



Communication and Effective Change Management in Family-Owned Supermarkets in Kenya; A Case Study of Quickmart Supermarket

Leseiyo Moses^{a}, Magina Ochieno^b, Ochieno Consolata^c*

^{a,b,c} Management University of Africa

ABSTRACT

Market dynamics, rapidly changing globalization trends, liberalization, competitive pressures, and advancements of technology are forcing family-owned organizations to respond to the external environment changes by continuously changing their management and internal operational strategies to survive or prosper. This study examined the influence of communication on change management in family-owned supermarkets in Kenya. A case study of Quickmart Supermarket. This study was anchored on a theoretical framework involving Kotter's 8 step change management model. The descriptive cross-sectional design was used. The target population for this study comprised of 240 management employees drawn from management levels 1 to 4. A focused study was done for regional managers, and face-to-face interviews were conducted for senior managers, in addition, questionnaires were used to collect data from the 150 sampled employees. Validity tests were used to reduce threat to content validity while reliability tests were used to test consistent, and to ensure the results were free from bias. All the statistical analysis was done using SPSS. The findings obtained indicated that communication plays a major role in minimizing resistance to change. However, in this study, the respondents felt that communication alone was not enough, it needed to be backed by the vision, purpose, and the benefits of the change. With this regard, communication effective for it to enhance the ability to adapt to new changes. The study recommended that effective communication is key when managing change. To ensure effective change management occurs, family-owned supermarkets in Kenya must ensure that they communicate the purpose, the vision, and the benefits of change.

Keywords: Communication, Resistance to Change

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Change is an essential aspect of business growth and development (Burnes, 2004). However, managing change in family-owned businesses can be a complex process that requires effective communication strategies. This article explores the role of communication in effective change management in family-owned supermarkets in Kenya, using the case study of Quickmart Supermarket. Visser & Chiloane-Tsoka, (2014) take a multi-level approach, examining the impact of communication strategies at the global, continental, regional, and national levels. At the global level, effective communication is critical to managing change in family-owned businesses. In a globalized economy, family-owned businesses face unique challenges that require effective communication strategies. Kotter & Schelinger, (2008) explore the role of communication in facilitating effective change management in family-owned supermarkets, highlighting the importance of communication in building trust, promoting employee involvement, and creating a shared vision for the future. Their findings have important implications for family-owned businesses worldwide (Canterino & Cirella, 2013).

Njenga, (2016) assert that effective communication is particularly important in Africa, where family-owned businesses are a significant source of employment and economic growth. However, family-owned businesses in Africa face unique challenges, including access to finance, skills development, and market opportunities. By examining the role of communication in effective change management in family-owned supermarkets in Kenya, the authors provide valuable insights that can be applied across the African continent. According to Osisioma (2004) the East African region, where family-owned businesses are an important component of the economy. In this context, the authors examine the role of communication in facilitating effective change management in family-owned supermarkets. They identify a number of key success factors, including effective leadership, clear communication, and employee involvement. These findings have important implications for businesses operating in the East African region. Okeyo, Nwoye, and Onoyima, (2020) state that at the national level family-owned businesses are a significant source of employment and economic growth. Using the case study of Quickmart Supermarket, the authors explored the role of communication in effective change management. They identify a number of key factors that can contribute to successful change management, including clear communication, employee involvement, and leadership. Their findings have important implications for family-owned businesses in Kenya, and can help to inform the development of effective communication strategies.

Keter, (2014) mentioned the effective communication is critical to managing change in family-owned supermarkets in Kenya. The authors' multi-level approach highlights the importance of effective communication strategies at the global, continental, regional, and national levels. Their findings have important implications for family-owned businesses worldwide, and provide practical insights that can be applied by companies seeking to improve their change management practices. By emphasizing the importance of effective communication in building trust, promoting employee involvement, and

creating a shared vision for the future, the authors provide a blueprint for family-owned businesses seeking to remain competitive in a rapidly changing business environment. In another study in Nigeria about family business, succession, and survival strategies Okeyo, Nwoye, and Onoyima, (2020), studied three family business and they found out that the three businesses were sustained after a leadership transition from the founders. Their conceptual framework was based on transformational leadership theory. Keter, (2014) Studied change management and succession in family-owned small and medium enterprises in Nairobi. The objective of the study was to establish the influence of change management and succession in family-owned small and medium enterprises in Nairobi area. In his findings he noted that the change management adopted by family-owned small and medium enterprises in Nairobi were quality leadership, long-term succession planning, open planning of leadership transfer, and effective communication between founders and succeeding generation and good management practice.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Organizations must continually adapt new strategies to achieve a strategic fit with the ever-dynamic environmental changes. Managing change is a complex task, a fact many case studies and various literature consensually agree on. In a five-year study conducted by McKinsey consulting firm on organizations that underwent organizational change, out of 1536 companies surveyed only 38% of managers agreed the process succeeded. The challenge is more evident in surviving today's competitive environment since organizations are forced to quickly respond and adapt to survive the pressures of the external environmental forces (Hourmatallah & Khalis, 2019).

The livelihood of 85% of private sector employees globally depends on family business which is an important consideration that should attract more focus and attention in organizational and management literature mainstream studies (Cassia et al., 2012). Due to rapid changes in the technology space and global economy, development of new change capabilities is crucial to enable family-owned businesses survive the turbulent environments (Canterino, 2013). Sharmilee (2014) indicate that family-owned businesses fail within 3-4 years of their existence and those which exist for more than 5 years barely survive the transition. The Kenyan retail and wholesale sector was the 6th largest contributor to national Gross domestic product, contributing 7.9 % in 2021 recording a drop from previous year's 8.1 % (KNBS, 2022). The sector is one of the largest private employers of which supermarkets constitute a major segment of the sector (Wambui, & Maina, 2022). The Kenya supermarket business environment landscape has witnessed rapid proliferation of small players, entrants of foreign firms, mergers and acquisitions of big and medium players. The retail industry in Kenya is largely dominated by family-owned and run business entities.

Mergers and acquisitions and rapid store expansion are some of the change initiatives Kenya supermarket retail players have engaged but failed to achieve desired growth objectives or resuscitate loss making streak. An example of a failed acquisition strategy in the Kenyan retail sector is the Choppies acquisition of Ukwala supermarket in 2016. The merger encountered turbulence and four years later, Choppies closed shop and exited the market (The East African, 2020). Retail chain Mulleys Supermarket, which is family owned announced the closure of five of its 10 branches, in a shock downsizing plan that saw hundreds of staff laid off in an ambitious expansion program that went the wrong way (Business Daily, Nov 2021). One of the problems that have plagued major supermarkets in Kenya is that they are a family ran businesses with little external oversight (Mugendi, 2021).

Several studies have been done in investigating the influence of communication on effective change management. Canterino and Cirella (2013) examined organizational transformations in an Italian family-owned business company. A study gap is the focus was not on Kenyan supermarkets. Otinda (2015) studied change management of a merger and acquisition at L'oreal a consumer company in the fast-moving goods sector, Daniel (2019) studied effect of change management on performance of firms in Nigeria, while Mwiriki (2015) studied strategic change management and performance of large supermarkets in Nairobi County, both studies focused on the effect of change management on performance. The mentioned studies reveal conceptual and context gaps that this study seemed to examine. This study explores the effect communication on effective change management in family-owned supermarkets in Kenya and to find answers to questions on challenges faced during organizational change place to overcome these challenges.

1.3 Specific Objectives

To establish the influence of communication on effective change management in family-owned supermarkets in Kenya. A case study of Quickmart Supermarket

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Literature Review

The anchor theory guiding the study objectives is the Kotter eight step model explaining the phases a change process undergoes highlighting the importance of a leadership that creates urgency, shares the intended vision with employees while guiding them and anchoring the changes through sustained reinforced communication, alignment, and involvement of the entire organization's employees.

2.1.1 Kotter 8 Step Model

The Kotter change management model, which outlines a sequence of eight steps for successful organizational change, serves as the foundation for this study. According to Kotter (1995), these steps involve creating a sense of urgency among leadership or change agents, forming a guiding coalition,

defining a clear vision and strategy, communicating the change vision effectively, empowering broad-based action, generating and articulating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change, and anchoring new approaches in the culture to sustain the change.

The research study variables originate their relevance from Kotter's eight steps of change management. According to Kotter any change process must have a leadership committed towards facilitating the change process, a change leader/manager/agent that effectively guides the process by creating readiness for change adoption among the employees, through effective communication, top management support and employee involvement and enablement. The process outcome is aimed at reducing resistance to change and ensuring successful change adoption. The steps are meant to detach the organization from the current state, manage the transition process towards adopting the new change and reinforce the new change culture. The theory eight steps anchor and illuminates the guidance path of the study variables.

2.2 Empirical Literature Review

The empirical literature review examined several studies conducted in change management as a practice in various sectors. The review examined findings from empirical studies which provided a guide to the study research framework and provided insights in addition to ones captured in the theoretical literature review.

2.2.1 Communication and Effective Change Management

Riehl, Beckert and Koch (2019) studied how communication can be effectively used to influence acceptance of change among employees. They conducted an online survey on a population of 608 German employees recently subjected to a change in their workplace across industries and occupations. Among the change processes participants reported, 30.3% were involved in internal restructuring, 24.8% referred to a change in organizational culture, 24.3% concerned with change in technology, 10.5% strategic refocus, 5.6% relocation adjustments, and 4.4% a merger or buy-out.

The results from study never showed differences based on the type of change. Change communication variables accounted for the largest share of variance, transparent communication, and inclusion of employees in the change process resulted in positive change acceptance. The findings showed the importance of transparent change communication in organizations, if well expressed and with employees closely engaged, contributes to increased positive acceptance, less resistance and active employee participation towards change implementation.

Mutiso (2017) conducted a study on change management communications: A case of PS Kenya's Orion Project. The study examined communications influence on staff motivation in a change management process within PS Kenya's ORION change project. The study objectives were to establish the effect of change communications and influence of composition of change communications team on staff motivation. It also examined the challenges that change management teams faced during the change process. The study findings revealed that, communication in change management is critical in creating a positive attitude about the change among employees and choice of communication type used is also important in the effective engagement of employees. According to the study findings, the constitution of a change management communication team whose composition also involves the staff helps improve motivation among the members.

Gichungi (2014) conducted a case study at Unilever Kenya examining the influence of communication strategy on change management. An interview guide was used collect primary data. The study results revealed that communication is useful in providing employees with adequate understanding of change objectives, enhances clarity of process and reveals impact it causes. It provides employees with an opportunity to send feedback input to management which measures change adaption progress. The study revealed the pace of acceptance and implementation of change was highly dependent on how well the communication was done. The study further revealed communication played a vital role in reducing resistance to change and improved customer service experience during the change process because of minimal service disruptions.

2.3 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shows the relationship between the change management practice determinants which are the study independent variable namely Communication and its effect on the dependent variable which is organizational resistance to change.

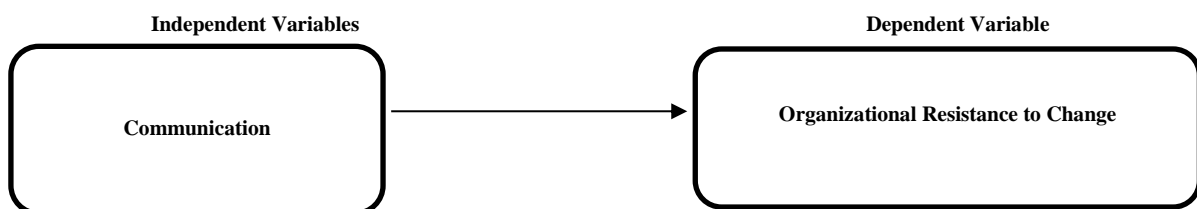


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

3.0 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

The study adopted a mixed method research design. The mixed method was utilized in the interview guide and in questionnaire as research instruments. A descriptive cross sectional research design was used to define the occurrence of a phenomenon or to compare factors in an organization at a particular time. The descriptive cross-sectional design compares factors in an organization at a particular time as opposed to longitudinal designs where variables are studied over a period of time (Saunders *et al.*, 2016).

3.2 Target Population

The target population for this study comprised 240 management employees drawn from management levels 1 to 4, the senior most being level 1 in descending order to level 4. The four levels constitute the CEO, departmental heads, category section heads, branch managers and assistants and other middle management staff working in Quick mart Supermarket.

Table 1: Target Population

Rank	level 1	level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Totals
Department					
Snr management	4				4
Finance		1	38		39
Commercial		1	8	50	59
Operations		1	24	86	111
Hr		1	2	1	4
IT		1	7		8
Audit			1		1
Compliance			1		1
Ehs		1			1
Marketing			2	2	4
Supplies		1	6	1	8
Totals	4	7	89	140	240

Source - Retail Association of Kenya (RETRAK) October 2022

The study drew its sample from the population size of Quickmart Senior managers, departmental heads, senior and middle level managers since they were solely responsible for decisions concerning organizational change. The study used stratified random sampling techniques. Stratified random sampling was used to select four strata namely, management levels one to four comprising of top leadership, executive committee, and head of departments or sections.

3.3 Sample Size

Table 2: Sample Size Table

Rank level	level 1	level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Totals
Department					
Snr management	4				4
Finance		1	23		24
Commercial		1	5	30	36
Operations		1	14	53	68
Hr		1	1	1	3
IT		1	4		5
Audit			1		1
Compliance			1		1
Ehs		1			1

Marketing		1	1	2
Supplies	1	3	1	5
Totals	4	7	53	86

The researcher used a mixed method research design that involved an interview guide targeting the senior management and the questionnaire targeting management levels one to four as the primary tools for data collection. The research made of focused group and interviews to collected data significant to the research questions. According to Nyumba et al., (2018), focus group discussion is frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of social challenges and issues.

The main objective was to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of Quickmart broader population. In addition, the interview guide contained semi-structured questions covering all the variables under this study. The questionnaire was also employed to obtain responses from the sample of respondents selected.

3.4 Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire is a research instrument that collects data from sample respondents, and its objective is to breakdown the research objectives into specific questions and answers to generate required research data (Kothari, 2010). The instrument assisted the researcher to maintain confidentiality and save time in collecting the large amount of data.

The questionnaire was structured in two parts namely, part A and part B. Part B consisted of four sections aligned with the independent and dependent variables and the questionnaire structure corresponding with the study objectives. A 5-point Likert scale evaluation from strongly agreed (SA) to strongly disagreed (SD) measured responses. Secondary data was obtained from the publications, online sources, library sources, annual reports, and policy documents. These supported the findings from primary data.

A focused study was conducted on 8 regional managers, and one-on-one interviews using the interview guide conducted for the CEO, Quickmart founders and other executive levels.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Descriptive Statistics:

Table 3: Communication Influence on change adoption frequencies

My organization's communication of new changes enhances my ability to adapt to new changes effectively					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	21	14	14	14
	Disagree	63	42	42	56
	Neutral	42	28	28	84
	Agree	18	12	12	96
	Strongly agree	6	4	4	100
Lack of communication awareness on the purpose vision and benefits of change hinders effective adaptation to new changes					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	2	2	2
	Disagree	9	6	6	8
	Neutral	12	8	8	16
	Agree	72	48	48	64
	Strongly agree	54	36	36	100
Transparent, clear, honest, and open communication during the change process makes me manage and adapt to new changes effectively					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	3	2	2	2
	Disagree	6	4	4	6
	Neutral	15	10	10	16
	Agree	78	52	52	68
	Strongly agree	48	32	32	100
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Strongly disagree	15	10	10.2	10.2

	Disagree	30	20	20.4	30.6
	Neutral	33	22	22.4	53.1
	Agree	24	16	16.3	69.4
	Strongly agree	45	30	30.6	100
	Total	147	98	100	
Change leadership appreciative messages on milestone achievements and individual recognition motivates the change adoption process.					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Disagree	3	2	2.1	2.1
	Neutral	3	2	2.1	4.2
	Agree	81	54	56.3	60.4
	Strongly agree	57	38	39.6	100
	Total	144	96	100	
Missing	System	6	6		
Total		100	100		

Most of the employees stated that communications related to new changes did not enhance chances of adopting to the new changes. This meant that the employees required other initiatives coupled with communication for them to adapt to the new changes. For this study results were as follows 14 % strongly disagreed, 42% disagreed, 28% were neutral and 12 % agreed, while 4% strongly agreed. The employees for Quickmart also agreed that lack of communication on the purpose of change and the vision related to change impeded the adoption to new changes.

The employees stated that they were most likely to adopt the new changes if the leadership effectively communicated on the purpose of the change and the vision of the organization in relation to the change. The results were as follows; 2% strongly disagreed, 6% disagreed, 48% agree and 36% of the participants strongly agreed. In addition, the 52% of the participants agreed that they were likely to adopt the new changes communication was transparent, clear, honest, and open. This meant that the employees were most likely to adopt the new changes if the leadership communicated the change with openness and clarity.

Table 4 Analysis of variance between the length an employee has stayed in Quickmart and views on the organization's communication.

ANOVA							
		f	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
My organization's communication of new changes enhances my ability to adapt to new changes effectively	Between Groups		1.505	3	0.502	0.476	0.7
	Within Groups		98.985	94	1.053		
	Total		100.49	97			
Lack of communication awareness on the purpose vision and benefits of change hinders effective adaptation to new changes	Between Groups		4.415	3	1.472	1.717	0.169
	Within Groups		80.565	94	0.857		
	Total		84.98	97			
Transparent, clear, honest, and open communication during the change process makes me manage and adapt to new changes effectively	Between Groups		4.877	3	1.626	2.168	0.097
	Within Groups		70.47	94	0.75		
	Total		75.347	97			
Management interactive communication on progress updates, response to feedback, and complaints in previous change initiatives made change adoption effective.	Between Groups		12.758	3	4.253	2.305	0.082
	Within Groups		169.742	92	1.845		
	Total		182.5	95			
Change leadership appreciative messages on milestone achievements and individual recognition motivates the change adoption process.	Between Groups		3.13	3	1.043	2.764	0.047
	Within Groups		33.976	90	0.378		
	Total		37.106	93			

Communication of new changes enhanced adoption but needed to be coupled with other initiatives for effective adoption $F(3) = 0.476$, $p = 0.7$, lack of communicating the purpose and vision related to the change impeded effective adoption of the changes $F(3) = 1.717$, $p = 0.169$, transparency increased the chances of adoption of the new changes $F(3) = 2.168$, $p = 0.097$, management interaction with employees during change management process made change adoption effective $F(3) = 2.3$, $p = 0.08$, change leadership appreciative message $F(3) = 2.764$, $p = 0.047$, using 0.5 level of significance, the

analysis of variance indicated that there was a split view on how employee who had been with Quickmart for a longer period and the recent hires viewed the chances of adoption to change when the top leadership send appreciative messages. Chances are the resent hires either did not understand the effects of communication on adoption to the change process or they had not yet been assimilated into the Quickmart organizational culture, therefore they lacked ownership.

Less than 50% of the participants agreed that their commitment levels toward implementing and adopting new changes were affected by the quality of change management as follows, 8.5% strongly disagreed, 29.8 % disagree, and 19. % were neutral, 29.8 agreed while 12.8% strongly agreed. This showed that the employees were either holding strong stands regarding certain ongoing changes or there could have been gaps in the change management processes at Quickmart. The majority of the participants also agreed that their attitude and acceptance of new organizational changes had been greatly influenced by the resources and support provided by my Quickmart. This meant that Quickmart provided adequate support and resources during the change management process as 34% strongly agreed and 40.4 % agreed. 85% agreed that effective completion of change projects on time and within budget scope is influenced by effective change management practices. This meant that Quickmart had completed some projects on time and within budget.

5.0 SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Summary of findings

According to the study findings, communication plays a major role in minimizing resistance to change. However, in this study, the respondents felt that communication alone was not enough, it needed to be backed by the vision, purpose, and the benefits of the change. With this regard, communication effective for it to enhance the ability to adapt to new changes. According to the study findings 48% of the respondent's agreed and 36% strongly agreed that they are more likely to adapt to new changes if the management effectively communicates the purpose of the change and the vision. In addition, 52% of the participants agreed that they are likely to adopt new changes if the communication is transparent, clear, honest, and open.

5.2 Conclusion

In conclusion, this research study has found that effective communication is crucial in implementing change management strategies in family-owned supermarkets in Kenya. The study found that family-owned supermarkets face unique challenges such as resistance to change and lack of resources, which require innovative solutions from top leadership to overcome. Effective communication can help to address these challenges and create a culture of innovation and change in the supermarket industry.

5.3 Recommendations

Effective communication is key when managing change. To ensure effective change management occurs, family-owned supermarkets in Kenya must ensure that they communicate the purpose, the vision, and the benefits of change. Crafting an effective communication is an art, for this reason, family-owned supermarkets should consider engaging the services of communication experts to ensure that the employees get the messages as intended and without any distortion, while at the same time leaving channels of communications open to allow for feedback, and therefore promoting clarity, openness, and honesty.

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