TOWARDS A MODEL OF HIGH PERFORMANCE ORGANIZATIONS IN GHANA

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ABSTRACT

The challenges of the Global Economy have set academics and practitioners thinking of new ways to ensure high performance. Whilst there are several concepts that have been put forward as having a panacea to Organizational Performance, most of these have been applied in developed country environments, which differ in terms size and the complexities from the economies of developing countries. Through literature review and the development of conceptual model, the study argues that using Knowledge Management and Management Innovation as independent variables and HPO framework and Competitive Advantage to mediate and moderate the relationships, High Organizational Performance can be predicted.

Keywords: Competitive Advantage; High Performance Organizations; Knowledge Management; Management Innovation.

INTRODUCTION

The focus of performance management traditionally had been on reporting profits and losses at the expense of strategies (Nilsson, & Kald, 2002) and did not really provide a holistic view of organizations. Meanwhile there is a fundamental transformation of the business landscape powered by globalization, and ICT, (Prahalad, & Krishnan, 2008) which among other things provides increasing opportunities for the creation of new products and services leading to intense competition generated by non- traditional competitors (Prahalad, & Ramaswamy, 2004), the emergence of China as a strong economic power (De Waal, 2009), the emergence of the Euro-zone and its financial challenges, and the determination of African countries like Ghana to reduce poverty using the private sector as the engine of growth.

These transformations require new management methods and processes (De Waal, 2009) because the existing ways of the firm and how it creates value has been altered (Prahalad, & Krishnan, 2008). The question, which bothers academics and practitioners, is how to measure
performance and are the performance measures developed from the developed countries applicable all over the world especially in developing countries. In this regard, the search for high performance factors is likely to continue due to the complexities and challenges facing the business community all over the world and the shocks such as the economic crises that Europe and America had been exposed to in recent times with its impact on virtually all corners of the world including developing countries like Ghana.

This study applies the High Performance Organizations (HPO) framework developed by De Waal, (2009; 2010) and combines it with Knowledge Management (Darroch, 2005), Competitive Advantage (Porter, 1985) and Management Innovation (Hamel, 2006) as the basis to develop a High Performance Organization (HPO) framework in Ghana.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

High Performance Organizations

The American Management Association (AMA) perceives HPOs as companies that are role models of the organizational world to the extent that they become the reality of the world versions of modern management ideal (AMA, 2007). Other scholars perceive HPOs as having strong financial management (Brown, & Eisenhardt, 1998), satisfied customers and employees (O’reilley, & Pfeffer, 2000), high levels of individual initiative (Hobeche, 2005; Foster, & Kaplan, 2001), productivity and innovation, aligned performance management and reward systems as well as organizations with high quality human resource practice (Delany, & Huselid, 1996).

In an attempt to develop an HPO framework, De Waal, (2009; 2010) adopted the common themes of HPOs and defines HPOs as ‘organizations that achieve financial and non- financial results that are better than those of their peers over a period of time of at least five to ten years’ (De Waal, 2009:182 ; De Waal, 2010). The definition of De Waal appears to be in line with that of the American Management Association which asserts that HPOs are organizations that are so excellent in so many areas that they consistently outperform most of their competitors for extended period of time (AMA, 2007). For the purposes of this study, the definition of HPOs by De Waal, (2010) has been adopted because it appears to take care of the various dimensions of HPOs and therefore could be a basis to examine Organizational Performance with a holistic view.

Identifying with the definition of HPOs put forward by De Waal, (2009), then organizations that are high performing, may be said to be the ones that are on top of their competitors in terms of profit maximization and cost minimization whilst having excellent relationships with, employees, customers, interest groups and other stakeholders. These organizations have been described by Jamrog, Vickers, Overholt, & Morrison, (2008) as examples of modern managerial excellence in the world. Added to this is the fact that if organizations want to be high performing then they need to think beyond the traditional approach of doing things and must adopt new principles of
innovation, which emphasized collaboration with all stakeholders (Prahalad, & Krishman, 2008). Organizations that are perceived to be high performing therefore should adopt multiple competitive strategies so as to adjust to different market conditions (AMA, 2007). Perhaps it is this caution that makes the AMA, (2007) to suggest that organizations that adopt HPO characteristics may not necessarily guarantee high performance but stand a better chance of performing well.

One may even be tempted to ask whether the research community has agreed on one best prescription to making organizations HPOs since it is said ‘there are so many ways to kill a cat’ and organizations behave and respond to the challenges that faced them at one point or the other and also their behavior may vary from one environment to the other. De Waal himself admits that HPOs cannot constitute a generic recipe due to the significant differences in organizations hence not all the HPO factors may be applicable to all organizations at the same time (De Waal, 2010). If this is so then, the search for HPO factors and frameworks has to continue to generate and add to the debate in the field of Organizational Performance. Based on this, the study adds Knowledge Management, Management Innovation and Competitive Advantage to De Waal’s framework to develop a model of High Performance Organizations in Ghana.

**Knowledge Management**

Knowledge Management is one of the emergent disciplines in the Management literature (Darroch, 2005). It may be understood to mean an emerging set of organizational design and operational principles, processes, organizational structures and application of technologies that enhance creativity and ability to enhance business value (Gurteen, 1988). Its definition is associated with its processes, hence it is associated with the processes through which it is acquired, developed, gathered, shared and protected to enhance Organizational Performance (Alavi, & Leidner, 2001; Grant, 2002; Donate, & Guadamillas, 2011).

The literature puts forward two types of knowledge namely, tacit and explicit knowledge (Grant, 2002; Leonard, & Sensiper, 1998). Whilst tacit knowledge is said to be knowledge that is intuitive, unarticulated and exists in the mind of people and can be transferred through learning by doing or watching (Choi, & Lee, 2003), explicit knowledge has been said to be documented and shaped (Choi, & Lee, 2003) and available for ease of reference. Whatever the type of knowledge, its management to give a competitive urge to organizations is what is of concern to academics and practitioners. It is for this reason that Grant, (2002) emphasizes the need for Knowledge Management which focuses on generating and exploiting knowledge of which its management process should examine how it is acquired, how it is disseminated and how organizations are responsive to knowledge (Darroch, 2005).

Researchers are of the view that firms that accumulate processes and manage knowledge are the ones that outperform their competitors (Cohen, & Sproul, 1991; Hart, & Banbury, 1994). Located in the Knowledge Based View (KBV) of the firm, (Kogut, & Zander, 1992; Nonaka,
1994) Knowledge Management has been described by researchers such as Donate, and Guadamillas, (2011) as the most important strategic resource for ensuring survival and success of organizations. It provides a coordinating mechanism to enhance the capabilities of organizations (Donate, & Guadamillas, 2011) in order to position organizations for enhanced performance. Alavi, and Leidner, (2001) as well as Janssen, Van Den Bosch, and Volberda, (2006) suggest that due to the emergent nature of Knowledge Management, more empirical studies on the relationship between Knowledge Management and Organizational Performance is needed. The suggestion of Alavi, and Leidner, (2001) and Janssen, Van Den Bosch, Volberda, (2006) partly provides the motivation for this study, which adopts Knowledge Management as an independent variable in this study to evaluate its relationship with Organizational Performance using the HPO framework as a mediator and Competitive Advantage as a moderator.

Figure 1 below, presents a framework for perceiving Knowledge Management and Organizational Performance. According to this framework, when the knowledge acquisition process, knowledge dissemination processes and knowledge responsiveness processes are well managed in the firm, it will lead to high performance of that firm and become a source of Competitive Advantage.

**FIGURE 1: KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT FRAMEWORK**

Adapted from Darroch, (2005)

**Management Innovation**

Hamel, (2006) ; Mol, and Birkinshaw, (2009) operationalized Management Innovation as the generation and implementation of management practice, process, structure or technique that is new to the state of the art and is intended to enhance firm performance. It is aimed at increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of organizational internal processes and allows organizations to cross performance thresholds and remain one of the most important sources of Competitive Advantage (Hamel, 2006) and by extension making organizations to become HPOs.
In his model of Management Innovation, Hamel, (2006) challenges managers to commit to the big management problem, come out with novel principles that illuminate new approaches, a deconstruction of management orthodoxies from a typical organization that redefine what is possible. The Management Innovation approach therefore calls on managers to think out of the box if they want their organizations to be high performing. It appears what really constitute Management Innovation has not been settled in the debate that characterizes the subject matter but one thing, which has been asserted, by Hamel, (2006) and his followers is that innovation of management principles and processes have the capacity to improve the Competitiveness of organizations.

Management Innovation may be important to permeate the highly bureaucratic structures of Ghanaian organizations, which hinder innovation and change. Kuada, (1994, 2010) argues that children born and brought up in ‘familism’ structures which are common in Africa hardly take initiatives and therefore required to conform to existing structures. Theimann, April, & Blass, (2006) also observed that management and leadership in Africa is characterized by resistant to change, reactive, short-term, context dependent, risk avoidance among others. The observation of Kuada, (2010) and Theimann, April, & Blass, (2006) then makes a stronger case for Management Innovation in developing countries which aims at bringing new and successful ideas to bear on organizational success in a challenging business environment. Perhaps that is why Hamel, (2006) is of the view that the only way to change managers’ work especially in large organizations is to reinvent the processes that govern that work.

In addition, there appears to be gaps in the literature of Management Innovation and how it contributes to HPOs in the African context. This gap exists partially because Management Innovation appears to be tacit and different from the so-called laid down procedures in organizations. It is for this reason that the concept has been adopted by this study to examine how Management Innovation contributes to Organizational Performance in Ghana. Flowing from the debate on Management Innovation, then it is worth studying at least to understand how it combines with other factors to make organizations HPOs.

**Competitive Advantage (CA)**

It has been argued by some scholars that Competitive Advantage is one of the over used terms in the Strategic Management literature, yet its definition continues to be illusive (Ma, 2000). The literature rather appears to describe the concept of Competitive Advantage as; when a firm’s actions in an industry creates economic value and when few competing firms are engaging in similar actions (Porter, 1985); when the firm has the means to edge its rivals when competing for customers (Buffan, 2000; Christensen, 2001) and when the firm’ products are superior in quality than its rivals (Kumar, et al, 1999).

Theoretically therefore, firm resources have been the focus of Competitive Advantage. The Resource Based View (RBV) has become crucial and dominant in the strategic development and
thinking of firms (Wu, 2009). The assumption of the Resource Based View of the firm is that firm resources are heterogeneous and immobile and that performance is basically due to the resources and capabilities that are distinct, valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable (Eisenhardt, & Martin, 2000; Barney, 1991). Firms, according to the RBV are to implement strategies that are distinct, valuable, inimitable and non-substitutable in order to remain competitive and outperform their counterparts (Barney, 2002).

However, examining the role of knowledge as a key resource in achieving Competitive Advantage, the RBV has been extended to what is known as the Knowledge Based View of the firm (KBV). KBV assumes that the firm is a knowledge bearing entity (Kogut, & Zander, 1992) and that the firm uses its organizational capabilities to constantly and continuously create new knowledge resources whilst at the same time exploiting the existing knowledge resources (Nonaka, 1994) for the production of goods and services. The KBV of the firm acknowledges without doubt the role of knowledge in the creation of firm value and when properly managed will lead to high performance of the firm hence its moderating role in this research.

Firm Performance

Performance measurement over the years had focused on financial measures at the expense of holistic approaches. This led researchers to rethink new ways of measuring performance hence the division in the literature as financial and non-financial measures of performance. (Nilsson, & Kald, 2002; Abdel-Maksoud, Dugdale, Luther, 2005). This division appears to be short lived because the inadequacy of financial measures continues to be exposed and the fact that holistic performance measurement began to take roots in the literature of performance management (e.g. Kaplan, & Norton, 1992). Since financial measures are considered to be insufficient, there is therefore the need for broader measures (Abdel-Maksoud, Dugdale, Luther, 2005) leading to a shift in the paradigm from narrow performance measures to strategic performance measures generating a debate in the performance management literature as to what framework should be used to measure High Performance in organizations.

In an attempt to measure organizational performance, Delany, and Huselid, (1996) developed and applied scales that can perceive and predict organizational performance. Though these scales are said to be subjective in nature they have the capacity to predict actual performance of organizations especially in a developing country like Ghana where actual performance measures are difficult to obtain.

CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Flowing from the debate in the theoretical background discussed above, the Conceptual Model presented in Figure 2 below has been developed as a framework to developing High Performance Organization model in Ghana.
**FIGURE 2: CONCEPTUAL MODEL OF HPOS IN GHANA**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INDEPENDENT KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT</th>
<th>MEDIATOR HPO FACTORS</th>
<th>MODERATOR COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE</th>
<th>DEPENDENT ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE</th>
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**Discussion of the Conceptual Model**

The first stage of the study aims at testing the relationship between Knowledge Management and Organizational Performance as well as to find out the relationship between that and the HPO framework and Competitive Advantage. This relationship arises from the fact that Knowledge Management has become an important strategic resource (Darroch, 2005) and a source of high performance due to the power of globalization and ICT (Prahalad, & Krinshman, 2008) and the fact that we are in a knowledge market place (Grant, 1996). In view of the importance of Knowledge Management to Organizational Performance our first hypothesis states:

H1: *There is a positive relationship between Knowledge Management and Organizational Performance, which is mediated by the HPO framework.*

One of the results of effective Knowledge Management is said to be Competitive Advantage (Conor, & Prahalad, 1996) and improved financial performance of firms (Teece, 1998; Nonaka,
& Takeuchi, 1995). This is because the RBV of the firm, which has been extended and derived the KBV of the firm emphasized knowledge as an important resource which when managed properly will lead to high Organizational Performance and thereby gaining Competitive Advantage. The relationship between Knowledge Management and HPO framework is yet to be explored in Ghana. Hence our second hypothesis states:

**H2: Competitive Advantage moderates the relationship between Knowledge Management and HPO.**

In order to evaluate the extent to which Competitive Advantage moderates the relationship between the HPO framework and Organizational Performance we derive our third hypothesis, which states:

**H3: There is a positive relationship between the HPO framework and Organizational Performance but Competitive Advantage moderates this relationship.**

The purpose of this research is to develop a model of High Performance Organizations in Ghana. The literature search on Performance Management and High Performance Organizations for that matter led to the choice of the HPO framework of De Waal, (2010).

In an attempt to find out additional factors that might be helpful in explaining HPOs in Ghana, Management Innovation (Hamel, 2006; Mol, & Birkinshaw, 2009) was isolated from literature and included in the conceptual model in Figure 2 above. In Ghana, it is said that ‘the fish rots from the head’ to emphasize the critical role of management to the success or failure of organizations. Whilst agreeing with De Waal that management quality is important, its innovation becomes more important and must be emphasized to ensure high performance especially in a developing country like Ghana which is faced with a number of challenges namely, infrastructural deficits, excessive bureaucracy, and resistant to change. These challenges held constant, then there is the need for a type of management that will be innovative to ensure Organizational Performance. Drawing on the definition of Management Innovation which includes management processes and systems that enhance organizational effectiveness (Hamel 2006; Mol, & Birkinshaw, 2009), the fourth hypothesis was derived and states:

**H4: There is a positive association between Management Innovation and Organizational Performance such that the HPO framework mediates that relationship and Competitive Advantage moderates it.**

The strategic management literature emphasizes the role of Competitive Advantage in High Performance Organizations but how Management Innovation is also related to the HPO framework has to be explored even though its literature suggests that Organizations that implement Management Innovation may also gain Competitive Advantage (Hamel, 2006) Thus, following on Porter, (1985, 2004) and Hamel, (2006) the fifth hypothesis was derived and states:
H5: Management Innovation is positively related to HPO framework but Competitive Advantage moderates that relationship.

MEASURES

The measures, which may be used for the empirical study of the model of HPOs in Ghana, are represented in Table 1 below.

**TABLE 1: MEASURES**

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As indicated in Table 1 above, Knowledge Management may be measured by scales adapted from Darroch (2005). These measures have been applied and validated in a number of researches and they measure the three dimensions of Knowledge Management namely, knowledge acquisition, knowledge dissemination and responsiveness to knowledge. The HPO factors developed by De Waal have been validated in a number of studies mainly in Europe (De Waal, 2009; 2011). The HPO framework has five factors as indicated in Table 1 above. In order to measure Management Innovation, the scales developed by Mol, & Birkinshaw, (2009) have been adapted. This is a one factor measure of Management Innovation which appears to address specific issues concerning implementation of Management Innovation and distinguishes it from other forms of innovation such as product and process innovation (Mol, & Birkinshaw, 2009).
As appeared in the Table 1 above, Competitive Advantage is also one factor measure based on Porter, (1985 & 2004) whilst Organizational Performance will be measured based on the perception of the firm’s performance relative to other organizations adapted from Delany, and Huselid, (1996). For the detailed measures please refer to the Appendix.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed at developing a Model of High Performance Organizations in Ghana. The study therefore evaluated the existing HPO framework and assessed how variables like Management Innovation, Competitive Advantage and Knowledge Management impact on Organizational Performance. Based on this, the study speculates a positive relationship between Knowledge Management and Organizational Performance, which is mediated by the HPO framework and moderated by Competitive Advantage. It also speculates a positive relationship between Management Innovation and Organizational Performance, which is mediated by the HPO framework and moderated by Competitive Advantage. The strength of this study lies in the combination of various factors into one HPO model in a developing country like Ghana.

Furthermore, indicators for each of the variables have been provided using validated scales. These scales will measure the various factors and relationships discussed in the conceptual model for High Performance Organizations in Ghana. If tested and confirmed the model in this study provides insights to High Performance Organizations in Ghana. These insights may serve as a guide to managers interested in developing their organizations into High Performance Organizations.

FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research will apply the developed conceptual model for an empirical study in the Insurance Industry in Ghana. This is because the Insurance Industry has undergone significant changes since the introduction of the Economic Recovery Programme in the early 1980s. The passage of the Insurance Law in 2006 however brought the operations of the NIC to the required international standards (NIC, 2010). With the discovery and exportation of oil in commercial quantities in 2010, Ghana is poised to attain great social and economic development. The Insurance Companies must become HPOs so as support the oil and other businesses which may enhance the further development of the country.

APPENDIX: MEASURES

Knowledge Acquisition

- Our organization values employee attitudes and opinions
- Our organization has well-developed financial reporting systems.
- We are market focused by actively obtaining customer information
Our organization is sensitive to information about changes in the market place.
Our organization works in partnership with international customers.
Our organization gets information from market surveys.
We acquire knowledge through team work.
We can locate the source of information that we need.
We employ people deemed to have the expertise we need.
Staff have access to all required information on-line.

Knowledge Dissemination

Knowledge is disseminated on-the-job.
Market information is freely disseminated
We use specific techniques to disseminate knowledge
Our organization uses technology to disseminate knowledge
Our organization prefers written communication
In our organization knowledgeable staff share their ideas with other staff.
In our organization we conduct regular meetings to exchange experiences
In our organization we use newsletters to disseminate information.
In our organization some of our staff discuss issues with professional associations.

Responsiveness to Knowledge

In our organization we have adequate knowledge to respond to customers questions.
In our organization we have adequate knowledge to respond to questions on competitors.
In our organization we respond to questions on technology.
In our organization we are flexible by readily changing products.
In our organization we are flexible by changing strategies.
In our organization staff have access to information required to perform their job
Our organization is flexible and opportunistic
In our organization we update our knowledge databases
In our organization we have a well developed human resource function

Continuous Improvement and Renewal

Our organization has adopted a strategy that clearly sets it apart from other organizations
In our organization processes are continuously improved.
In our organization processes are continuously simplified.
In our organization processes are continuously aligned.
In our organization what matters to the organization’s performance is explicitly reported.
In our organization both financial and non-financial information is reported to organizational members.
- Our organization continuously innovates its core competencies.
- Our organization continuously innovates its products, processes and services.

**Openness and Action Orientation**

- The Management of our organization frequently engages in a dialogue with employees.
- Organizational members spend much time on communication, knowledge exchange and learning.
- Organizational members are involved in important processes.
- The management of our organization allows making mistakes.
- The Management of our organization welcomes change
- Our organization is performance driven.

**Management Quality**

- The Management of our organization is trusted by organizational members.
- The Management of our organization has integrity.
- The Management of our organization is a role model for organizational members.
- The Management of our organization applies fast decision making.
- The Management of our organization applies fast action taking.
- The Management of our organization coaches organizational members to achieve better results.
- The Management of our organization focuses on achieving results.
- The Management of our organization is very effective.
- The Management of our organization applies strong leadership.
- The Management of our organization is confident.
- The Management of our organization is decisive with regard to non-performers.

**Workforce Quality**

- The Management of our organization always holds organizational members responsible for their results.
- The Management of our organization inspires organizational members to accomplish extraordinary results.
- Organizational members are trained to be resilient and flexible.
- Our organization has a diverse and complementary workforce.

**Long Term Orientation**

- Our organization grows through partnerships with suppliers and/or customers.
- Our organization maintains good and long-term relationships with all stakeholders.
Our organization aims at servicing the customers as best as possible.
The Management of our organization has been with the company for a long time.
New Management is promoted from within the organization.
Our organization is a secure workplace for organizational members.

Management Innovation

- Our management made major changes in the business structure over the last 3-5 years
- Our Management introduced new practices into the organization over the last 3-5 years
- Our management implemented a new corporate strategies over the last 3-5 years
- Our Management significantly changed our corporate strategies over the last 3-5 years
- Our management implemented advanced management techniques within the organization over the last 3-5 years
- Our Management significantly changed our organizational structure over the last 3-5 years
- Our management implemented diversified organizational structure over the last 3-5 years
- Our management introduced new marketing concepts into the organization over the last 3-5 years
- Our management implemented new marketing strategies over the last 3-5 years
- Our management focuses the workers to commit to a big picture of the organization over the last 3-5 years
- Our management reinvented our work processes over the last 3-5 years
- Our management comes out with novel management principles over the last 3-5 years
- Our management redefine our organization over the last 3-5 years
- Our management improved the business performance of our organization over the last 3-5 years
- Our organizational success over the last 3-5 years can be traced to the innovation of our management

Competitive Advantage

- We can sustain our operations with limited funding.
- We serve our customers in a short time
- Our customers can easily access our services
- We can succeed in service delivery amidst resource constraints
- We achieve most of our set targets
- Our organization is result oriented
- Compared to other organizations, our organization has low costs per transaction
- We have capacity to change
Firm Performance

- Compared with the industry average, we are more profitable.
- We have been registering better returns than any other firm in the industry.
- We have the highest portfolio in the industry.
- The firm's outreach is so far the best in the industry.
- Our market share is the highest in the industry.
- We have a high performance culture.
- We have superior capabilities and execution of duty.
- Over the past five years, our organization met its performance objectives.
- We have high–performing people, in the jobs where they can have the most impact.
- Our front line consistently execute well on activities that are critical to success.
- In general, our organization is performing better than it did five years ago.

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