Impact of External Business Environment on Training in Nurses at a Referral Hospital in Kenya

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the political environment (government policies, devolution to county governments, professional associations and trade unions) socio-cultural environment (age, gender, education levels and peer-pressure) and technological environment (advancement in technology, evolving hospital care delivery systems, information and communication technology, invention and innovations) on staff training at a referral hospital. The study was conducted based on data collected from 322 nurses working at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital in Eldoret, Western Kenya. The hypotheses were tested using Pearson correlation coefficients and multiple stepwise linear regression analysis. The findings of the study indicated that the technological environment explained 95% of the variation in nurse training (Adjusted $R^2 = 0.942$, $P < 0.05$). On the other hand, the political and social-cultural environments were not significant predictors of training in nurses ($P > 0.05$).

1. Introduction

The business environment refers to the sum total of factors or variables that may influence the present and future survival of an organization (Armstrong, 1999). These factors encompass various internal and external influences under which the organization operates. The business environment plays a very important role by shaping the ability of the organization to maintain successful relationships with its clients. It is the environment that is likely to determine to a great extent the success of business (Shaikh, 2010). Consequently, successful firms recognize the importance of constantly scrutinizing and adapting to the changes in the business environment (Kottler, 2005). As a matter of fact, every business organization has to interact and transact with its environment, this therefore, means that the business environment has a direct relation with the organizations. Even though the success of an organization is invariably linked to its own internal micro-environment such as how it is structured, how it is provided with working capital and other resources, co-operation of labor, the effectiveness of its technology and so on, it also depends on the macro environment such as government policies, external trade and international environment, the socio-cultural environment and the technological environment (Fernando, 2011).

External business environmental factors (political, economic, socio-cultural, and technological) have been known to influence the functioning of organizations in various ways. After a close examination of the external environment, Dauda and Ismaila (2013) assert that, businesses depend on their environment to get input resources such as information, ideas, raw materials, finance and labour among others, and for the consumption of finished goods and services. This implies that organizational business activities are influenced and shaped by environmental forces such as social, economic, technological, legal or regulatory forces among others. For example, in Nigeria, technological environmental factors prompted quoted manufacturing firms in the food and beverage industry to adopt multi product marketing strategies to remain competitive (Dauda & Ismaila, 2013). Makokha and Theuri (2014) examined the influence of external factors on delivery of quality services in public institutions in Kenya. These authors report that the external environment had an immense impact on the actual quality of service offered in public institutions and the way quality was perceived by the public. Furthermore, Njanja and colleagues (2012) carried out a study on the effects of the external environment on internal management strategies within micro, small and medium enterprises in Kenya. The external environment factors considered in the study were; legal/political, economic, socio-cultural, regulatory/policy issues and technological factors. The management strategies looked at were - marketing strategies, human relation strategies, strategic management and interpersonal factors. The study indicated that there was a significant correlation between the management strategies and environmental factors. However, there was no significant effect of the environment on the performance of the micro, small and medium enterprises. The study concluded that, the external environment affects performance by impacting on the strategies adopted by management to remain competitive. In addition, Alkali and Isa (2012) carried out a study on the influence of external

environmental factors on the performance of small manufacturing enterprises in Bauchi state, Nigeria. The findings indicated that capital access and government support were significantly associated with business performance of small manufacturing enterprises. Furthermore, the relationship between technological factors and organization choice of multi-product marketing strategies of quoted manufacturing firms operating in the food and beverage sector in Nigeria was examined by Dauda and Ismaila (2003). The study revealed that technological environment factors prompted adoption of multi-product marketing strategies. The study recommended that, managers desirous of success in their operating environment should pay particular attention to technological dynamism, such as; technological invention, advancement in technology, availability of state of the art technology, nature of technological changes and diversity of technology in the manufacturing firms operating environment. For these reasons it is recommended that organizations should pay close attention to their environments by doing periodic scanning to monitor changes that may be significant to their operations (Adeoye & Elegunde, 2012).

The impact of the external and internal environment on human capital development was examined by Echdar and Si (2013). The study sought to test and analyze whether the internal and external environment influence the development of human capital through intervening variables - planning and human resource management, employee improvement, education and training, recognition of employee performance and employee satisfaction. Results from the study indicated that the external factors that significantly influenced human capital were economic and technological environments. However, the social-cultural environment did not show a significant effect, on human capital development. These researchers concluded that the knowledge and skills of employees can be improved through education and training to match with changes in the technological environment. This findings are consistent with Kibos (2004), who recommended that training measures should be used to improve the ability of employees to cope with the challenges posed by new advances in technology and thus improve performance. From the foregoing, it can be inferred that the external business environment has a profound influence on the overall organizational performance. However, there is paucity of data examining the relationship between the external business environment and staff training, a key component of organizational performance.

Staff training can be considered as a strategy that can help the organization deal with the changes in the business environment. In order to succeed and achieve organizational objectives, business organizations must develop strategies that align training and development activities with the business environment (Dauda and Ismaila 2013; Kurtulus, 2014). Training is as a deliberate effort to teach specific skills, knowledge, and attitudes to serve a specific purpose (Archive, 2008). On the other hand, training can be said to be a planned systematic modification of behavior through learning, events, programs and instructions which enable individuals to achieve the levels of knowledge, skills and competence needed to carry out their work efficiently (Mwaura, 1999; Dabale, 2004, Armstrong, 2006). However, training is not only aimed at improving the employee's knowledge and skills with regard to his or her functional and administrative duties, but the acquisition of certain integrity, loyalty and responsibility is also within the scope of training

(Dabale et al., 2014).

Training is an important and integral part of human resource development and is crucial to organizational effectiveness. Training helps employees to prepare for change, to face emerging challenges, and acquire competencies necessary to achieve organizational objectives. It also improves the overall capabilities of an organization (Thakore, 2013). In the USA for instance, organizations spent over one hundred and thirty four billion dollars annually on training employees (Noe, 2012) thus, employee training is inevitable if an organization is to pursue excellence in its operations. For these reasons, training invested in people should be such that it will enable them to perform better as well as empower them to get the best out of their natural abilities for the effectiveness and efficiency of the organization (Babaita, 2010). It is envisaged that, organizations should always be on the lookout to identify any changes in their external business environment and therefore be able to use strategies that would enable them deal positively with the business environmental forces. This is in consistent with the views of Eisenhardt and Brown (1998) that, an organization should remember that it is not for the environment to change in its favour, but rather the management of the organization to update their operations in line with the environment changes, otherwise they will be pushed out of business. In summary, an organization that wants to succeed must develop a clear understanding of the trends in the external environment and forces that shape the competition, this understanding will enable an organization to choose the appropriate training strategies that fit the trend in the external business environment.

There are limited studies that have specifically investigated the influence of external environment on staff training. Most of the studies reviewed have looked at how the external environmental factors such as political, economic, social-cultural and technological impact on the general performance of the organization. From the studies cited above, it can be inferred that all organizations, whether for profit or non profit, private or public, large or small operate within the environment that exhibit different levels of turbulence and complexity. Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital (MTRH) is the second national referral hospital in Kenya. It is located in Eldoret City, in Western Kenya. The hospital has an 800 bed capacity and employs approximately 2000 nurses serving patients form the broader east African region. As a public organization MTRH does not operate in a vacuum, but within the same competitive and dynamic environment as other private business organizations. MTRH has experienced several changes in the external business environment including: inventions and innovations of novel ways in health-care provision, technological advances in the health sector, changes in government policies, evolving professional requirements by respective professional bodies, shifting demands by trade unions, change of expectations from clients, changes in working styles and recently devolution of health service to county governments, all of which have variously impacted on employees in their respective places of work. In order to cope with this emerging environmental threat the human resource department at MTRH has come up with a training and development policy to ameliorate the impact of these macro-environmental shifts on performance. The policy aims to offer training opportunities to all the MTRH staff and improve employee competence to match with the existing on the job realities (MTRH Report,

2015). We therefore, postulate that the changes in the external business environment will have an impact on staff training at MTRH.

2. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses

The open systems theory (OST) assumes that organizations are strongly influenced by their environment. OST was initially developed by Von Bertanlannfy (1968), a biologist. OST defines systems as characterized by an assemblage or combination of parts whose relations make them interdependent. In his work on the general systems theory, Bertanlannfy (1968) indicated that a system has a boundary that separates it from the environment and allows inputs to the system and outputs from it. He further explained that, in most cases, real world systems are open systems which interact with and are often influenced by their external environment, thus acquiring new qualities which allows them to evolve. Furthermore, Scotts (2004) indicated that OST view an organization as embedded in an environment and thus part of a system includes other organizations as well as political, economic, social and cultural institutions. Additionally organizations are capable of continuously changing their structural form to respond to the environment (Cole, 2002; Scott, 2003).

The environment consists of other organization that exerts various forces of an economic, political or social nature. The environment also provides key resources that sustain the organization and lead to change and survival (Micheal, 2004). Therefore, the external environment can be considered as one of the influential factors that determines survival of a system (Hanna, 2000). In addition, every business organization has to interact and transact with its environment, hence the business environment has a direct relation with the business organization. It is the environment that is likely to determine to a great extent the success or otherwise of a business (Shaikh, 2010). In this context the following hypotheses were developed.

H_1 - The relationship between the political environment and training in nurses is positive and significant

H_2 – The relationship between the socio-cultural environment and training in nurses is positive and significant

H_3 – The relationship between the technological environment and training in nurses is positive and significant

3. Methods

3.1 Sample and Data Collection

The sample comprised of nurses employed at MTRH in Eldoret city, Kenya. The target population was 1945 nurses working at MTRH (MTRH database, 2012). From this target population, Krejcies and Morgan (1970) formula was used to determine the appropriate sample size. Thus, 322 nurses were determined as the appropriate sample size. To obtain a representative sample from the target population, the 322 nurses were proportionately selected by simple random sampling using a lottery system that selected participants based on personal file numbers of all the 1945 nurses.

3.2. Measures

The questionnaire that was used was divided into sections; A and B. Section A, consisted of both open ended and closed ended questions about the study participants characteristics (age, gender, level of education and job tenure). On the other hand, section B consisted of closed ended questions on the external environment. The section was further sub-divided into section I, II, and III, where questions about various aspects of the external environment namely: political, social cultural and technological environment were asked. The questions were constructed based on a Likert scale response system with five alternative responses from the MTRH nurses. According to Trochim (2006) the Likert scale is used in order to capture data from respondents' perceptions, views and opinion. The five point Likert scale that was used in this study was represented by the following terms; strongly agree (5), agree (4), undecided (3), disagree (2), strongly disagree (1).

Measurement Validation

To determine the content validity of the instrument, expert judgmental panel from the university was contacted due to their expertise and proximity. The research experts helped the researchers determine the validity of the research instruments; thereafter appropriate revisions were made. In addition, the reliability of the instruments was tested by piloting the questionnaires in nurses practicing in a similar referral hospital in the region (Kakamega Teaching and Referral hospital). Thereafter, a split half method was used to test the reliability of the research instruments. According to Zinbarg (2005), Cronbach's alpha is a coefficient of reliability that gives an unbiased estimate of data generelisability. An alpha coefficient higher than 0.75 indicates that the gathered data have a relatively high internal consistency and could be generalized to reflect opinions of all respondents in the target population (Joppe, 2000). From the piloted study, Results of 0.8 and above from the cronbach α value were achieved and therefore, this was considered reliable for the study.

4. Analyses and Results

Data was first processed and checked for completeness before carrying out any analysis. The data was edited, cleaned, and validated for omissions, completeness, clarity and accuracy with consistency in preparation for coding process. The data was then summarized, coded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive statistics which included measures of central tendency; mean, standard deviation and frequency distribution. To assess the association between the dependent variable (nurse training) and independent variables (political environment, socio-cultural environment and technological environment) and the impact of the predictor variables on outcome variables, correlation and regression analysis were performed and used to test the hypotheses of the study. A multiple stepwise linear regression model was employed as described below:

$Y = C + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$

Where:

Y = Nurse training

X_1 – Political environment

X_2 – Socio-cultural environment

X_3 – Technological environment

C – Regression Constant

β – beta coefficient

ε- Error term.

All statistical analyses were completed in SPSS (Version 18, Chicago, IL; USA). Significant differences were declared at $P<0.05$.

Demographic Information

322 questionnaires were administered to nurses at MTRH and 298 respondents were obtained, achieving a response rate of 92.5%. The age and gender distribution of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Age and gender distribution of nurses at MTRH

		Frequency	Percent (%)
Gender	Male	69	23
	Female	229	77
	Total	298	100
Age (years)	18-24	56	19
	25-35	138	46
	36-45	68	23
	46-55	27	9
	>55	9	3
	Total	**298**	**100**

Most of the nurses (66 %, n = 197) had diploma level qualification, with a minority (5%, n = 6) having postgraduate level qualifications. Furthermore, most of the respondents 46%, n = 136 had worked in the organization for a period of 6-10 years, while only 2 %, n = 7 had worked in the organization for above 20 years.

We examined the impact of the political environment (government policies, devolution to county governments, professional associations and trade unions) on nurses training. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Influence of the Political environment on training in nurses

		SA	A	UD	D	SD
Government Policies influence training in nurses	F	63	159	36	21	19
	%	21	53	12	7	7
Devolution to county governments influence training in nurses	F	178	66	29	15	10
	%	58	22	10	5	3
Professional Associations influence training in nurses	F	113	96	54	27	8
	%	38	32	18	9	3
Trade Unions Influence training in nurses	F	56	61	78	94	9
	%	19	21	26	32	3
Mean		103	96	49	39	12
±SD		56	45	22	37	5

Note. SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; UD – Undecided; D- Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree;F – Frequency.

The influence of the socio-cultural environment (age, gender, education levels and peer pressure) on nurses training is illustrated in Table 3

Table 3. Influence of the Socio-cultural Environment on Staff training

		SA	A	UD	D	SD
Age influences	F	62	144	59	14	19
training in nurses	%	21	48	21	5	6
Gender influences	F	59	49	54	58	78
training in nurses	%	20	16	18	20	26
Education levels	F	111	98	42	28	19
influencers training	%	37	33	14	9	6
In nurses						
Peer Pressure influences	F	28	56	118	87	9
training in nurses	%	9	19	40	29	3
Mean		65	87	68	47	31
±SD		34	44	34	33	32

Note. SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; UD – Undecided; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree;F – Frequency.

The technological environment (advancement in technology, evolving hospital care delivery system, information technology and inventions and innovations) influenced training in nurses as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Influence of the Technological environment on Staff Training

		SA	A	UD	D	SD
Advancement in technology influences training in nurses	F	132	116	28	9	13
	%	44	39	9	3	4
Evolving hospital care delivery-systems influences training in nurses	F	67	117	51	42	21
	%	23	39	17	14	7
Information Technology influences training in nurses	F	107	138	36	10	7
	%	36	46	12	3	2
Inventions and innovations Influence training in nurses	F	87	111	87	10	3
	%	29	37	29	3	1
Mean		98	121	51	18	11
±SD		28	12	26	16	8

Note. SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; UD – Undecided; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree;F – Frequency.

To infer the statistical implications of the descriptive findings above, a correlation analysis was run to establish whether there was indeed a relationship between the predictor and outcome variables. The correlation results are as presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Correlation Matrix

		Training	Political	Sociocultural	Technological
Training	Pearson				
	Correlation	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0			
	N	298			
Political	Pearson				
	Correlation	-0.78	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.22	0		
	N	298	298		
Socio cultural	Pearson				
	Correlation	0.14	0.32	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.87	0.68	0	
	N	298	298	298	
Techno -logical	Pearson				
	Correlation	0.98	-0.66	0.32	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.02[*]	0.35	0.68	0
	N	298	298	298	298

Note. *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

To examine closely the combined effects of the external environment (political, socio-cultural and technological) factors in influencing the variation of staff training at MTRH, a multiple stepwise linear regression was performed. The values for tolerance were greater than 0.2

cut-off and those of variance inflation factor (VIF) were less than 4 for all the predictor variables. This shows lack of multi-collinearity among independent variables (political, social-cultural and technological environments). Therefore, the estimated regression coefficients were accurate. The regression model (adjusted $R^2 = 0.942$, P = 0.019) indicated that 94% of the variation in training in nurses was influenced by the change in technological environment. This shows that there exists a strong positive relationship between staff training and change in the technological environment. On the other hand, none of the other predictor variables (political and socio-cultural environments) had any significant association with training in nurses.

5. Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1 (H_1): There is a significant and positive relationship between the political environment and training in nurses. This hypothesis did not correspond with the findings from the study which revealed that the political environment had a coefficient of estimate ($\beta = -0.239$) which was not significant P = 0.76; implying that we accept the null hypothesis stating that there is no significant relationship between the political environment and training in nurses.

Hypothesis 2 (H_2): There is a significant and positive relationship between the social-cultural environment and training in nurses. Findings showed that the social cultural environment had a coefficient of estimates ($\beta = -0.194$) which was not significant (P = 0.220) and hence we accept the null hypothesis and conclude that the social cultural environment has no significant effect on training in nurses.

Hypothesis 3 (H_3): There is a significant and positive relationship between technological environment and training in nurses. Findings from the study showed that technological environment had a coefficient of estimate ($\beta = 0.981$) which was significant (P = 0.019). Thus, we accept the hypothesis since the test of beta coefficients indicated that there was a significant relationship between the technological environment and training in nurses.

6. Discussion of the Findings

The demographic findings indicated that most of the nurses at MTRH were female (76.8%, n = 229). There is therefore, a need for male gender mainstreaming as a recruitment policy to enhance the number of male nurses and hence promote diversity in the institution. On the other hand, majority of the respondents were youthful (25-35 years) and thus, it was expected that these respondents would be actively pursuing further training before they plateau in their careers. However, this was not the case, as most of the respondents were diploma level graduates (66.1%, n = 197) with very few graduate trained nurses (26.5%, n = 79). Although, upward mobility in the nursing profession at MTRH was not determined in the current study, it may be inferred that entry level qualifications; that is, diploma in nursing, qualifies individuals for career advancement based on working experience. This implies that there is no incentive to pursue higher academic/technical qualifications that are in tandem with the emerging external business environment amongst nurses at MTRH.

The descriptive data (Tables 1-3) indicated that the external business environment (political,

socio-cultural and technological) had an influence on training in nurses at MTRH. This is broadly consistent with the findings of Kurtulus (2014), who reported that the external environment impacts significantly on human resource management activities. However, inferential analysis of the relationship between external environment and training in nurses at MTRH indicated that only the technological environment (advancement in technology, evolving hospital care delivery systems, information and communication technology, invention and innovations) was a significant predictor of training in nurses. This is in line with a previous study by Echdar and Sci (2003) who reported that the technological environment was associated with human capital development. Similarly, Kotler (2011) argued that technology is the most dramatic force shaping the destiny of the business world. Moreover, a cross sectional analysis of US Businesses in services, wholesale and retail trade sectors, found a strong relationship between advanced technology and skills advancement (Abowd et al., 2007). In contrast, the political (government policies, devolution, professional associations and trade unions) and socio-cultural (age, gender, education levels and peer pressure) environments were not significantly associated with training in nurses at MTRH. These results were unexpected and may be attributable to the uniqueness of the sample. As stated above, most of the nurses held entry level qualifications (diploma in Nursing) and had been employed for a period of 6-10 years but had not advanced in their qualifications; an indicator of career stagnation. This would be expected to be at variance with changes in the external environment that impact on human resource training needs.

7. Implications

The findings of this study show that change in the technological environment (advancement in technology; evolving hospital care and delivery systems; information technology and communication, inventions and innovations) significantly influenced training in nurses. Therefore, human resource managers should emphasise on the job training in nurses to enable this cadre of employees cope and adapt to the rapidly changing technological environment, if they are to remain effective health care providers. On the other hand, the there was no significant relationship between the political environment (government policies on training, devolution, professional bodies and trade unions) and training in nurses. Decentralization of health services under devolved units is a recent phenomenon in Kenya and therefore, the minimal impact of devolution on training in nurses that was observed in this study may reflect the novelty of the policy rather than a lack of effect. Nevertheless, the existing government policies on training did not appear to impact on staff training at MTRH, an indication that the government machinery involved in implementing training policies is not effective. In addition, professional associations and trade unions did not significantly influence staff training. This finding is curious, in view of the numerous industrial unrests and collective bargaining agreements (CBA) associated with the nursing profession in Kenya. It can be inferred that most of these CBA are primarily focussed on personal emoluments at the expense of other aspects of professional well-being, such as staff training. Similarly, the social cultural environment (age; gender, education levels and peer pressure) was not significantly associated with training in nurses. Based on these findings, it is important to replicate this study in other samples to confirm the consistency of our findings. This is

especially, important in view of the dearth in literature examining the relationship between the external business environment and staff training.

8. Limitations and Directions for future Research

This study had several limitations that may limit the generalizability of our findings. Firstly, the study sample was mainly composed of youthful female nurses working at national referral hospital. Therefore, this may bias the respondents and mask possible associations between the political and socio-cultural environment and staff training. Thus, a more heterogeneous sample may demonstrate an association between the political and socio-cultural environments and staff training. Secondly, we used a cross-sectional study design and therefore it is difficult to map out the exact temporal relationship between the external environment and staff training. Future studies should aim at a longitudinal design to effectively determine the association between the external environmental factors and staff training. Nevertheless, the findings from this study are novel and thus future studies should aim to confirm the consistency of these findings in other settings/populations based on the limited literature available on the influence of external environment on staff training. In view of the foregoing, future studies investigating the influence of external environment on staff training are warranted.

9. Conclusions

The study examined the relationship between the external business environment (political, socio-cultural and technological) factors and training using data from 298 nurses working in a national referral hospital in Western Kenya. It was established that only the technological environment was significantly associated with training in nurses. The political and socio-cultural environments were not significantly related to training in nurses.

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