ORGANISATIONAL LEARNING AS A KNOWLEDGE RETENTION STRATEGY IN SELECTED PUBLIC BROADCASTING CORPORATIONS IN THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT COMMUNITY

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ABSTRACT

This article reports on a study that assessed the organisational learning activities for the purposes of retaining critical knowledge in three Southern African Development Community (SADC) public broadcasting organisations. The article reports the partial findings of a doctoral study that focused on analysing the knowledge retention strategies in three public broadcasting corporations, namely, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC), Department of Broadcasting Services (DBS) and Zimbabwe Broadcasting Corporation (ZBC), in the SADC. The aim of the study was to establish how organisational learning strategy captured and retained knowledge in these public broadcasting corporations. A structured self-administered survey questionnaire was used to purposively sample 162 professionals and managers in the three organisations. The study concluded that through organisational learning the three public

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broadcasting organisations captured and retained knowledge but were limited by the lack of knowledge management officials. The study recommends the establishment of knowledge officers' posts to manage the organisational knowledge and to implement sound mentorship programmes to assist learning in these organisations. While the Human Resources (HR) departments may be managing the training of individuals as a way of acquiring knowledge, the study further recommends that the management should provide HR with more funds to improve the learning culture that allows for innovation, continuous knowledge creation and transformation.

Keywords: knowledge management, knowledge sharing, knowledge retention, knowledge retention strategy, learning organisations, public broadcasting corporation

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Broadcasting organisations generate critical organisational knowledge that may be retained for future use. The nature of the critical knowledge ranges from explicit knowledge in documentaries, to recorded tapes, to tacit knowledge that is held by technicians, accountants, editors, information technology (IT) specialists, public relations staff, librarians, archivists, communication managers, and so on. Knowledge retention is closely related to the two confusing terms, namely, learning organisation and organisational learning. These terms are used interchangeably in this study since they mean almost the same thing to different authors (Gau 2011; Villardi and Leitao 2001).

A learning organisation equips employees with operational knowledge which benefits the organisation if the knowledge is retained. In the extant literature so far surveyed a number of definitions have been identified. Senge (1990) defines a learning organisation as an organisation where people continuously expand their capacity to create results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together. In his seminal work, Senge (1990) describes the basics of a learning organisation as hinged upon personal mastery, mental modes, shared vision, team learning and systems thinking. Garvin, Edmondson and Gino (2008) suggest that in a learning organisation, employees continually create, acquire, and transfer knowledge. While Aggestam (2006) is of the opinion that a learning organisation has a culture that supports learning and innovations both by individuals and by the organisation itself, Langer (2005) understands a learning organisation to mean a form of organisation that actively enables the learning of its members in such a way that it creates positive outcomes such as innovation, efficiency, improved alignment with the environment, and competitive advantage. The two definitions by Senge (1990) and Langer (2005) indicate that the organisation plays a pivotal role in organising, planning and facilitating the learning of its members. The active

involvement of the organisation in the learning of its employees suggests that the organisation wants to see improved service delivery and production as a result.

Du Plessis, Du Plessis and Millert (1999) seem to generalise that in order to get smarter, the organisation needs to capture its organisational knowledge. In a case study done at a medium sized Australian company that Du Plessis et al. (1999) named Exco for the purposes of maintaining its anonymity, they found that the management team had taken a practical, long-term approach to develop the company into a learning organisation though further work is required to encourage teams and individuals to use team learning to develop skills in systems thinking.

To Garvin et al. (2008), the tougher competition, technology advances and shifting customer preferences make it more crucial than ever for companies to be learning organisations. Huber (1991) thinks that an organisation is assumed to learn if any of its units acquires knowledge that it recognises as potentially useful to the organisation. However, Huber's definition of a learning organisation does not reveal the role of the organisation in the learning process. It would appear as if it is the initiative of the units or individuals in that particular unit.

Mitleton-Kelly (n.d., 1) posits that 'a learning organisation is one that is able to change its behaviours and mind-sets as a result of experience'. While acknowledging that organisational learning is more than individual learning interacting in groups and teams, Mitleton-Kelly (n.d.) further charges that learning organisations need to create learning environments that facilitate the achievement of the organisational objectives. Such environments promote learning, a strong network of relationships and distributed leadership.

Kim (2006) provides an overview of the approaches to evaluate the contributions of knowledge management implementations to organisational performance when she claims that a company's ability to innovate and learn enables it to continue to make improvements and create value. Kim (2006) insists that innovation and learning measures may include new product introduction and sales from new products. She does not, however, touch on services when in fact knowledge management, innovation and learning improve service delivery as well. Rashman, Withers and Hartley (2009) conducted a systematic review of the literature on organisational learning and knowledge with relevance to public service organisations. They note that learning within and between organisations have been identified as central to the processes of public service improvement, and the sharing of knowledge is central to such improvement. The public broadcasters that were studied belong to the public sector. These observations do not mention the importance of retaining the shared knowledge in other forms such as record repositories like registries and records centres.

Oliver (2008) conducted a survey to investigate the knowledge management practices of organisations with a quality approach to operations. The quality approach to operations in this context refers to improved or excellent delivery of services that

is efficient and effective. The data was collected from a mail survey and the findings suggested that organisations with a more successful quality programme have regular briefings to share experiences and have a general environment where learning from experience is shared. From that study it emerged that 93.2 per cent of the respondents advocated that employees should engage in training activities while 62 per cent of the respondents acknowledged attending seminars. Knowledge is closely linked to learning and as such organisational learning is all about knowledge acquisition. Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) tacit knowledge transfer through the socialisation process is closely linked to learning by imitation, copying and on the job training. Tacit knowledge acquisition is linked to Wenger's (2006) communities of practice (CoPs). When knowledge has been acquired as such it needs to be retained and maintained as an organisational asset.

Knowledge management initiatives may support and promote a learning culture that may in turn foster growth and thus improve the retention rate (Dubin 2005). A learning organisation facilitates the learning of all its members and continuously transforms itself. It is a fundamental goal for any progressive organisation to use information produced and received in the course of its work to promote organisational learning (Powell 2003). In a learning organisation people engage each other in workshops and seminars so that knowledge is acquired from inside and outside. An organisation with a learning culture favours the building and development of the collective organisational memory so that the knowledge and competencies of the past are transferred to new employees across generations of learning (Garvin 1999; Pedler, Boydell and Burgoyne 1989). Learning organisations use learning to reach their goals and, the benefit of learning is the retention of key personnel to provide organisational memory (Holbeche 2005). Such organisations facilitate the learning of all its members and can take advantage of the ever changing technology.

In a learning organisation, the advantages of information and communications technologies (ICTs) lie in what they can be used for. Mezher (2007) is of the opinion that the major advances in ICTs combined with the rapid growth of global networks have revolutionised learning and knowledge-sharing through communication, integration, collaborative working, online meetings and training. Powell (2003) contends that the use of ICTs in a learning organisation can greatly expand the volume and type of potentially useful information which can be stored, searched, and easily accessed and reused.

2. KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION

Huber (2010) remarks that knowledge acquisition is the process by which knowledge is obtained. Garvin et al. (2008) have identified what they refer to as the three building blocks of a learning organisation and these are: (i) a supportive learning environment; (ii) concrete learning processes; and (iii) leadership that reinforces

learning. Under the second building block, a team or company has a formal process of acquiring knowledge through generating, collecting, interpreting and disseminating information, experimenting with new offerings, gathering intelligence on competitors, customers, and technological trends, identifying and solving problems, developing employee skills through training and education.

The management and the Human Resources (HR) unit play a critical role in the learning and knowledge acquisition process. The role of managers as leaders in a learning organisation includes coaching, teaching and designing (Senge 1990), thus building an enduring capacity for learning through creating opportunities for learning, cultivating the proper tone, and inspiring the process of discussion (Garvin 2000). With a supportive learning environment Garvin et al.'s (2008) interpretation is that employees should feel free and safe to disagree with others, ask naïve questions, own up to mistakes, present minority viewpoints, recognise the value of opposing ideas, and take risks among other issues. The managers at Exco were found to be very effective in uniting the organisation's vision through teamwork and building a learning organisation (Du Plessis et al. 1999). Through leadership that reinforces learning the leaders demonstrate willingness to entertain alternative viewpoints, engage in questioning and listening as well as signal the importance of spending time on problem identification, knowledge transfer and reflection (Garvin et al. 2008). Leadership, expertise and knowledge are characteristics required for a broad range of production styles such as observational documentaries, drama-documentaries, presenter-led documentaries, first person narratives, and so on.

Production styles associated with broadcasting organisations include news, current affairs documentaries, sports, drama, advertisements just to mention a few production style refers to the way television and radio programmes are filmed and looks. According to Dimbley, Dimbley and Whittington (1994), production is a result of careful planning and preparation and highly developed techniques and practiced skills. In spite of the state of the art equipment and other available resources the quality of thinking, imagination, and planning, technical know-how determines the final product. The processes of thinking and methods of working by knowledgeable and experienced producers are likely to ensure more success than failures in broadcasting (Chester, Garrison and Willis 1978; Mohanty 1994; Sibanda 2011). Against this backdrop, the study investigated the organisational learning strategies used by public broadcasting organisations to capture and retain the valuable knowledge that the organisations acquire.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study draws from Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) theory of organisational knowledge conversion which views the interaction processes of tacit and explicit knowledge as an essential feature in knowledge management. This theory identifies

socialization, externalization, combination and internalization (SECI) as the four modes of interaction that facilitate knowledge management in an organisation. It has since been modified by Nonaka and his associates (Nonaka 1994; Nonaka et al. 1994; Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995; Nonaka et al. 2000). Conversion of knowledge from one form to another, results in some learning taking place, new knowledge being created, expansion of knowledge and retention of knowledge in the organisational system. The sharing of knowledge and experiences by the experienced with new entrants means that when retirees leave they leave but their knowledge has been retained by new and young employees who remain behind. Retention of knowledge includes all activities that preserve knowledge and allow it to remain in the system once it has been introduced. It includes all activities that maintain the viability of knowledge within the system (Newman and Conrad 1999). The knowledge conversion through social interaction between individuals and organisations is further discussed below.

3.1. Socialisation (tacit to tacit–socialization)

Socialisation describes an environment where individuals or groups of individuals share personal experiences, mental modes, beliefs, perspectives and tacit knowledge through individual direct interaction (Harsh 2009; Nold 2009). During socialization, individuals share experiences thereby creating tacit knowledge such as mental models and technical skills. In organisations employees share their experiences, mental models, beliefs and perspectives. New employees who may have greater knowledge of ICTs, for instance, have something to offer. According to this model, individuals may acquire knowledge through observation, imitation and practice without using language. For this reason, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995, 63) believe that 'Apprentices work with their masters and learn craftsmanship not through language but through observation, imitation and practice'. Brainstorming camps (*tama dashi kai*) and informal meetings set up at Honda to solve complex development projects were examples of socialization within a learning context which yielded new knowledge.

3.2. Externalization (tacit to explicit–externalization)

In the opinion of Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995, 64), 'externalization is a process of articulating tacit knowledge into explicit concepts'. Through externalization tacit knowledge becomes explicit 'taking the shapes of metaphors, analogies, concepts, hypotheses or models'. Externalization describes a process whereby tacit knowledge is converted into a form that is capable of being transmitted to others, outside of the immediate group through creation of procedures, emails, and any other forms of media that transmit knowledge to a wider sphere (Nold 2009). Examples of externalizing knowledge may be through speaking to an individual, writing, drawing a diagram, giving a presentation or even conducting a lecture.

3.3. Combination (explicit to explicit–combination)

Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) interpretation of a combination is that it is a process of systematising concepts into a knowledge system. Different bodies of explicit knowledge are combined. While Feller et al. (2013) define a combination as a process of merging diverse explicit knowledge items into more complex and systemic sets of explicit knowledge, Nold (2009) understands it (combination) to mean a process whereby individuals outside of the immediate sphere of personal contact receive knowledge that has been shared through some common media to combine the shared knowledge with existing tacit knowledge. When individuals communicate through various means they exchange and combine knowledge through documents, meetings, telephone conversations, and computerized communication networks. Externalization is largely responsible for the knowledge created in schools through education and training.

3.4. Internalization (explicit to tacit–internalization)

Internalization is the process of embodying explicit knowledge into tacit knowledge. Individuals or groups process newly received knowledge with their own tacit knowledge, and then merge knowledge from internal and external sources to create an entirely new nugget of knowledge (Nold 2009). It is closely related to learning by doing. Nonaka and Takeuchi (1995) argue that experiences through socialization, externalization and combination become valuable assets when they are internalized into individuals' tacit knowledge bases in the form of shared mental models or technical know-how. Documentation helps individuals to internalize their experiences, thus enriching their tacit knowledge. Manuals facilitate the transfer of explicit knowledge to other people, thus helping them to experience the experiences of others indirectly.

Various learning activities that take place result in knowledge transfer, which Newman and Conrad (1999) view as the flow of knowledge from one party to another, and these include communication, translation, conversion, filtering and rendering. Knowledge transfer and retention occurs when people as members of the same and/ or different organisations, exchange tacit and explicit knowledge (Jennex 2008). These four modes of Nonaka and Takeuchi's SECI model show that knowledge can be transferred from one employee to another, from the heads of employees to documents/databases through knowledge conversion thus retaining knowledge in the organisation system. Through learning by doing, when juniors understudy seniors, such as in the engineering/transmission sections of the broadcasting organisation, knowledge is converted from explicit to tacit.

4. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Organisations are aware that most of their organisational knowledge resides in their employees' heads (Levy 2011; Staplehurst and Ragsdell 2010) and therefore put strategies in place to unlock and capture it in order to avoid the immense damage done when it goes out of the door. Within the broadcasting environment, supervision, direction and coordination as well as provision of world class quality programmes require utilisation of knowledge and retention of that knowledge. The ZBC is finding it challenging to achieve its objectives because of knowledge flight from the organisation, redundant equipment, technological obsolescence and underfunding among other challenges. Through literature search and interviews with staff (managers) from the organisations, the researcher noted that knowledgeable, talented and highly qualified professionals were leaving these organisations resulting in the loss of valuable organisational knowledge (SAMP 2004). In 2008, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) Board Chairperson reported that they had up-scaled some strategic functions and evolved a holistic reward system 'and staff wellness strategy in pursuit of the goal of becoming South Africa's employer of choice so as to minimise loss of talent. While numerous appointments were made, there have also been on-going resignations of skilled and knowledgeable staff, some of who have joined competitors' (SABC 2008, 2).

In the context of the ZBC, the brain drain of skilled professionals from Zimbabwe has become particularly voluminous and damaging over the last decade (SAMP 2004). Interviews with the head of the DBS in Botswana revealed that this organisation has lost knowledgeable staff and experts in journalism, reporting, transmission, technicians, ICT specialists, and so on to private media organisations and some have migrated to the West, particularly Australia. The question then arises: what organisational learning measures have been put in place to capture and retain valuable knowledge that these public broadcasting corporations need? The purpose of this study was to establish how organisational learning strategy captured and retained knowledge in these public broadcasting corporations (SABC, ZBC and DBS) in order to capture and retain knowledge in the face of high turnover of skilled staff. Specifically, the objectives of the study were to:

i.   identify the organisational learning knowledge acquisition activities in the three public broadcasting corporations;

ii. establish how the organisation's management facilitate knowledge acquisition through learning;

iii. find out the role of Human Resource (HR) in enabling knowledge conversions for retention purposes.

5. METHODOLOGY

The study used both qualitative and quantitative research design in order to complement the other. The data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire and interviews from a target of 240 professional and management staff, respectively, complemented by document review and observations in the three SADC public broadcasting organisations. The responses were received from 162 professional staff and their managers included giving a response rate of 68 per cent. Document review consisting of director's reports, annual reports and policy documents was also conducted in order to supplement the data. The survey questionnaire was subjected to a pilot study to enhance the validity and reliability of results. The quantitative data was analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to generate descriptive statistics while the qualitative data was analysed thematically. Ethical aspects were ensured through making the respondents anonymous during analysis and reporting of the results, thereby securing the respondents' consent and ensuring that the results from the study were not divulged to any third party or used for any other purpose.

Not every department, section, division or unit participated in the study. The research reported here focused exclusively on sections that provided core and administrative business services of broadcasting. Table 1 gives a summary of the different departments, positions and numbers of those who participated in the study.

Table 1:   Departments and roles of respondents (N = 240)

Department	Position/role	Number of respondents
Radio services	Broadcasting officers, producers, editors, reporters, journalists, radio announcers, station managers	44
Television services	Broadcasting officers, camera persons, channel controller; editors, reporters, journalists	38
Sales and marketing	Sales and marketing officers, events coordinator	24
Library/Archives	Librarians; archivists	26
Corporate communications	Communication specialists, public relations officer	20
Information technology	IT officers, systems administrator	20

| Engineering/transmission | Technical superintendent, broadcasting engineers, transmission engineers | 32 |
| Administration (transport, supplies, stores, accounts, HR, legal services) | Fleet supervisor, transport administrator, accounting officers, legal officers, human resource officers, stores and supplies officers | 36 |

It was decided to restrict the survey to this group and these sections because they form the primary units of broadcasters within their organisations and the individuals' knowledge was required to be retained. The impact of retaining the acquired knowledge within these categories was significant as tacit knowledge tended to be more prominent here. The prepared questionnaire was piloted with a small group of broadcasting professionals in order to validate its content and ascertain that the questions were appropriate to the potential respondents. After the necessary adjustments were made, the questionnaire was then administered to 240 individuals. Of these, 162 were completed and returned.

6. RESULTS

6.1. Profile of respondents

Managers and professionals were asked questions about personal information, such as gender, age, educational level and occupation. Regarding the respondents' ages, the data obtained from the questionnaires indicated that the highest number of respondents were aged 25–35 years (71; 43.2%) followed by 36–46 years (57; 34.5%). Respondents in the age group 47–57 years and those less than 25 were ranked third and fourth, with 29 (17.5%) and six (3.6%), respectively. The lowest number consisted of two (1.2%) respondents between the ages of 58–65 years. There were no respondents aged above 65. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2:   Respondents' ages (N = 165)

Age	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents (%)
Less than 25	6	3.6%
25--35	71	43.2%
36--46	57	34.5%
47--57	29	17.5%
58--65	2	1.2%
Above 65	0	0%

Analysis by gender revealed that there were more male respondents (85; 52%) than females (80; 48%) in the sample that was studied. The results are shown in Figure 1.
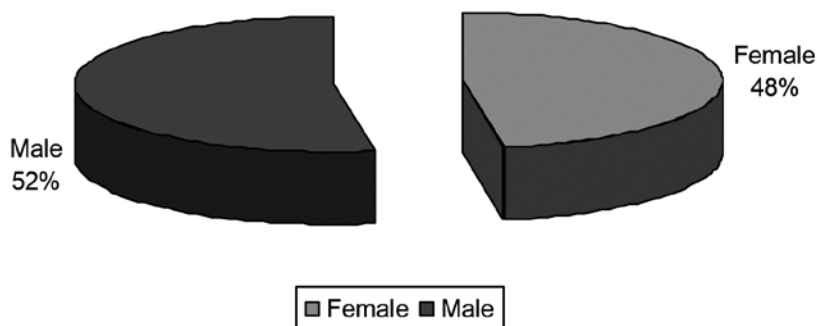

Figure 1:   Respondents' gender distribution (N = 165)

Analysed separately, the data on gender disparity was even wider at managerial level. Out of the 37 managers who provided qualitative data by way of interviews, 10 (27%) were females and 27 (73%) were males. Further discussions with some of the female heads revealed that generally women were reluctant to take up managerial posts because of their family commitments, dual roles at home, and the demands and challenges that are associated with managerial positions.

Regarding the length of service of the participating managers it emerged that 10 (27%) had worked for between 0–5years; six (16%) for 6–10 years; nine (24.3%) for 11–20 years; 11 (29.72%) for 21–30 years; and one (2.70%) for 32–40 years. No manager indicated the 'other category'. In terms of the respondents' education and training levels, the frequency distribution revealed that 88 (54.04%) of the respondents had acquired a bachelor's degree; 49 (30%) were diploma holders; and 11 (6.21%) had a master's degree. Matric/Advanced level/high school accounted for nine (5.59%), while eight (4.16%) had post matric and post advanced level certificates. There were no responses to the PhD qualification. From the interviews it was revealed that five managers were diploma holders; 25 had first degrees; four had master's degrees; and one indicated a post high school certificate. Another interviewee mentioned a 'higher degree' but was reluctant to shed more light or to reveal whether it was an honours or a master's degree.

The researcher assumed that the sampled respondents would give useful opinions on the aspects that were covered in both the questionnaire and interview guide in respect of their broadcasting organisations.

6.2. Knowledge acquisition

A question was asked (to both managers and professional staff) to establish what knowledge acquisition activities were taking place in the broadcasting organisations. The respondents had the option of selecting more than one answer. The majority of the respondents (99; 61.5%) indicated that knowledge was acquired through training followed by workshops/seminars (97; 60.2%), education (56; 34.7%) and mentoring (38; 23.6%). The findings are represented in Figure 2.
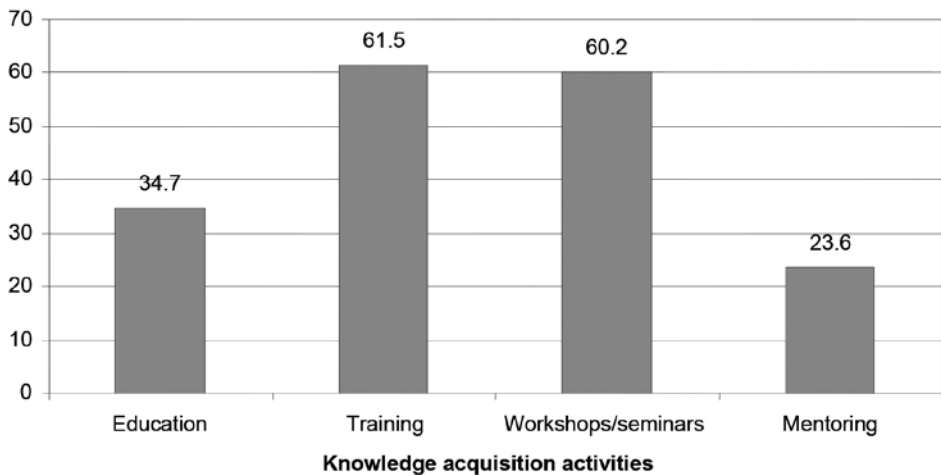

Figure 2:   Knowledge acquisition activities in the organisation

While Huber (2010) states that knowledge acquisition is the process by which knowledge is obtained, Nonaka and Takeuchi (1985) expound that organisational knowledge is produced and acquired when employees interact. Knowledge is generated and acquired through interaction processes, such as training, education, workshops, seminars, storytelling, mentoring and apprenticeship. Individuals acquire new knowledge through learning and the behaviour change is noted performance.

During the interviews, managers were asked about how education, training, seminars workshops, mentoring and apprenticeship assisted their organisation to acquire and generate knowledge. In response the majority (36) of the managers spoke highly of mentoring but went on to reveal that there were no mentoring programmes in place. One manager even said, 'Mentoring is there in name but experienced employees are free to implement it or not.' At the ZBC, the Manager for Online News noted that new employees such as reporters struggled and as such they had been paired with more experienced journalists and reporters for guidance in their daily operations. At the SABC, the researcher gathered from the interviewees that

mentorship had just started but it was an informal arrangement as there was no formal mentorship programme. Vinson (2003) posits that to truly learn from employees, organisations must have knowledge sharing programmes in place. At the DBS, mentoring was largely viewed as a way of continuous improvement and knowledge generation activity but without formal arrangement to see its implementation. The interviews confirmed that knowledge is acquired through education; discussions in meetings and newsrooms; training; holding seminars and workshops; and mentoring the new employees.

Managers were asked about how their broadcasting organisations encouraged and promoted acquisition of knowledge through learning. The data obtained through the interviews revealed that all the three organisations funded their employees to undertake studies and acquire basic degrees or advanced degrees at local and regional universities. This finding indicates that the three public broadcasting organisations are indeed learning organisations as suggested by Senge (1990) who regards a learning organisation as one which provides members with energy to keep exploring the world and adjusting themselves to changes. In the face-to-face interviews, managers were asked if they would regard their organisations as learning organisations and to explain their opinions. All the managers revealed that the three public organisations were learning organisations and had a policy to train all of their respective employees. Johannessen, Olaisen and Olsen (2001) note that organisational learning produces organisational knowledge which, if retained, gives the organisation competitive advantage. Specifically the findings from the three broadcasting corporations indicated that the three organisations send their employees for training to the following universities: University of Botswana and Limkokwin University in Botswana, and Rhodes University and University of the Witwatersrand in South Africa. In Zimbabwe, the ZBC sponsors its employees to attend schooling at Midlands State University, National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe Open University and technical colleges, namely, Harare Polytechnical College, Bulawayo Polytechnical College, Gweru Polytechnical College, Masvingo Technical College, and Mutare Technical College. In most cases, employees attended in-house training and workshops to improve and acquire new knowledge and capabilities. The current study's findings confirmed Du Plessis et al.'s (1999) view that a learning organisation is continually getting smarter because learning is planned and systematic. At the SABC, bursaries and loans are available for those employees who want to further their education. Such employees would later be required to repay the loans. This could be one retention strategy that the SABC as a public broadcaster could use to retain staff and knowledge.

The 12 managers interviewed at the ZBC cited economic problems and sanctions as major challenges hampering training and education of the corporation's employees. In the event that some funds were availed for studying, those employees would be bonded for a period equivalent to their absence from work while studying. The managers also indicated that the ZBC's experienced expertise had left to join

other broadcasting organisations in the region and abroad. Their departure had left a performance gap due to loss of critical knowledge in its various sections. However, the head of the HR resource section indicated that efforts were being made to curtail the situation through offering attractive packages and benefits to encourage those who had left the ZBC to return.

6.3. HR and organisational learning

The HR sections avail funding for workshops and seminars to equip employees with knowledge and sharpen their skills for better performance at work. From such gatherings employees generate knowledge that can be retained in the organisation. By so doing the organisation renews and transforms itself continuously. The HR managers of the broadcasting organisations were asked the role of their sections in enhancing the acquisition and generation of knowledge. The face-to-face interviews revealed that two of the surveyed organisations (SABC and ZBC) have training and development units within the HR departments. These units are responsible for coordinating all the training that takes place in the organisation. The other organisation (DBS) sends its staff for training to other government departments.

The interviewees revealed that employees are 'sent to other broadcasting organisations such as the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and Deutsche Welle in Germany where they learn and bring new ideas'. One IT Manager opined that, 'training brings new ways of thinking thus we send our people to Germany, USA and the Far East (China and Japan) for training'. The learning enables workers to acquire new knowledge and skills which in turn should be retained as organisational knowledge to improve the organisation's resiliency in times of crises and when the knowledgeable employees leave the organisation. This was also consistent with Turban, McClean and Wetherbe (2004) who refer to organisational learning as the development of new knowledge and insights that have the potential to influence an organisation's behaviour.

One of the findings was that some individuals in the organisations started in the low ranks and have been promoted to higher positions. This was credited to the culture of learning in the organisations as a strategy towards knowledge retention in the organisations. For instance, some individuals started as canteen operators but have advanced to technicians and camera operators, while some who started as receptionists are now executive secretaries. The head of HR at the ZBC revealed that as part of its organisational training policy, the ZBC reimburses 50 per cent of the costs upon successful completion of a relevant course.

An organisation's HR department can facilitate the knowledge conversion (tacit and explicit) as a way of creating new knowledge and retaining it as organisational knowledge. This can be done through employee participation in discussions on particular topics during workshops/seminars, learning, teaching, debates and brainstorming among other activities (Afiouni 2008). Individuals can

share knowledge during interaction as described by Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) socialisation activities in the knowledge conversion theory. Interviews were held with all the three HR managers of the three organisations. Two HR managers indicated that they had training officers who facilitated the training of employees and holding of workshops and seminars when necessary. The other organisation did not have a training section but would send their employees for training to other ministries or better engage consultants when the need arose.

From the questionnaire a question was asked to establish how the HR department facilitates the sharing of tacit knowledge between individuals and the results were as follows: brainstorming 29 (18.1%), discussions 32 (20%), debates 6 (3.6%), learning 71 (44.6%), teaching 29 (17.9%) and CoPs 8 (5%). Examples of CoPs include those of journalists, reporters, records managers, ICT managers to mention but a few. The responses indicated that the HR department plays an important role in overseeing the learning of its organisational members. Figure 3 presents the findings.
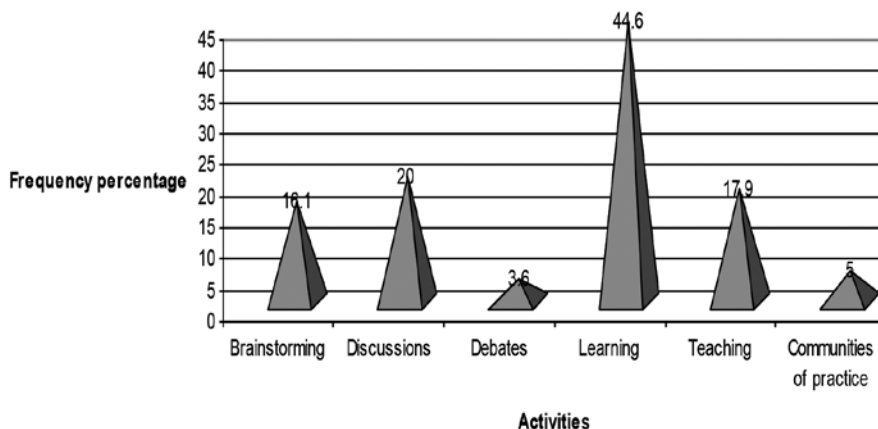

Figure 3:   How HR facilitates knowledge sharing

The HR training divisions coordinate and facilitate the training of organisational employees by arranging workshops, seminars and short courses. The interviewed managers indicated that supervisors in various sections of the broadcasting organisations identify training needs by establishing performance gaps, thus assessing an individual employee's current performance against the expectations. The supervisors may also identify needs for training when new equipment and technology is to be introduced to employees who do not have the background knowledge. Upon identifying training needs, the immediate supervisors place requests to the training co-ordinators of each of the broadcasting organisations studied.

During the interviews managers were asked if the public broadcasting corporations had knowledge management officers. The findings indicated that all the three organisations did not have a post for knowledge officers. The closest posts were HR, librarian, records manager and archivist.

6.4. Distribution of tacit knowledge through learning

When asked if tacit knowledge was distributed and shared through formal socialisation activities, it was clear that workers acquired most of their knowledge while at work (101; 62.34%), meetings (76; 46.9%) and apprenticeship (48; 29.62%). This finding is consistent with Taylor's (2007) statement that many organisations have individual learning programmes for staff, including induction. The rest of the responses were as follows; mentorship 33 (20.37%), formal CoPs 2 (1.24%), brainstorming sessions 30 (18.5%), formal learning 21(12.9%), writing 15 (9.25%) and adding 2 (1.23%). The results are presented graphically in Figure 4.
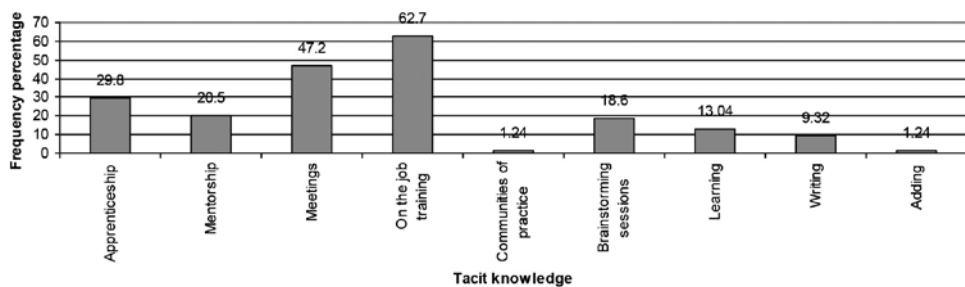

Figure 4:   Methods of acquiring tacit knowledge

During the face-to-face interviews with radio and television services managers (middle and line managers) of the three broadcasting organisations, it emerged that news teams and journalists meet in editorial meetings where they discuss and share knowledge on stories and news items. At these meetings, managers brainstorm, discuss and share their tacit knowledge.

In the main questionnaire respondents were also asked if tacit knowledge was distributed and shared through informal socialisation processes and activities. Sixty-six (40.74%) of the respondents indicated that tacit knowledge is distributed and shared through employee experiences, while 49 (30.2%) respondents shared knowledge during sporting activities as they interact informally and discuss work issues with colleagues. The finding is in line with Turban et al. (2008) who refer to a learning organisation as an organisation's capability of learning from its past experience, learning from the best practices of others, and transferring knowledge

quickly and efficiently within the organisation. Some 42 (25.9%) respondents indicated that they share tacit knowledge by spending time with each other and 33 (20.37%) respondents shared tacit knowledge during retreat resort. Only one (0.61%) respondent indicated informal CoPs. In the 'any other' category respondents identified media events and staff functions such as Women's Day events.

Interviews with the managers revealed that all the three organisations studied had sporting activities as social events in order to encourage socialisation, sharing information and knowledge in a non-working environment. Employees from different sections, provinces and regions have formed several sporting teams for various sporting disciplines. Such teams meet on arranged dates to engage in competitions and during these formal and informal gatherings, employees meet and discuss some tasks. In this way they learn from each other by sharing their tacit knowledge with other workers from whom they are geographically separated.

The study found the SECI model quite appropriate since knowledge is retained in the organisational system in documents, databases and employees. The three broadcasting organisations' employees learning and acquisition of knowledge are attested to by the SECI model (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). The SECI model describes the knowledge acquisition and retention in the organisation through socialisation, externalisation, combination and internalisation (Nonaka and Takeuchi 1995). The current study established that the SECI model was appropriate in explaining knowledge retention in the broadcasting organisations through in-house trainings, workshops, seminars, formal and informal gatherings as learning organisations. In a way this helps the organisation to harness, capture, harvest and retain the knowledge from transient workforces and ageing workers. The valuable tacit knowledge in individual employees is converted to explicit knowledge through the process of externalization. In this way relevant knowledge is captured, stored and retrieved and then applied to the current decision-making activity in the broadcasting corporations. However, due to media volatility and technological obsolescence there is a need to identify and capture critical knowledge and store it in updated knowledge storage media formats. The researcher found the SECI model relevant to the study just like studies done elsewhere by Fowler and Pryke (2003).

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study attempted to establish organisational learning as knowledge retention strategies in selected SADC public broadcasting corporations. The findings indicate that the three broadcasting corporations are aware of the importance of knowledge acquisition through learning as evidenced by sending their employees to various universities and polytechnic colleges as well as conducting workshops, seminars and attending international conferences. Short courses attended in other countries are

also a source of new knowledge. In line with this it was found that their respective HR sections are supportive of the motive to acquire new knowledge through learning.

The three public broadcasting corporations should formalise mentoring programmes to facilitate knowledge transfer from the experienced and knowledgeable individuals to less experienced ones. Research has found that human beings learn effectively from each other.

The HR section at the DBS in Botswana should establish a training department that can identify specific training needs in its organisation rather than depending on generic training programmes offered in other ministries as is currently the case.

It is also recommended that the three organisations forge collaborative synergies, such as in news production, innovations, use of ICTs, and so on with other internationally established broadcasting organisations to exchange knowledge on all activities that support broadcasting. Another recommendation is that the three broadcasting organisations encourage the creation of CoPs of reporters, journalists, engineers and archivists to mention but a few, in order to facilitate learning from each other. These CoPs may be extended to international broadcasters.

While the HR section may be managing the training of individuals, the study recommends the establishment of a Knowledge Officer post to coordinate all organisational learning activities in each of the broadcasting corporations.

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SABC *see* South African Broadcasting Corporation.

SAMP *see* Southern African Migration Project.

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