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## **Knowledge Management: The New Imperative in Organisations**

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### **Abstract:**

*Knowledge being the only resource that increases with use and share has become imperative in organisations. Knowledge Management (KM) is the way to gain sustainable competitive advantage and every organisation should embrace it. The explicit and the tacit knowledge should be utilised to the betterment of organisations. This paper explores how knowledge is managed and is valued. Knowledge Management (KM) and Information Management (IM) will be compared and contrasted. The challenges of knowledge management will be discussed and the paper recommends that knowledge management should be embraced by all organisations as a strategic asset. It calls for knowledge leadership, without which, organisations will not be strategically positioned in this world of knowledge economy.*

**Keywords:** *Knowledge, knowledge management, information, librarian, information professional, knowledge workers*

### **1. Introduction**

The world has reached a new level in its epistemology and organisations must be cognizant of these developments. We used to be in the agricultural revolution, industrial revolution, information age and now we are in the knowledge economy. During those times, labour and capital used to be the paramount assets to be managed by organisations but the new capital now is knowledge. Since the new capital is now knowledge, knowledge workers have become the new capitalists as they own the means of production which is their knowledge. Drucker (1988: 351) predicted that “the organisation of the future would be knowledge-based and would comprise largely of specialists who direct and discipline their own performance through organised feedback from colleagues, customers and headquarters”. Knowledge has become increasingly valuable than the traditional physical or tangible assets. (Dalkir, 2008:16). “Knowledge has become the key economic resource and the dominant—and perhaps even the only—source of competitive advantage.” (Drucker, 2014:2). Carnegie (2010:1) argues that the only irreplaceable capital an organisation possesses is the knowledge and ability of its people. Bajaj and Nag (2009:4) assert that “the competitive advantage for a business comes from its knowledge base and its ability to mobilize and integrate knowledge. It is knowledge that plays a dominant role in an information and knowledge age”. Kotler (2005:158) posits that “today you have to run very fast to stay in the same place”. Cavaleri, Seivert and Lee (2008) aver that business typically is designed more for efficiency and productivity than for knowledge. It becomes critical for organisations to have knowledge leaders who advocate for the value of knowledge. This paper seeks to establish knowledge management as a new imperative in organisations.

The processes, sources, challenges and strategies of knowledge will be examined. The case study of City of Harare will be used to determine the value assigned to information and knowledge management. The City of Harare, like any other urban organisation, seems to care much for the systematic management health, water, waste management, finances than knowledge. Though the City of Harare has put much effort on these aspects, it is always reported that there is ineffective service delivery as evidenced by burst pipes, housing allocation shortages and water cuts. It has come to my attention that knowledge management is imperative for all those functions to operate effectively. Organisations including the City of Harare, have lost considerable part of their revenue paying for what they do not know and what they thought they do not know. It is therefore imperative to consider knowledge as a critical, delicate, precious and powerful asset to be managed.

### **2. Statement of the Problem**

It appears that the City Fathers do not consider the management knowledge as a priority of equal significance to water treatment, health, waste management. In fact, in surveys done as part of this investigation the general reaction was over the idea of knowledge management! The phenomenon of official without fact or notion of where to look for data is not strange. Even citizens are generally bitter over the mismanagement of material asserts but not of knowledge.

### **3. Purpose**

We are living in the knowledge economy therefore knowledge has to be valued as paramount asset in organisations. This results in achieving competitive sustainable advantage. Therefore, the reason for this inquiry is to measure the problem of the city’s culture towards issues regarding knowledge management and to argue for respect of valuing the significance of knowledge.

#### 4. Review of Related Literature

In the review of related literature, distinction of information management from knowledge management, types of knowledge and the concept of knowledge as a new imperative will be explored.

##### 4.1. Knowledge Management (KM) versus Information Management (IM)

Dalkir (2005:7) defines information as “content that represents analyzed data. Information is data endowed with relevance and purpose (Drucker (2008)). It is the organised data for a purpose. Information can easily be documented and transmitted. “Knowledge is defined as what we know: knowledge involves the mental processes of comprehension, understanding and learning that goes on in the mind and only in the mind, however much they involve interaction with the world outside the mind, and interaction with others” (Wilson, 2000). Johnson and Scholes (2004:150) define knowledge as “awareness, consciousness or familiarity gained by experience or learning. It is the know-how and the know what. The know-how is the tacit knowledge and the know-what is the explicit knowledge.

Frappaolo (2002:8) is of the opinion that “defining knowledge management is not a simple issue. It is not a technology, although technology should be exploited as an enabler”. According to Dalkir (2008) Knowledge Management is the deliberate and systematic coordination of an organization’s people, technology, processes and organisational structure in order to add value through creating, sharing and applying knowledge as well as through feeding the valuable lessons learned and best practices into corporate memory in order to foster continued organisational learning. It is the process through which organisations acquire, create, generate, disseminate and utilize knowledge for organisational goals and objectives. The interviewed participants in the City of Harare failed to effectively define knowledge management. This had an implication that knowledge was not effectively managed as according to Allee (2002) how one defines knowledge and knowledge management determines how one manages them.

Information management is the process by which an organisation maximizes the efficiency with which it plans, collects, organizes, uses, controls, stores, disseminates, and disposes of its information, and through which it ensures that the value of that information is identified and exploited to the maximum extent for the achievement for organisational goals and objectives. Information is much more easily identified, organised and distributed. Knowledge, on the other hand, is difficult to manage because it resides in one’s mind. Thus, KM is essentially limited to creating the right conditions for individuals to learn (using information and experiencing the world) and apply their knowledge to the benefit of the organisation. The application of one’s knowledge can, hopefully, thereby be translated into relevant information that is shared and used resulting in new products and actions that create value. There are also very important differences between information and knowledge management when it comes to strategies for protecting of valuable intellectual capital. An IM perspective will lead organisations to put too much emphasis for example on “front-door security”, badges, firewalls, permission and access levels (Dalkir, 2008). Although in many cases these measures can be of utmost importance, in many other circumstances, truly important knowledge resides within people’s heads and an active and systematic protection strategy of this type should be put in place which includes retention policies and the circulation of knowledge. Circulation of knowledge strategy relates to actively developing mentoring thus helping juniors learn from more senior people that hold strategic knowledge. There is also need for fostering teamwork and communities of practice which is making sure a number of people develop knowledge collectively, therefore, reducing the potential of losing knowledge suddenly by the departure of a particular individual. However, since knowledge is a form of information as in explicit knowledge, it follows that Knowledge Management is a form of Information Management.

##### 4.2. Types of Knowledge

The main types of knowledge are:

- Tacit knowledge/Implicit knowledge -Knowledge that is difficult to transfer to another person by means of writing it down or verbalizing it. It exists in the mind.
- Explicit Knowledge-Knowledge that has been or can be articulated, codified, and stored in certain media. It can be readily transmitted to others.

##### 4.3. Knowledge Management as a New Imperative

The question confounding this article is: what this new interest on knowledge management in organisations is all about? The first reason being that we are in the knowledge economy, hence knowledge management becomes **imperative** and has become the dominant force. Drucker (2010) argued that knowledge has become the global currency as it is fluid, crosses boundaries and is scarce. It has become the new capital and today’s real corporate issue is not to raise money but to recruit those who own the new capital which is knowledge. Davenport and Prusak (2009: ix) posits that knowing about knowledge is critical to business success and possibly to business survival”. Franklin (2014) opines that an investment in knowledge pays the best return. Therefore, if an organisation is so much interested in getting a best return, it has to heavily invest in knowledge management. The key to economic success is always linked to the advances in knowledge creation and the ability of a nation in translating knowledge into products and services. Knowledge creates knowledge and in the process brings competitive advantage and leads to wealth creation (<http://informationr.net/ir/8-1/paper143.html>). Steyn. (2004:3) observes that “successful organisations are knowledge-creating organisations, which produce, disseminate and embody new knowledge in new products and services. To this end, knowledge management enables organisations to improve efficiency and effectiveness mainly by decoding tacit knowledge into explicit information”. Probst, Raud and Romhardt (2001:32) argue that “the whole point of knowledge management is to make sure that knowledge present in an organisation is applied productively for the benefit of that organisation”. Having information and knowledge is regarded as having power. Gadner et al (2003:3) stipulate that “the concepts of information and knowledge have become

increasingly important as the economic focus has shifted from material resources to knowledge and information of organisations and their employees". Today knowledge has the greatest power. It controls access to opportunity and advancement (Flanklin, 2014). Knowledge is a vital business resource. In fact, knowledge is critical to manage change, which is the distinguishing feature of the information age. Knowledge management has the following roles:

- Creating core and distinctive competency,
- Helps in decision making,
- Creates wealth,
- Solves problems, brings power and innovation,
- Results in the right action,
- Brings efficiency and effectiveness in the organisation,
- Helps in organisational strategy and change management.

## 5. Methodology

The qualitative research paradigm was used in establishing the value assigning to knowledge management. The qualitative design was chosen as it is appropriate to the area under study because it is difficult to measure knowledge therefore qualitative paradigm become the most appropriate. The case study design was used which was the case of City of Harare. Interviews, document analysis and observation were used to ascertain how knowledge is management in the City of Harare.

## 6. Findings and Discussion

Findings and discussion are presented through the use of the knowledge life cycle, a hierarchy of knowing, sources of information and knowledge and strategies for managing knowledge.

### 6.1. The Application of the New Imperative in Organisations

The life cycle of information and knowledge shows how both are applied in organisations.

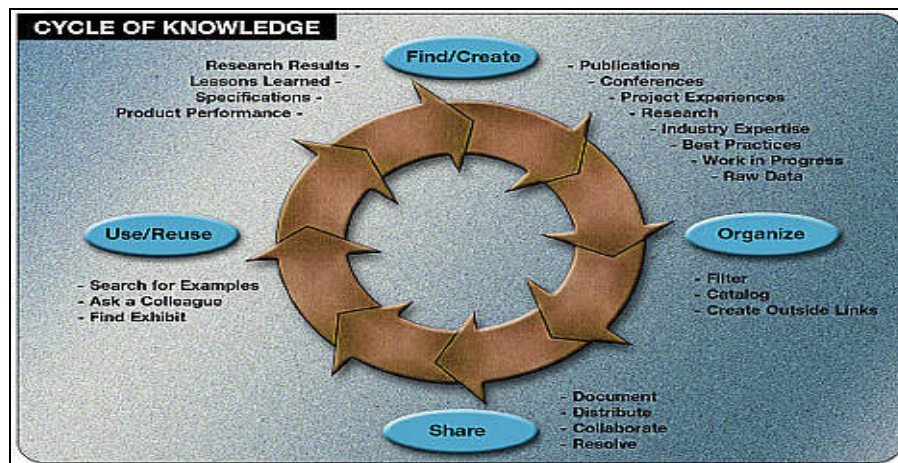


Figure 1: The Knowledge cycle  
(Source: Burk 1999:3)

Burk (2009:3) observes that in traditional organisations, knowledge tends to flow along organisational lines, from the top down however that pattern seldom results in making knowledge available in a timely fashion and where it is needed the most. This was also the case in the City of Harare of which knowledge mostly flows from top to bottom. In organisations with managed knowledge, information can flow across organisational lines, reaching the people who can use it in ways that best promote the organization's goals and that enhance service to the customer at the same time. How this happens can be understood by examining the four basic elements of the knowledge management cycle: find/create, organize, share, and use/reuse.

### 6.1.1. Find and Create Information and Knowledge

Knowledge is gained through a variety of means, including publications, conferences, workshops and meetings, project experiences, research, and industry expertise. Knowledge in the City of Harare was acquired through induction, training, supervision and workshops. However, the workshops were mainly attended by the top management. Participants showed that information was acquired in the City of Harare through book purchases for the special library as well as donations from Book Aid for the City of Harare Municipal libraries which cater for the public. Information on rate-payer bills was created by the City of Harare. Most participants indicated that there was no room for new knowledge creation from the subordinates. Participant 07 opines that "if you want to come up with a new idea or initiative, you receive a negative response that is killing the City of Harare". This is supported by participant 05 who reiterated that "we do not have mechanisms in place to identify who knows what, who does what and who does it best. The find and create aspect of information and knowledge is therefore disturbed.

### 6.1.2. Organisation of Information and Knowledge

The knowledge should be filtered and catalogued and the links to the outside should be created. To help carry out the organize functions information and knowledge professionals are called for which include the Librarian, Records Manager and Knowledge Manager. Participants from the interviews indicated that information and knowledge was organised in an ineffective and inefficient way in the City of Harare. Participant 025 adds that *“because information and knowledge are not effectively organised, we tend to rely on memory, gut feeling and the little information that we have at hand instead of proper evaluation of information and knowledge”*. Participant 012 gave an example of the Housing Department where information on housing waiting list is filed manually *“such that if one is asked how many people are on waiting list, he/she would just say over one thousand people”*. It was revealed by participants that the organisation would pay a lot on what it already has though it did not know therefore the need to find out, who has which knowledge in the organisation. There was need for knowledge network and mapping that provides links to people with the different types of knowledge since this was not practiced in the organisation.

### 6.1.3. Sharing and Information Dissemination

The interview participants showed that in the City of Harare, knowledge was shared and information was disseminated though mostly top-down. Knowledge in the City of Harare was shared though induction, training and workshops. There was limited room for bottom information and knowledge flow. If it happened it would be information in the form of requests for example loan and salary advances. In the City of Harare information could also be disseminated and shared through e-mails. Participant 013 avers that *“the Public Relation Division at Town House is responsible for disseminating information to the public”*. Participant 048 adds that *“if there is an outbreak, epidemic or disease, the City Health Department uses brochures, billboards, and Charts to disseminate the information”*. The employees leaving the organisation were not given a chance to share what they know hence they left the organisation with their means of production which is their knowledge. Those remained, faced difficulties in continuing from where these workers left. Sharing of information and knowledge was also a challenge as there was a “silo” attitude towards information and knowledge management. Participant 015 posits that *“the organisation is silo in nature and in that silo there are pipes-no connectivity, therefore no knowledge sharing”*. This shows that there is no networked information and knowledge flow in the organisation.

### 6.1.4 Use and Reuse Information and Knowledge

It is when information and knowledge that has been captured, coded, shared, and otherwise made available is put to actual use. If this step is not accomplished successfully, all of the KM efforts will have been in vain, for IM and KM can succeed only if the information and knowledge are used (Dalkir, 2008:145). Knowledge is used in the City of Harare to attend health, finance, public safety and education issues in the City of Harare. However, there is a challenge of underutilization of knowledge workers. Knowledge does not only end on being used, it has to be reused. This results in building on the existing knowledge and creation of new knowledge. It becomes imperative to understand which knowledge is of use to which set of people and how best to make it available to them so that they not only understand how to use it but believe that using this knowledge will lead to an improvement in their work. This results in the improved service delivery. Most interview participants showed that information is used every day and every second in the City of Harare, though this is not valued. It was observed by the researcher that information could be used as exhibit in the case of suspected fraud. This observation was made at the records centres where internal and external auditors would come to request for proof of payment, income and expenditure records and in the disciplinary committee such records were also used as exhibits. Participant 011 posits that *“in the Engineering Department, if there are renovations being done on roads, they used and reused posters and road signs so that the motorists will be informed that there is road work ahead”*. This was done for the safety and appreciation of the general public.

## 6.2. A Hierarchy of Knowing

The diagram below illustrates the hierarchy of knowing stages:

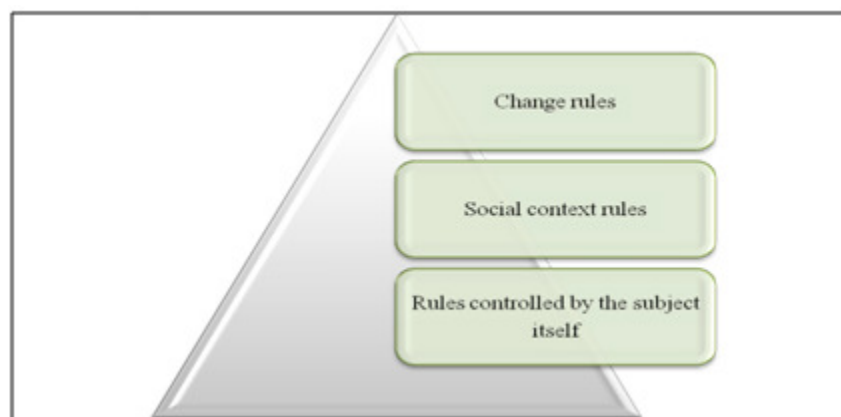


Figure 2: A hierarchy of knowing

Rolf (1991:3) suggests a hierarchy of knowing based on how the rules are followed:

- The lowest level of knowing is to follow rules which can be controlled by the subject itself. It then shows that the rules will be controlled by the knower. This identifies the skill that one possesses. The skills that were identified in the City of Harare included the typing skills. It was observed that employees in the City of Harare have different skills. The challenge being that they are not given room to be innovative and creative due to the hierarchical structure, culture and the “silo” attitude.
- The next level is to follow rules which are established by a social context outside the individual. It represents the know-how according to the social context. It includes both skill and the ability to act in social contexts. Other actors, like a professional institution, society and tradition establish the rules. It shows that the individual has nothing to add or subtract from the rules set by the society, profession and tradition, he/she will be following the established rules consciously like the person under the apprentice and conscious level in the stages of competence in knowledge acquisition. In the City of Harare, people follow rules, policies and procedures. Most of the people are in this level.
- The highest level is to be able to and to be allowed to change the rules. This shows competence or expertise. It is the mastering of rules of the profession, society of tradition such that they no longer need to be obeyed. This represents unconscious competence as in the case of the stages of competency in knowledge acquisition. One can perform the work unconsciously. This indicates that when one reached the highest level of knowing he/she will be able to criticize some of the rules and able to change those rules. This level is difficult to reach in the City of Harare as people are not allowed to change the rules and there is no room for innovation and initiative.

### 6.3. The Sources of Information and Knowledge

There are different sources of information and knowledge management which include the human mind, information centres which incorporate libraries and records centres, internet and organisations, products and services.

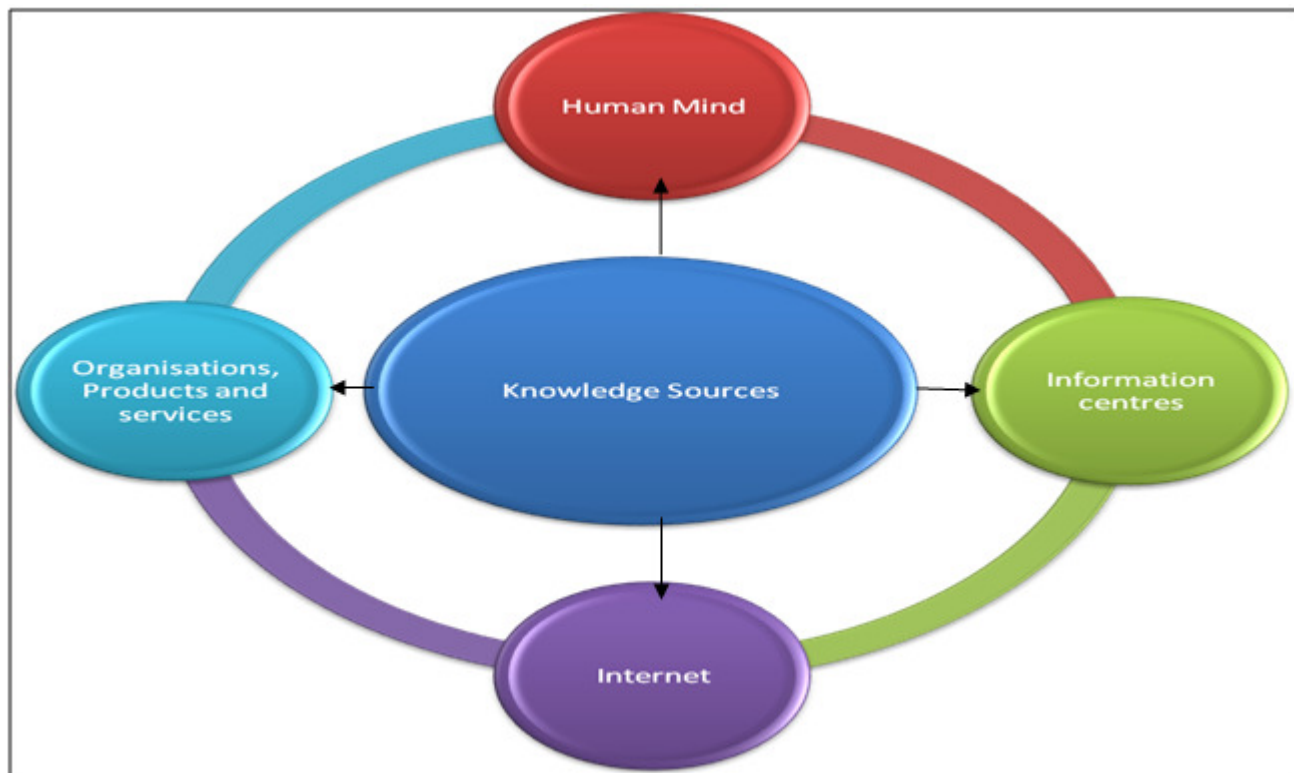


Figure 3: Knowledge Sources

#### 6.3.1. The Human Mind

Awad and Ghaziri (2009:75) give an example of human mind as a source of knowledge and add that it accommodates learning. The City of Harare had its knowledge in the employees' minds. Fahey and Prusak (2012:3) identifies that any discussion of knowledge is meaningless in the absence of a “knower”, knowledge is what a knower knows, there is no knowledge without someone knowing it. Knowledge therefore, must be viewed as originating from the knower. Taken literally, the need for a knower raises profound questions as to whether and how knowledge can exist outside the heads of individuals. Although knowledge can be represented in and often embedded in organisational processes, routines, and networks, and sometimes in document repositories, it cannot truly originate outside the heads of individuals. Fahey and Prusak (2012:3) observed that some organizations take databases as “knowledge bases” and talk of search engines as if they were human brains, and they extol executive expert systems as if the human mind were incidental to their construction and use. This then leaves the question does knowledge only exist in the mind? Some knowledge can also be recorded in films and Digital Video Disc or “digital versatile disc” DVD. Thus even if the person dies his/her knowledge can be seen.

The existence of knowledge is evidenced in products and services. Thus even the originator of the knowledge dies, his/her legacy remains for example the organisation, products and services that were introduced by the knower. This then shows that the originator of the knowledge is the mind but it can be evidenced in products, performance, action, process, organisations, products and services.

### 6.3.2. Information Centers

The City of Harare has information centres in the form of libraries and records centres. It was observed that the City of Harare's Finance Department Library was not often consulted for organisational decision making purposes but mostly for reading newspapers. However, reading newspapers made employees updated with current information, but it became a challenge, when employees only come to the library to read newspaper. This pointed to the underutilization of the library as it could offer more services to meet the organisational objectives rather than just reading newspapers. The researcher observed various records centres in the City of Harare from different departments in order to identify the extent of utilization of information centres. In those departments there were also some mini records centres. Participant 019 posits that "*each section has its own semi records centre*". The result of this was duplication of work. This was very costly to the organisation. This is supported by participant 03 who avers that "*records centres are not utilized because there are no proper systems in place for the effective utilization*". Participants indicated that most people would not follow records management procedures and records ended up being lost.

### 6.3.3. Internet

Kotler (2005:33) postulates that the internet has created new winners and buried the laggards. The internet can be used in the transfer of information and knowledge and as a source of information and knowledge. Participants indicated that they use the internet to send and receive e-mails and to search for information from Google. They showed that they did not use the internet for video conferencing, Group decision Support systems and Marketing Information Systems.

### 6.3.4. Organisations, Products and Services

Though organisation, products and services are sources of knowledge, literature is lacking on these aspects as sources of knowledge. Knowledge is impeded in the City of Harare as an organisation, its products and services.

## *6.4. Strategies of Knowledge Management Application*

The following are the strategies for knowledge management:

### 6.4.1. Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice (CoP) can be defined as groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly.

### 6.4.2. The Delphi Method

Burnes (2004: 254) suggest that "this uses a panel of experts, who are interrogated about a number of future issues within their area of expertise".

### 6.4.3. Data Warehousing and Data Mining

Schultheis and Summer (2004:239) assert that data warehousing "is a term for any system that stores, retrieves, manages or otherwise manipulates massive amounts of data. Data mining which is sometimes called data or knowledge discovery is the process of analyzing data from different perspectives and summarizing it into useful information that can be used to increase revenue, cuts costs, or both.

Knowledge can also be transferred to other members of staff through:

- The World Wide Web and e-mail (the internet),
- Train and Development,
- Substantial documentation of procedures and product knowledge,
- Knowledge mapping,
- Provide an environment in which people volunteer what they know,
- Storytelling,
- Demonstrating,
- Filming,
- Decision Support Systems and Group Decision Support Systems,
- Mentoring,
- Library, Documentation and records management and
- Artificial intelligence.

The City participants indicated that they use strategies like training, supervising and attending meetings.

## **7. Recommendations**

This paper brings up the following recommendations:

- Knowledge management should be embraced by all organisations as a strategic asset as it offers sustainable and distinctive competitive advantage so that organisations will be able to strategically position themselves in this world of knowledge economy.
- Knowledge workers should be recognized and managed appropriately. Suppose the product is honey and one decides to keep bees. What one needs to do is to provide the bees with a conducive environment and resources to improve the quality of the honey as the bees already know how to produce the honey. This also applies to the management of knowledge workers.
- There is need to recognize Librarians and any other information professionals as drivers in Knowledge Management.
- Knowledge leadership is called for. The new knowledge leaders will bridge the role of managers and leaders by overseeing knowledge management systems and creating supportive workplace environments for knowledge development. Knowledge leaders will be put at all levels in the organisation. These knowledge leaders will work hard in enhanced their knowledge so that the organisation will effectively benefit.
- There is need to evaluate the knowledge to see its relevance and nature to link with the changing environment. This will also help in determining what knowledge is to be integrated in the organisation. It will also help in evaluating every stage of knowledge management to ascertain its efficiency and effectiveness.
- Organisations should provide a conducive environment for knowledge management to excel.
- Information and knowledge management value chain -Value chain in information and knowledge management is called for. This is when value is added wherever information and knowledge are discovered, created, stored, transferred or shared.
- Knowledge networks and communities of practice are called for in order to effectively and efficiently manage information and knowledge.
- Knowledge management must be fully aligned and integrated into the organization's strategy, plans and culture.
- Intellectual capital is called for which is the collective knowledge of individuals in the organisation whether or not documented. This knowledge can be used to produce wealth
- The municipality concerned should develop an encompassing knowledge management strategy which has both technical and cultural attributes.
- The performance measurements agreements of all employees should include knowledge management as the strategic focus area during all financial years.
- Knowledge management must be fully aligned and integrated into the municipality's strategy, plans, and unit's strategic plans as well as to department's business plans.
- Indigenous knowledge through public-participation should be extracted and used in order to play a tremendous role in organisational effectiveness.
- The municipality concerned should invest in knowledge workers by giving them rewards in promoting the transfer of tacit to explicit knowledge which would be mainly used for innovation and creativity which brings change and a high productivity rate.
- The City of Harare should have an organisational policy for information and knowledge management that will be evaluated with changes in the market and every organisation should have an information and knowledge management policy.
- There is need to capture the knowledge that exists in the employee's minds. Organisations should be in a position to identify and record the knowledge so that one does not leave or die with all his/her knowledge. The knowledge should be shared where needed and utilized creatively.
- The green leaf or Chipo Mutongi's knowledge Management model is called for which advocates that the organisations should be managed though the midrib system which is knowledge management which co-ordinates every section, activities and people and this ultimately destroy the negative attitude towards knowledge management and the silo mentality (Mutongi, 2016)
- Institutional memory that would house collective knowledge is called for, information, facts, beliefs, ideas, concepts, experiences, know-how, processes and historical development of the organisation. It was often said that Rowan Martin, Elizabeth Musodzi and Edith Opperman played great roles in the City of Harare however if these roles are not put in the institutional memory, people many not know for certain how great these people were save for the buildings that were named after them which are Rowan Martin Building, Mai Musodzi Hall and Edith Opperman Maternity Centre. The institutional memory would help to curb loss of all the knowledge embedded in people's minds when they left the organisation due to various reasons which might be retirement, illness, resignation and death.

## 8. Conclusion

Every organisation should apply knowledge management to meet up the environmental changes as the world is now in the knowledge economy. The knowledge management life cycle should be effectively and efficiently carried out in the organisation with evaluation at every stage to meet up with market changes. The Knowledge Managers, Librarians and any other Information professionals have great role to play in the application of knowledge management as a strategic resource as they are at the core of knowledge creation, organisation, retrieve, transfer, share, disseminate and make the knowledge used and reused. It was concluded that knowledge management was not prioritized by the City of Harare and information and knowledge workers were not fully utilized. There were challenges in the application of knowledge management which include the confusion on information and knowledge, the challenge of managing knowledge workers, the ability to create and replace new knowledge and reluctance in sharing knowledge. There is

therefore need for clear definitions and explanations of information and knowledge, knowledge workers should be management with the relevant management and leadership style. There is need to encourage interactions and workshops for knowledge sharing. Knowledge management should be embraced by all organisations as a strategic asset as it offers sustainable and distinctive competitive advantage.

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