fund Board of Trustees was operating without committees. Also, the Zimbabwe Mining Development Corporation (ZMDC) did not have board representations on the boards of its joint venture companies as per the joint venture agreements. The ZIMRA Board membership was reviewed from seven to ten but the review was never implemented and this resulted in the three non-executive members rotating to serve in the available committees at a huge cost to the organisation.

The Auditor-General Report (2013) recorded a serious governance crisis at the Central Mechanical Equipment Department (CMED) where expenses of the governing board rose from \$42 455 to \$169 723 in 2012 representing a 400% increase as compared to the prior year 2011, as a result of unnecessary adjournment of meetings for issues which could have been deliberated and finalised in one sitting. This meant that the company was incurring wasteful expenditure sacrificing activities of its core business, while decision-making was slow thus compromising the timely implementation of strategies.

Challenges facing most government departments can be addressed with a KM solution where there is a link between KM strategy and business strategy. When asked if their organisations' KM strategy linked with the overall business strategy, virtually all the participants stated that there was not even mention of KM in their organisations' business strategy. The participants made reference to their organisations' mission statements which showed no linkage to KM. This sharply contrasts with the views of Nakano, Muniz, and Batista Jr (2013) which identified leaders' strategic intent as a critical enabler which fosters a context in which creativity and knowledge creation are promoted. This means the strategic leadership's interest in, and emphasis on, knowledge generation, acquisition, and sharing as exhibited in strategic plans. These were lacking in the strategic plans of government departments which makes it difficult for these institutions to deal effectively with the volatility and uncertainty created by the economic crisis engulfing Zimbabwe today.

The interviews sought to establish if the top leadership of the government supported KM and had put in place clear and well-coordinated KM programmes in government ministries and parastatals based on the government's vision and mission, including training and development programmes in KM. All the participants indicated that there was no promotion and support of KM practices such as fusing them into the performance appraisal systems meaning no rewards and/or recognition of employees who generated and shared knowledge, and also ensuring existence of clear and well-coordinated KM programmes.

Finally, interview participants were asked if there were positions of Knowledge Officers/Directors in government departments in the same manner there were directors of finance, human resources, etc. All the participants indicated that there were no such office bearers. This meant that there was no one with the specific responsibility of championing KM practices in government departments and institutions as his/her job description.

5. CONCLUSION

Research has revealed that KM is no longer a business strategy for private business organisations only but even for state institutions as well. Governments can enhance their efficiency, performance, and image through effective KM practices such as generating, sharing, utilizing, and retaining knowledge by creating the right organisational culture, establishing the right organisational structure, and ensuring that top leadership champions KM practices. Zimbabwe today faces a serious economic crisis whose negative impact can be reduced through KM initiatives. Through this study, it was observed that the organisational culture under which the government operated did not promote KM practices. For instance, there were no rewards for civil servants who made effort to generate knowledge on how to do things better, meaning that there were no incentives to motivate knowledgeable government employees to come up with new workable ideas that could extricate Zimbabwe from its current economic malaise. Civil servants were not free to express themselves and experiment with new ideas that could constitute solutions to the economic crisis meaning that creativity and initiative were stifled. There is therefore a high likelihood that solutions to the economic challenges lie in the country's technocrats whose voices have not been heard. Government's organisational structure was found to be a hindrance to the possible economic recovery of the country hence a KM enabler was absent. For example, the country was found lacking in terms of the right infrastructure to promote sustainable economic growth. There was no electricity most of the time, and inadequate buildings for office space. There were not enough formal and informal networks to generate and share knowledge on the challenges facing the country and possible solutions. The country was found to be lacking in terms of technology such as IT (little internet and intranet, no electricity) hence found it difficult to attract the much needed FDI. The country's top leadership was found lacking in terms of KM vision and strategy to link it with business strategy for a more effective performance that could speed up economic growth. Due to this, the government has missed out on the potential to apply KM in resolving its myriad of challenges as has happened with other governments such as Latvia, Finland and others. Below is a proposed model for the resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis from a KM perspective:

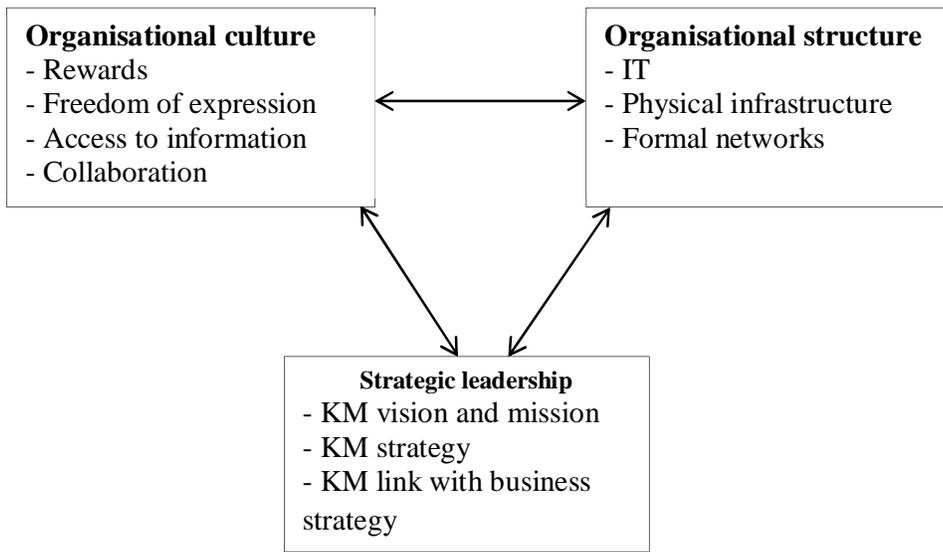


Figure 1: Proposed KM model for the resolution of the Zimbabwe crisis (Author's perspective)

It is envisaged that an integration of the right organisational culture, appropriate organisational structure, and a strategic leadership with an effective KM vision and strategy as shown in Figure 1 will lead to an end to Zimbabwe's economic crisis.

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