Effect of Organizational Learning on Strategy Implementation: A Case of International Rescue Committee (IRC) - Kenya

by

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EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ON STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE OF INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE (IRC) - KENYA

by

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In accordance with Daystar University policies, this thesis is accepted in partial fulfilment of requirements for the Master of Business Administration.

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EFFECT OF ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING ON STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION: A CASE OF INTERNATIONAL RESCUE COMMITTEE (IRC) - KENYA

I declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any other college or university for academic credit.

Signed: ____________________________ Date: ________________

Samora Otieno
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I would like to thank my supervisors Dr. Kefah Njenga and Dr. Peter Ngure for their guidance and direction with this project, Kellie Leeson and Prafulla Mishra of IRC for allowing me to use the IRC as the subject of my research.
Dedication

To my loving wife Caroline Mwangi-Otieno for her support and constant encouragement throughout my research work and especially when the going got tough.
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ABSTRACT

Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) spend a lot of resources including money and time developing strategic plans. Unfortunately, only about 10% of strategic plans are successfully implemented. Every organization, whether public or private, is unique in the way it interacts with its environment and no one strategy will fit the circumstances of all organizations. Strategic management theories however suggest that incorporating organizational learning into the strategic plan is vital for successful implementation of the strategic plans. They argue that it allows the organizations to adjust appropriately and in a timely manner to changes in their operating environment.

This study sought to analyze the role of organizational learning systems in the successful implementation of the IRC 2008/10 Country Program Strategic Plan (CPSP). The study had four objectives: to analyze the implementation process of the IRC CPSP; to identify organizational learning systems put in place by the CPSP; to determine the impact of the said systems; and, to identify challenges faced by the IRC in the implementation process of the 2008/10 CPSP.

The study targeted employees of the IRC and representatives of partner organizations who had participated either in the formulation or implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP. A total of 33 IRC employees and 4 representatives of partner organizations met the criteria and were all targeted by the study. Data was collected through interviews, self-administered questionnaires and review of documents. In general, 65% of those
targeted by the study agreed to participate. The data was analysed both quantitatively using Epi-Info™ and qualitatively (manually).

The study found that organizational learning systems can indeed contribute to the successful implementation of strategic plans. Changes in organizational culture, organizational structure and technology use associated with the IRC 2008/10 CPSP contributed positively to the successful implementation of the strategic plan.
# ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Full Form</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BUA</td>
<td>Basic Underlying Assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Country Director</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEO</td>
<td>Chief Executive Officer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CPSP</td>
<td>Country Program Strategic Plan</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
<td>Information, Communication and Technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IDP</td>
<td>Internally Displaced Person(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IRC</td>
<td>International Rescue Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GE</td>
<td>General Electric Co. (USA)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PC</td>
<td>Program Coordinator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R &amp; R</td>
<td>Rest and Recuperation. A form of vacation benefit allowed to staff working in hardship areas besides the accrued leave days.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SMART</td>
<td>Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Time-bound objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPLM</td>
<td>Sudanese People Liberation Movement</td>
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## TERMINOLOGIES

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<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Program units</td>
<td>departments involved in carrying out the mandated activities of the Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational Units</td>
<td>departments providing support services to the program units</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor fatigue</td>
<td>the notion that donors grow tired of funding certain programs or causes after a while.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social impact</td>
<td>effects of an NGO’s work on the target community</td>
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Introduction

“It is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent but the most responsive to change”. Charles Darwin

All organizations, irrespective of their mission, seek not just to survive but also to thrive in their competitive operating environment in the long run. For this to happen, they need to adopt a strategic approach to management. By putting together the definitions provided by various authorities and leading scholars in the field, strategic management can be summarised as the process of developing and implementing long-term organizational plans aimed at achieving sustainable competitive advantage in a rapidly-changing operating environment.

Goldsmith (1995, p.1-2) outlines what he calls “four main teachings” of strategic management as: looking to the future; paying ongoing attention to external factors; establishing and keeping a match between the external factors and the internal organizational resources and capabilities; and finally, viewing strategic management as an iterative process that requires continuous feedback and learning. Organizational learning, observe Trim and Lee (2007, p.335), results in new ways of doing things and facilitates strategic decision making processes both of which are key for the development of sustainable competitive advantage.

In an attempt to effectively respond to the continuous changes in their environments, organizations can very easily find themselves veering off-course. In order to remain focussed on their mission it is vital that organizations constantly remind themselves of their mission. Strategic management is about both the development and
implementation of a long term strategic plan that provides a roadmap to the organization. A good plan should incorporate a learning process to assist the organization detect and respond to changes in the environment in order to produce the desired results (Fogg, 1999).

Background to the study

The rapidly changing environment contemporary organizations find themselves operating in means that the critical success factors are also constantly shifting. Organizations should therefore view themselves as living systems in constant direct interaction with their environments and put in place organizational learning systems and processes to achieve homeostasis with their dynamic environment. Argyris (2004) and Feurer, Chaharbaghi and Wargin (2010) concur that unidirectional approaches especially to strategy implementation are unlikely to work for organizations and recommend that strategy formulation and implementation be viewed as part of a continuous learning process through which organizations constantly seek to realign themselves to the changes in the environment by detecting and correcting mismatches between their intentions and actual outcomes in order to achieve their goals. Argote (2004) observes that organizations can learn either from their own experiences or from the experiences of others through intentional knowledge transfer or through unintentional knowledge spillage.

The International Rescue Committee – Kenya (The IRC)

This is a case study of International Rescue Committee– Kenya (herein referred to as “the IRC”). The IRC is an international nongovernmental organization (INGO)
founded in 1933 to rescue survivors of Nazi oppression in Europe and help them settle in free countries (Bonn & Baker, 2000). According to Carland and Faber (2008), the work of the IRC has evolved over the last 75 years to include provision of emergency relief services to internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees besides assisting refugees resettle in the United States.

The IRC has provided health services at the Kakuma refugee camp since 1992 (IFRC, 2008). In 2007, the IRC formulated their 2008/10 Country Program Strategic Plan (CPSP). The implementation of this strategic plan has since been completed and a new 2010-2015 CPSP developed and is currently being implemented. The study reviewed the process of implementation of the IRC 2008/10 CPSP and the effect of organizational learning systems in the implementation process with a view to documenting any success factors that can be used by other organizations especially in the non-governmental sector.

Problem statement

Some organizations see the development of a strategic plan as an end in itself and not merely as a means to an end. Hoag and Cooper (2006) observe that fewer than 10% of organizations are capable of developing and implementing strategies that work. Several reasons have been cited for failure of strategy implementation key among them being the reason that in developing strategies, most organizations assume a stable and predictable operating environment. As a result, they develop strategic plans that outline hard and fast rules on strategy implementation (Hoag & Cooper, 2006) that do not factor in the unpredictability of their operating environment and provide
little or no room for organizational learning and the resulting changes in ways of
doing things. When such organizations encounter these unforeseen obstacles in the
implementation process, they are ill-prepared to deal with them and their strategies
invariably fail (Swayne, Duncan & Ginter, 2006).

Considering the vast amounts of money and other resources spent on formulating
strategic plans, especially among NGOs, and the increasing demand for accountability
and good stewardship of resources by donors and beneficiaries of the donor funds, a 90%
failure rate in implementation of strategies is simply unacceptable.

Purpose of the study
The purpose of this study was to analyse the implementation process of the IRC
2008/10 CPSP and the organizational learning systems put in place by the IRC in the
implementation process. The study hoped to document the role of organizational
learning in strategy implementation. It is hoped that the findings of this study will be
shared with other NGOs as an example of best practices in the implementation of
strategic plans.

Objectives of the study
1. To analyse the implementation process of the IRC 2008/10 CPSP
2. To identify the organizational learning systems put in place by the IRC
3. To determine the impact of the organizational learning systems on the implementation of the IRC 2008/10 CPSP

4. To identify challenges faced by the IRC in implementing their 2008/10 CPSP

Research questions
1. What were the key steps in the strategy implementation process?

2. What organizational learning systems did the IRC put in place for the implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP?

3. How did the learning systems affect the implementation of the IRC 2008/10 CPSP?

4. What challenges did the IRC face in implementing their 2008/10 CPSP?

Justification of the study
Organizations spend a lot of time and resources in the process of developing strategies. Because of the great need for accountability to donors on the use of funds, Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs) can ill afford to invest money into developing strategies that cannot be implemented. For all organizations and especially for NGOs it is paramount that all measures be put in place to ensure that formulated strategies are not just implemented but that the desired social impact is also achieved through the implementation of developed strategies.
Significance of the study

This study will benefit the following stakeholders:

- NGOs will avoid wastage of limited donor funds and be able achieve greater social impacts by developing strategies that acknowledge the dynamic environment they operate in.

- Communities in which the NGOs work will also benefit through enhanced responsiveness of the NGOs to the changing needs of the communities.

- Donors will have greater satisfaction since their resources will result in more meaningful impacts.

Critical assumptions

The study assumed that:

1. The learning systems utilised by the IRC can be replicated in other NGOs.

2. Only the learning systems contributed to the successful implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP.

3. Information required for the successful and timely completion of the study would be readily available.

4. The security situation in Kakuma would allow the researcher to conduct field visits for purposes of data collection.
Limitations

The main limitation of the study was limited generalization. Being a case study focussed on only one organization, the applicability of the findings on other organizations is limited.

Summary

The IRC is one of the leading international NGOs in the provision of healthcare to camp based refugees in Kenya and arguably in Africa. At a time when many organizations spend a lot of money and resources to develop strategies but fail to implement them, the IRC successfully implemented their strategy (and on time!). Such success stories should be documented and the good practices shared with all organizations especially NGOs the humanitarian sector that are likely to be facing challenges similar to those faced by the IRC in implementation of its strategic plan.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to the 1990s, it was thought that for organizations to succeed they needed to match their strategy to their structure, culture and life cycle stage. This ‘strategic-fit’ concept, argue Flood and Flood (2000), assumed that strategy was about a series of ‘either/or’ choices that people and other aspects of the organizations had to be aligned to. This thinking resulted in chaotic change management in the 90s and forced strategists to rethink their approach to strategy. It became widely recognised that strategy was not a ‘straight jacket’ or ‘prescription’ solution to organizational problems and that a good strategy had to take into account the dynamic environment organizations found themselves operating in.

Organizations had to understand that they are in constant interaction with their environment and appreciate the impacts of changes of their environment on their operations. Goldsmith (1995) talks of the need to continuously pay attention to the organization’s external environment and keep a match between those factors and the internal environment of the organization as a key pillar of strategic management. This view borrows from the general systems theory advanced by Von Bertalanffy in the 1950s and sees organizations as being part of the environment in which they operate and with which they constantly interact. This approach enables the organization to identify important relationships and provides a basis for redesign (Swayne, Duncan & Ginter, 2006) in an attempt to achieve a dynamic homeostasis in the ever-changing environment.
Strategic management and corporate strategy

Dransfield (2001) defines an organization’s strategy as “its long-term plans which will help it to achieve its objectives in a changing environment.” (p. 3).

It is commonly said that if you don’t know where you are going, any path will take you there. Organizations have planned since time immemorial but prior to 1950s most only did regular one-year financial plans. It was not until 1950s and 1960s that organizations started developing long-range (4-5 year) plans.

According to Pacios (2004), strategic planning as a concept appeared in mid 1960s and originated from the military. While long-range planning assumed a stable operating environment, strategic planning emphasized the need to analyse the organization’s operating environment and sought to answer three questions: What is the actual position of the organization?, What does it want to achieve?, and What must it do to achieve it? (p.260).

Two military strategists, Sun Tzu, a Chinese general and Car Von Clausewitz, a Prussian general have, through their works: The Art of War (5th Century BC) and On War (1832) respectively made major contributions to strategy as we now know it. In The Art of War, Sun Tzu emphasizes the importance of planning in advance to ensure success in the battlefield. Clausewitz on the other hand points out that “everything takes a different shape when we pass from abstractions to reality” (Clausewitz, Machiavelli & De Jomini, 2007) and recommends that strategic plans allow adaptation to the situation at hand.
In business, this decision-making process (strategy) can be divided into three levels: corporate, business and functional. According to Pierce and Robinson (2009) the corporate level strategies are developed at the board of directors and CEO level and are concerned with the welfare of shareholders and society at large; the business level strategies are formulated at the corporate and business manager levels and aim at determining the best competitive strategy to adopt in the market while the functional level strategies are formulated by functional and line managers. These are typically short-term strategies aimed at ensuring efficiency and effectiveness in executing the firm’s overall strategic plans.

The strategic management process has many components. In his ‘generic task inventory of strategic planning’, Goldsmith (1995) provides a list of 5 key components: understanding the mission and goals of the organization; environmental analysis - both external and internal; formulation of strategy to achieve the objectives and goals; implementation of the chosen strategy in a timely and economical way; and monitoring and evaluation of performance while making adjustments as called for by changing circumstances. He further stresses that strategic management is an ongoing process with constant interplay of all the 5 generic tasks.

Feedback and learning is one of four pillars of strategic management (Goldsmith, 1995). This ‘pillar’ is particularly important for successful implementation of strategy and provides the link between organizational learning and strategic management which is the subject of this study.
Strategic planning and implementation

Organizations develop strategic plans for a variety of reasons including but not limited to: enhancing performance, reorganizing resources, providing information to members about the direction taken by the organization to encourage psychological attachment and appeasing different stakeholders and funding sources of the organization (Schraeder, 2002). O’Regan and Ghobadian (2002) see strategic planning as a deliberate attempt by organizations to alter their strength relative to their competitors “in the most efficient and effective way” (p.418). It is generally agreed that strategic plans result in improved performance of organizations especially in turbulent operating environments (Miller & Cardinal, 1994) but Mintzberg (1993) cautions that the mere presence of a good plan does not guarantee success.

Successful strategic planning and implementation requires “intimate and enthusiastic involvement” of all members of the organization through formal and informal channels in providing information for decision making (Fogg, 1994, p.3). Involvement of stakeholders and especially employees in the planning process encourages psychological attachment, improves job satisfaction and lowers anxiety about job security (Schraeder, 2002).

While there is consensus on the steps involved in the planning and execution process, the order in which they should be followed differs among authors. For instance, Fogg (1994) recommends starting with an environmental analysis and then looking at what he calls ‘mission contents’ later on. Schraeder (2002) on the other hand recommends that evaluation or development (if none exists) of vision and mission should precede environmental analysis. In general, the steps involved in the strategic planning
process are evaluation or development of the organization vision and mission, analysis of both external and internal environments, development of strategies to address the issues at hand, deciding on the appropriate strategy putting into consideration the organization’s priorities and resources available. The last and most important part of course is the implementation of the chosen strategies. It is worth noting however, that strategy implementation should, through feedback and learning, result in improvement of the strategic management process.

![Strategic management model adapted from Hill, Ireland & Hoskinsson (2009)](image)

Figure 1: Strategic management model adapted from Hill, Ireland & Hoskinsson (2009)
Organizational learning

Even though the concept of organizational learning had been in use long before, it is
Senge who coined the term organizational learning as it is currently applied.

According to Senge (1990, p.3), learning organizations are:

...organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create
the 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 to see the whole together.

Prior to this, Cyert and March (1963) had described organizational learning as a
process through which organizations adapted their processes and goals to their
environments. This adaptation occurs under two conditions: when intended outcomes
are achieved and when mismatches between intentions and outcomes are identified
and corrected (Argyris, 1999).

Both Senge (1990) and Argyris (1999) are of the opinion that individual learning is the
basis of organizational learning. Individual learning involves the traditional approaches
that include taking employees for training and is therefore not a big problem for
management provided they can identify the training needs of their members. The
challenge managers face is converting this individual learning into organizational
learning. For this to happen, Senge (1990) notes 5 prerequisites: i) organizational
structure conducive for reflection and engagement; ii) tools and guiding ideas or
technology to help people make sense of the situations they face; and
iii) a fundamental shift in the minds or values (researcher’s own words) among the
members. This is in agreement with Murray’s acknowledgement of the potential
negative impact organizational systems and culture can have on what he calls ‘unbounded’ learning (2002, p.239).

Argyris (1999, p.165) defines learning as “the detection and correction of errors” and sees the ability to redesign work in response to changes in the external and internal operating environments as a key requirement for learning organizations. Organizational learning is important for successful implementation of strategies (Smit, 2000; Eden & Ackermann, 1998) and should occur at both managerial and employee levels (Khosrowpour, 1995) with the employees learning to redesign the work and the management providing the right environment for them to do so (Argyris, 1999). Khosrowpour (1995, p.186) notes three key factors in organizational learning and strategy implementation: “...structural, human (due to management or employees) or technical.”

Structure

The relationship between structure and strategy is that of interdependence - much like that of the chicken and the egg. Structure depends on strategy and the success of strategy implementation depends on the structure. In the early 1960s Chandler conducted intensive studies of four (4) American companies and concluded that “structure follows strategy” (1969, p.14). He argues that the design of the organization (structure) is dependent on the resources allocated and courses of action taken by an enterprise to achieve its basic long-term goals and objectives (strategy).

Khosrowpour (1995) on the other hand talks of structural barriers being an impediment to successful strategy implementation by inhibiting organizational
learning. In the opinion of Hong (1999), organizations should be structured in a way that facilitates individual and organizational learning through effective information processing and integration. He is in support of Mintzberg’s contingency theory of 1989 which talks of the effectiveness of organizational structures being dependent on the unique circumstances and environment of the organization. This theory contradicts Fayol’s classical management theory which takes the ‘machine’ approach emphasizing on the scientific separation of the work process into different tasks.

Lucas and Klein (2008), point out that a rigid and control-oriented organizational structure hinders organizational learning by restricting access to and free flow of new information among the employees. In such cases where the employees are not free to air their views or express their opinions to the management, Hong (1999) sees little, if any, scope to accommodate changes. Hong further outlines four factors he considers key for effective organizational learning: lateral communication, emphasis on teamwork, role of middle level managers as linkages and employee empowerment or decision making authority of employees.

Using the case study of Protective Services Department in a Canadian Municipality, Lucas and Klein (2008), argue that the organizational structure including its leadership can influence how the employees interact with each other and with the management. Expectations of employees and management towards each other, known as “psychological contracts” influence the attitudes and behaviour of employees at the work place and by extension the organization culture.

Structure facilitates strategy implementation in many different ways. In the case of the IRC, the structure, by establishing effective communication channels, would facilitate
the transfer of information from first-line implementers of the strategy to the strategic
decision makers and vice versa. The structure would also affect the ways different
units interact in the implementation of the strategy. In some cases, a new strategic
plan is associated with changes in the organizational structure to facilitate
coordination of activities.

Organizational culture

Organizations can be viewed as complex, heterogeneous societies composed of many
different sub-cultures with different values and attitudes (Baba, 1989). Schein defines
the culture of a group as:

a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved
its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked
well to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as
the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.

(Schein, 2004, p.17)

Schein (1992) talks of these assumptions as being non-negotiable values that form
powerful and stable forces operating within the organization and affect the way
organizations respond to their increasingly dynamic environments. Schein (2004)
categorizes organizational culture into 3 levels: artefacts, espoused values and BUAs.

Artefacts are visible and physical. They include the dress code, physical settings like
offices, status symbols and signs and are often located in places like parking lots,
boardrooms, offices and in workstations. Artefacts represent the most superficial level
of organizational culture (Derr, Roussillon & Bournois, 2002) but are the most
observable (Daft, 2008).
Espoused values are audible and spoken elements including justifications, philosophies and slogans. These can be found in legends and myths of the organization as well as in the organizational jargon and even greetings. Other examples would include employee professionalism and a "family first" mantra.

Basic underlying assumptions are the actual values that the culture represents, not necessarily correlated to the values. These assumptions are typically so well integrated in the office dynamic that they are hard to recognize from within. They define “the deepest, most fundamental level of organizational culture.” (Buch & Wetzel, 2001)

While BUAs define the most fundamental level of organizational culture, they are mostly subconscious and not directly observable. The artefacts and espoused values are more obvious manifestations of the culture even though according to Buch and Wetzel (2001), these are often mere “wish lists” of the desired culture.

A good organizational culture should enable employees to learn in a way that creates innovation and improved alignment with the environment (Langer, 2005). Manring (2003) observes that this cannot be achieved if there is competition among the different subcultures. This competition can result in withholding of vital information, hiding of failures and distorted performance figures which are detrimental to the organization’s learning process. Based on the case of GE’s acquisition of Nuoro Pignone (NP) in 1994, it is worth noting that a change of culture is sometimes necessary to provide direction to organizational learning (Busco, Riccaboni & Scapens, 2002).
The IRC operations in Kakuma are camp-based and essential staffs including managers and lower cadres are housed in the camp. They share recreational facilities and dine at the same cafeteria. This creates room for informal interaction between management and junior employees. This informal interaction often provides an avenue for management to get to know more about what the juniors are going through that they would not necessarily learn through the formal channels. These informal interactions are good avenues for organizational learning.

Technology

The Oxford English Dictionary provides two meanings to the term technology: “the application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes, especially in industry” and “machinery and equipment developed from scientific knowledge”. Langer (2005) talks of technological dimension to organizational learning arguing that technological advancement can force accelerated transformation in an organization. Advancements in information technology, by facilitating accurate and reliable transmission of information, enables organizations to react faster to changes in their environment (Rivaro, Aubert, Patry, Pare & Smith, 2004; Hill & Jones, 2010). King (2009) further suggests that organizations can utilise technology to make knowledge available to members who need to use it at a time and place that is appropriate for effective use. This knowledge management process, he adds, allows integration of knowledge into the organizational processes leading to organizational improvement.
While in common usage technology refers to equipment and the operational knowledge behind them, it is applied loosely in this context to also include innovative decision making processes and the practical application of knowledge in an organization.

On the interaction of technology and organizational culture, Langer (2005) is of the opinion that an organization that has embraced a learning culture by putting in place systems for individual change management is likely to be faster at adopting new technology than one that does not have these systems. Aldrich (2001) concurs with this view that culture affects adoption of technology observing that technology is often rejected when the members feel that it threatens the existing norms and processes in the organizations.

In the case of the IRC, technology would facilitate organizational learning by providing channels for communication. Technology here would refer for instance, to the way new information is processed, stored and disseminated throughout the organization. It would also refer to systems in place to detect and communicate mismatches between intentions and outcomes.

**Theoretical framework**

Organizational learning is a key requirement for the successful implementation of an organization’s strategic plan. This research will be based on Senge’s organizational learning theory. Senge (1990) observes that organizations learn through their people and that organizational structures, technology and mindset of the members are important in tapping this individual learning and converting it into organizational
knowledge. Such organizations are able to utilise the knowledge not only to align with their environment (survival/adaptive learning) but also to enhance its capacity to create (generative learning). Both adaptive and generative learning are important for successful implementation of strategic plans. Smit (2000) observes that learning should be at the core of strategic implementation efforts.

Conceptual Framework

The relationship between successful strategy implementation, organizational structure, organization’s internal dynamics, organizational learning and technology can be presented as follows:

Figure 2: Organizational learning and strategy implementation framework
Schwab (2005, p.12) defines variables as “characteristics of objects or events that can take two or more values”. In research, variables can be classified into dependent and independent variables. Dependent variables are “outcomes or consequences...that researchers seek to understand, explain and/or predict” while independent variables “are those thought to influence or at least predict dependent variables”. Based on this framework, organizational structure, organizational culture and technology are independent variables while both organizational learning and successful implementation of strategy is are dependent variables. Successful implementation of strategy has a direct relationship with organizational learning with learning organizations being more likely to succeed in implementing their strategies.

Organizational culture, structure and technology are key in facilitating the learning process in an organization.

Summary

Charles Darwin statement that “it is not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent but the most responsive to change” could as well have been about ‘species’ of organizations. Like the biological species Darwin was referring to, organizations have to put in place systems to monitor changes in their environment and respond to them appropriately in order to survive and thrive in today’s operational environment irrespective of the nature of their business; whether for-profit or not-for-profit.
It is worth bearing in mind that there will be changes in the environment that the organization needs to monitor and respond to for successful implantation of its strategy. This thinking underlies the concept of organizational learning which depends on the structures in place, the culture within the organization and the application and utilization of technology among other factors. An understanding of the interplay between these four factors: structure, culture, technology and organizational learning is vital for successful implementation of an organization’s strategic plan.

The literature reviewed gives three key variables and their relationship with organizational learning. This research sought to establish how applicable this theoretical framework was in the implementation of the IRC 2008/10 CPSP.
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology refers to “a way to systematically solve the research problems” (Kumar, 2008, p.5). It is about what research methods are used and the “… philosophical foundations of choice of methods” (Green & Browne, 2005, p.7). Kumar provides four dimensions of defining research. According to him, research can be descriptive or analytical depending on whether it aims to just describe the situation as is or whether it aims to make critical evaluation based on available information; applied or fundamental depending on whether it aims to solve a social problem or to merely generate theory for new knowledge’s sake; conceptual or empirical depending on whether it is about abstract ideas or real experience and observation without an underlying theory; and finally qualitative or quantitative depending on whether the outcome relates to the nature or to the measurement of phenomena (2008).

Splitzlinger (2006) and Green and Browne (2005, p.46) talk of qualitative methods as being concerned with exploring meaning. They “are intended to convey to policy makers the experiences of … organizations…affected by the policies” (Fitzpatrick & Boulton, 1994 as quoted in Green & Browne, 2005, p.46). On the contrary, quantitative methods are supported by statistical tools and are useful when the researcher seeks to generalise the findings (Splitzlinger, 2006).

Traditionally, researchers have used either of the methods exclusively. It is only recently that researchers have started combining both qualitative and quantitative
approaches to research. This research employed the mixed methodology approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Research design

Kumar (2008) sees research design as techniques used in conducting research. The suitability of a research method depends on many factors including but not limited to the research problem and the depth of knowledge required about the phenomena in question. Commonly used designs include surveys, experiments and case studies.

Singleton and Straits (2005, p. 53) define a case study as “an in-depth qualitative study of one or a few illustrative cases”. Mugenda and Mugenda (2003) advocate for a qualitative approach when a researcher aims to get the perception of the participants regarding the research problem and Yin (1993) proposes the use of case studies when there is a complex interaction between the phenomenon under study and its context.

Case studies, like other methods of research, can be used to serve any of three research purposes: exploring a phenomenon especially where little is known; describing a phenomenon and thus doing away with speculations; or explaining causal relationships between phenomena (Babbie, 2010).

Because of the complex interaction between the successful implementation of strategic plan (phenomenon) and the ever-changing operating environment of the IRC (context), the researcher used an explanatory case study of single case design.
Population

Mugenda and Mugenda (2003, p. 41-42) define a population as “a complete set of individuals, cases or objects with some common observable characteristics” and proceed to distinguish between the target population which is “that population which a researcher wants to generalize the results of a study” and accessible or survey population which is the “experimentally accessible population” that is most representative of the target population.

The IRC is broadly organised into camp-based field operations and coordination in Nairobi. The Nairobi office is composed of three directors and five coordinators and seventeen operations support staff while the Kakuma refugee camp program consists of a field coordinator, eight program managers and sixty-six national employees. Out of the total IRC population of one hundred, the study targeted those employees who were in employment during the formulation and/or implementation of the 2008/10 Strategic plan. According to the HR records, only about thirty national employees including five senior managers and twenty five program officers were still employed in Kakuma at the time of the study.

Another group targeted was organizations including UNHCR, WFP and other operational partners of the IRC. There are three organizations that collaborate directly with the IRC in the Kakuma program.
The survey population consisted of all the thirty Kakuma-based employees, two Nairobi-based directors and representatives of three organizations that work closely with the IRC in Kakuma.

Population census
Because of the relatively small numbers involved, the researcher undertook a population census. Key informant interviews targeted seven IRC senior management staff in Nairobi and Kakuma field programs and three partner agency representatives. Self-administered questionnaires were sent to twenty-five field-based IRC employees below program manager level. The respondents included program officers and program support staff.

Table 1: Population distribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Target population</th>
<th>Survey population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nairobi-based staff</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakuma-based managers</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kakuma-based employees</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(below manager level)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Operational partners</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research instruments and data collection

The choice of research instruments depends on the type of data to be collected. Instruments like interviews, observations and document reviews are good for qualitative studies while questionnaires standardised measuring schedules and observation schedules are useful in quantitative studies (Finch & Finch, 2006). Stake (1995) recommends: observations, interviews and review of documents as research
instruments for case studies. This research used a combination of research instruments.

IRC field-based managers, a Nairobi-based director and a representative of a partner organization were interviewed. Open-ended, semi-structured and structured interview questions were used (see interview guide – appendix C).

Brown (2001, p.6) defines questionnaires as “any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answers.” According to Wilkinson and Birmingham (2003), questionnaires are relatively inexpensive to administer, can be developed with minimal training and are easy to analyse once completed. In this research, self-administered questionnaires were used to gather data from junior employees of IRC.

The researcher also conducted a content analysis of documents including the 2008/10 Country Program Strategic plan and the Strategic Plan Recommendations Report. No other documents were available in this regard.

Reliability and validity

Reliability is defined as the ability of the research design to gather data that can be relied upon. It is about replicability and consistency of findings. It is the extent to which other researchers making similar observations or analysing the data will come
to similar interpretations and results (Thyer, 2010). Reliability is necessary for validity.

McKinnon (1988) defines validity as the ability of the research instruments to capture the right phenomenon. It is about whether your research instruments allow you to hit the “bull’s eye” of your research object (Joppe, 2000, p.1). Validity is impaired if the research is designed in such a way that it unintentionally captures more than the phenomenon of interest.

To ensure reliability and validity, the questionnaires and interview guides were pretested and corrections made before the actual field work began. The respondents for the pre-tests were drawn from the IRC Nairobi office as well as employees of other NGOs working with refugees.

Data collected from the various sources was triangulated to corroborate the findings and reduce bias and therefore increase both the validity and reliability.

Data analysis and presentation of findings

Epi Info™ Version 3.5.3 was used to analyse the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires while the qualitative data obtained was manually analysed. Miles and Huberman (1994) are of the opinion that qualitative data is not always in a form that can be readily analysed and requires to be processed first. According to them, qualitative analysis is a series of three concurrent steps: data reductions, data display and conclusion drawing or verification. Data reduction or condensation occurs
throughout the research project and aims at simplifying and transforming the information collected into an appropriate form that can be analysed. Data display refers to assembling of the information in an accessible form that allows conclusions to be drawn. Lastly, conclusion drawing is about deciding what things mean. As already mentioned, all these process are concurrent and are part of the qualitative data analysis process.

Limitations

Because of a case study’s dependence on a single case, there is always a concern about generalization (Tellis, 1997). “Can and should we generalise from a single case?” ask Edwards and Skinner (2009, p. 214). Stake (1995, p. 8), however, argues that case studies are about ‘particularization’ in which a particular case is taken and studied in detail.

Ethical considerations

The Chambers Dictionary defines ethics as “a code of behaviour considered correct.” Ethics refers to the norms of doing things and the determination of what is right from what is wrong. In any type of research, several ethical issues are bound to arise. In this section, some of the ethical issues are highlighted and how the researcher addressed them.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is guaranteed when the identity of the respondent is concealed even though the response is public (Babbie, 2010). The researcher knows who said what
but does not identify the respondents publicly. The confidentiality of the participants has been maintained in this report.

Voluntary and informed consent

This is the norm that requires that informants participate in a research project with a full understanding of all possible risks involved. There were no obvious risks involved in this case study and it was not possible to have the participants sign the consent form. Nonetheless, the purpose of the study was clarified to all participants and they were made aware of key issues pertaining to confidentiality of their responses and the voluntary nature of their participation in the study. Because the interviews were conducted by phone, the contents of the forms were read to them and their consent sought before the interviews began.

Approval of research proposal

Approval for the study was received from both Daystar University (Appendix E) and from the National Council of Science and Technology (Appendix F).

Summary

This was a case study of the single-case design. Stratified purposive sampling technique was used in order to get the views of the different stakeholders (IRC employees, IRC beneficiaries/ refugees and partner organizations) on the strategy implementation process. Interviews, self-administered questionnaires and review of documents were used as research instruments for collecting data which was then triangulated to increase validity and reliability. Key ethical considerations in this
research included confidentiality, plagiarism, voluntary and informed consent and the need to get approval from relevant authorities.
CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS, PRESENTATION AND INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

Introduction

Data for this study was collected through self administered questionnaires, key informant interviews and content analysis of documents presented by the IRC. The questionnaires were administered to 25 field-based staff below the level of program managers. Key informant interviews were conducted for 5 field-based IRC program managers, the acting Country Director and a representative of the partner organizations working with the IRC in the Kakuma refugee camp. Finally, two documents, Program Strategy Recommendation Report (Bardou, 2008) and the IRC 2008-10 CPSP, were analysed for content.

Response rate

The overall response rate for the survey population was 69%. Disaggregated by research instruments, questionnaires had a response rate of 68% while interviews had a response rate of 70%. According to Rubin and Babbie (2009, p.388), a response rate of about 70% is “very good”.

Content analysis

The researcher analysed the content of the Program Strategy Recommendations Report (PSRR) prepared by a senior technical advisor seconded by the head office in March 2008 as well as the IRC 2008-10 Country Program Strategic Plan (CPSP).
Program Strategy Recommendations Report

This was the first time IRC Kenya was developing a CPSP and it was felt necessary to bring in an expert external to the country program to do a thorough assessment and SWOT analysis and give recommendations for the CPSP.

A senior technical advisor attached to the Strategy Unit at the head office in New York was in the country for a period of two weeks to do an assessment and provided his recommendations in the Program strategy recommendations report.

The report provided detailed analyses of the program status pre-CPSP including the geographical focus, sectors on which IRC – Kenya focused as well as the management structure and its suitability for IRC – Kenya programs. The report provided recommendations for the 2 year CPSP on the possible overall geographical and sectoral strategies (Fig. 3).

On geographical focus the expert recommended among other things:

1. Continued programming in the Kakuma refugee camp as well as considering expanding into the Dadaab refugee camp; and

2. Scaling up conflict-sensitive programming focusing on pastoralist communities in the North West parts of the Country (Pokot).

On operational sectors, the recommendations included:
1. Scaling up health programs including environmental health in the refugee camps as well as in the pastoralist communities; and

2. Exiting the education sector by handing over the programs to other partners given its small scale and lack of funding opportunities.

Other recommendations included:

1. Working through and supporting partners with primary focus in civil society outside the refugee program settings and in emergency response;

2. Taking regional and cross-border issues into account; and

3. Developing and maintaining emergency response capacity.

These recommendations were shared with the country program and acted as a guide in the development and implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP.
The CPSP was developed through a consultative process involving all cadres of staff over a period of 4 months. The CPSP was designed for a two year period following the directive of the head office partly because being the first strategic plan it was felt that a short duration allows for better learning and monitoring and that the lessons learnt would then be used in developing and implementing the subsequent, and longer, 5 year strategic plan.

According to Joyce Friel of the Peak Performance Corporation, a good strategic plan should have 5 key components: a) it should be aligned to the vision and mission of the organization; b) it should outline clear objectives; c) it should have a detailed action
plan indicating the resources necessary and the desired results; d) it should have a comprehensive implementation schedule; and finally, e) it should have a monitoring and evaluation framework.

Besides the recommendations of the expert and the inputs of staff, the CPSP development process was also guided by the vision and mission of the IRC.

Vision:

*Communities live in a peaceful, stable society where basic human rights are respected; governance is broadly accountable and populations are increasingly self-reliant.*

Mission:

*IRC Kenya will support governmental and non-governmental actors to restore and sustain basic services to communities affected by conflict, using strategies and methodologies that unite populations while maintaining its emergency preparedness capacity to respond to crises.*

The CPSP specified 5 key objectives (Appendix G) focusing on impact of programs, operational excellence, human resource capacity and the profile of the organization. Also provided was a detailed action plan outlining the projected results and the respective timelines (Appendix H) as well as an implementation plan (Appendix I) indicating the support required and the persons or units accountable.

The CPSP was designed to be evaluated on a quarterly basis to allow for adjustments based on the assessment of the operating environment. Ongoing monitoring and
evaluation mechanisms would provide a timely assessment of the progress of implementation in reaching the set milestones as outlined in the projected results and the social impact as envisaged in the objectives.

The CPSP was aimed at providing a road map for the organization to

“...expand its portfolio by adapting its programs to meet the demands of an uncertain political environment (refugee returns and IDP vulnerability) and initiate new growth opportunities while focusing on quality program design that enhances impact and positions for scale.”

At the time of the study, the report of an end term evaluation of the implementation process was not made available to the researcher. This would have provided an objective assessment of the success or otherwise of the implementation process.

The 2008/10 CPSP was well done considering that this was the first time the country program was developing a strategic plan. The goals and objectives were aligned to the vision and mission of the IRC and most of the objectives appeared SMART enough even though some of the projected results were not measurable for instance, one of the projected results is: “Relationships established with 50% of key partners.” Such a target would be more measurable if the actual number of key partners was provided so that during evaluation, the percentage of relationships established can be calculated and compared to the set target.

All the same, a lot of what was laid down as objectives was achieved and lessons learnt in the development and implementation process of the 2008/10 CPSP incorporated in the development and implementation of 2010/15 CPSP.
Opinions of junior IRC employees

Questionnaires were distributed among employees, other than management level, who had worked with IRC during the implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP and who would therefore be in a position to talk about the changes that came about as a result of the implementation process. Only 25 current employees met these criteria. Of the 25 questionnaires distributed, 17 were correctly filled in and returned representing a 68% response rate.

The questionnaires were first assessed for completeness. A soft version of the questionnaire was then recreated on EpiInfo™ Version 3.5.3 and the data entered. The data that had been entered into EpiInfo™ was validated and then analysed.

Duration of employment

All the respondents had worked with IRC for periods ranging from one year to 13 years at the time of the study with the mean length of stay being 5.7 years. A good majority (82%) had worked with IRC for more than 3 years and had therefore worked before and during the implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP. The rest were employed during the implementation of the CPSP (Fig. 4).
Figure 4: *Duration of employment*

*Formulation and implementation of strategic plan*

It is interesting to note that despite a vast majority of the respondents having been in employment during the implementation process, only 47% (8) of them reported to have participated in the formulation of the 2008/10 CPSP (Fig. 5). All the respondents however reported that once the formulation process was completed, the final strategic plan was communicated in a group forum through a general staff meeting that was attended by senior management from Nairobi offices.
Figure 5: Participation in the CPSP formulation process

Most (94%) however, reported to have been involved in one way or another in the implementation process (Fig. 6). The one respondent who felt that they did not play any role in the implementation despite having been in employment for over 10 years also reported no involvement in the formulation process and was the only respondent who was categorical that the implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP had failed. This could probably be attributed to personal dissatisfaction for the particular employee or disillusionment with the management.
Organizational structure

The study also sought to establish the role of organizational structure in the implementation of strategy. It was evident that there was change in the organizational structure as indicated by the high number of respondents (88%) who cited the creation of new positions and clarification of the reporting structure as part of the implementation of the strategic plan. Most of the respondents (76%) also indicated that there was employee empowerment on decision making (Fig. 7).

All the 15 who indicated that there was a change in the structure also felt that the restructuring and the resultant clarification of communication channels as well as employee empowerment through decentralization of decision making contributed positively to the success of the CPSP implementation. The remaining 12% (2) felt changes had no impact on the implementation process (Fig. 8).

Figure 6: Participation in the CPSP implementation process

Organizational structure
Figure 7: Opinion on changes in organization reporting structure and employee empowerment on decision making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Organizational structure</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Decision making</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8: Impact of structural changes on the 2008/10 CPSP implementation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in organizational chart</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employee empowerment in decision making</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change in reporting structure/communication channels</th>
<th>Number of Responses</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No impact</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not sure</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communication and technology

The study further sought to determine the role played by technology in the implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP especially in relation to communication.

A change in communication and technology was also reported by 82% of the respondents. As part of these changes, all employees were assigned email addresses and access to computers was increased for all staff. It was also pointed out that regular meetings at departmental and field program levels were held to discuss the progress of the implementation.

On the other components of technology as put forth by the study, 76% (13) of the respondents felt there was a change in the speed of information transfer, 12% (2) said there was no change and another (12%) 2 were not sure on whether or not there was change. Only 59% (10) said there was a change in the storage and sharing of new information. Those who felt there was no change in the way new information was shared were 29% (5) and a further 12% (2) were not sure whether or not there were any changes (Fig. 9).
The opinion on whether or not the changes above had a positive impact mirrored the opinion on whether or not there were changes with all those who said there were changes saying the changes had a positive impact while those who were not sure on whether there was change indicated that the change either had no effect or that they were not sure of the impact of the changes.

**Organizational culture**

Elements of organizational culture investigated included status symbol of key personnel, informal relationships/communication and general ways of doing things in the organization.
According to 52% of the respondents, there was a change in the status symbols of key personnel associated with the new strategic plan. The remaining 48% were equally split between ‘no change’ and ‘not sure’. Only 35% reported noticing changes in informal relationships and communications with 59% indicating that there was no change in this aspect. One respondent provided no response to this question. On the general ways of doing things in the organization, 76% of the respondents reported a change with 6% responding in the negative and 18% providing no response. Most saw the new way of working with partners as a positive thing (Fig. 10).

**Figure 10: Changes in components of organization culture associated with the 2008/10 CPSP**

A majority of the respondents (64% and 59%) felt that the changes in organization culture and informal relationships respectively had no effect on the implementation process. However, 18% and 29% respectively felt that the changes contributed positively to the implementation of the strategic plan (Fig. 11).
Most employees (71%) saw changes in the general ways of doing things and attitude within the organization has having a positive impact on the strategic plan. This shows that compared to other aspects of organizational culture, the general way of doing things around an organization has the greatest impact on implementation of strategy.

![Figure 11: Impact of organizational culture changes on implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP](image)

Organizational learning

On organization learning, the study sought to establish how individual learning was converted to organizational learning. The question was on how individual experiences were shared within the organization.

A majority (76%) reported that this was done through communication from senior management, 71% said it was done through regular review meetings while 59% reported sharing through emails sent by individuals to many recipients/ group emails.
It is worth pointing out that these responses were not mutually exclusive and some respondents provided more than one way of sharing the experiences within the organization.

Figure 12: How new information was shared during the 2008/10 CPSP implementation

### Decision making

There was decentralization of decision making with most respondents (88%) reporting that operational decisions were made at department level with employee participation. This is in agreement with their response on employee empowerment on decision making. Only two (12%) said decisions were made by senior management with no employee input.
Outcome of the implementation process

According to the majority (88%) of the respondents, the implementation of the CPSP was successful with 47% of them seeing success as reaching the set milestones and the other 41% viewing success as a function of achieving the desired social impact. Only one respondent (6%) felt that the implementation of the strategy had neither achieved the required social impact nor reached the set milestones while another respondent did not respond to this question (Fig. 13). The fact that most of the employees felt that they had achieved their goals in one way or the other is testament to the involvement they had in the process.

Figure 13: Respondents’ opinions on outcome of the 2008/10 CPSP implementation
Opinions of management staff

Six IRC employees in managerial positions in the field operations as well as the acting Country Director and a representative of a partner organization were interviewed. All interviewees were sent the interview guide (appendix C) in advance and a time scheduled for the telephone interview. The interview was recorded using an audio recording device and the recording later transcribed before being manually analysed. The interviews, the transcription and the analysis were all done by the researcher.

Employee involvement in strategy formulation and implementation

All the IRC employees interviewed were clear on the role they played in the formulation and implementation of the 2007/10 IRC strategic plan. While 67% were involved in both phases, 33% of those interviewed said they were only involved in the implementation. There was a general feeling that the formulation and implementation process were very consultative. One informant said:

“...we did our bit as Kakuma and we have our contributions to Nairobi then we got a feedback...the Country Director came and gave us feedback on what we had discussed and what had come...before she did that she already had sent it to the Program Coordinator who circulated it to us to look at it and comment on what had been written and see whether it was representative of what we had said and do our inputs of what we think should change...”

It was also clear from the key informants that after getting the input of all staff, the senior management continued involving the field staff and even convened a meeting to roll out the new strategy. To quote one informant,
“...had senior guys coming from Nairobi and they had a PowerPoint presentation...”

The final plan was also communicated to all new employees during the orientation process. It was reported that:

“The second area was to the new staff ensuring that it formed part of staff orientation at the country office level by the CD and at the field level by the PC”

Attempts were also made, quite successfully I may say, to continuously remind staff of the strategic plan at every available opportunity. One informant reported that this was achieved by:

“... also making reference of the strategic plan to staff during regular monthly staff meetings and encouraging managers to ensure that those working under them are aware of the strategic plan.”

Changes in line with the strategic plan and their impact

Organizational structure

All the key informants interviewed mentioned that there was restructuring of the program. This was done to facilitate growth of the organization, as stated by one of the interviewees;

“...like in some program areas, the organization purposed to grow and therefore required...like for example, in sectors where they were being headed by officers we had to create positions of managers...”

It also enhanced operational excellence through the creation of sector coordinators for example in the health programs. This had the effect of reducing the workload for
the health coordinator and “also reducing the number of reporting lines to have better supervision.” The restructuring was not just limited to the health program but also to supporting operations. According to the acting Country Director, this was done because:

“Programs cannot stand on their own. If operations is weak (sic), if finance is weak, if logistics is weak, if HR is weak then you are not able to do those programmatic aspirations.”

Technology

Technology played a key role in communication which in turn paramount in information sharing and conversion of individual experiences and knowledge into organizational knowledge. During the implementation of the IRC 2008/10 strategic plan, several participants mentioned the role played especially by ICT. It was mentioned by various interviewees that the number of computers increased significantly during the implementation period and that all employees were allocated email address and had access to the internet. In one particular program, it was mentioned that the number of computers increased from one to six during the implementation period. This not only facilitated communication between staff and management and within staff but also increased the speed of information sharing and thereby making decision making easier and faster. This is best captured in the words of one of the key informants:

“what I can mention is about internet and email, most of our colleagues they have access to internet and this was used as a tool to pass information and also instructions so there is great improvement in terms of communication and everyone was kept at a loop.”
Access to computers and the internet also created an avenue for staff to pursue online courses which do not require that staff leave their work stations. In this way, the employees are able to improve on their skills without interrupting work.

“...what I can actually say is about staff development...has shifted from classroom courses to online courses...”

Organizational Culture

In matters of organizational culture, there was a push to engage with the partners and with the host community more. According to the PC,

“... it was envisioned that implementation of programs outside refugee operations was to be done through partners hence there was a lot of engagement with partners.”

But the process was not all outside looking. The IRC aimed to change the way things were being done internally. To this end, human resource (HR) processes were reviewed to focus more on attracting and retaining competent staff while at the same time ensuring better treatment of employees from the host community especially those who had previously been employed as national volunteers. They were subsequently taken in as full time national staff.

The new approach of treating staff as valuable assets of the organization in particular appears to have bore fruits. A representative of a partner organization who was not privy to the details of the IRC strategic plan reported that,
I might not be able to say much but from outside I have observed that previously there was something that used to happen that actually made staffs a bit stressed that they were staying for long I think like 12 weeks in the camp before going for their R&R and nowadays... the staffs look more motivated than they were before this new change and to me this is a dimension that has improved their motivation.

A culture of empowering staff was also introduced partly to address the issue of high staff turnover at the time to ensure continuity in program work even when a member of staff leaves but also to build capacity of employees and provide avenue for growth within the organization. According to one interviewee,

"IRC has also taken upon itself on building capacity of their own staff so that if there is an opportunity within, first priority is given to existing staff so that their capacity is built. This is motivating to the staff who have been in the program. The other one is to continue the training to develop a pool that we can hire from."

**Challenges faced in implementation and response to the challenges**

The IRC faced three main challenges during the implementation period.

i. High staff turnover: This was mentioned by an employee as well as a representative of a partner organization. According to the IRC employee, high staff turnover created gaps in the programs and interfered with implementation as more time was spent on training instead of implementation.

“One of the challenges that I know is staff turnover, so that IRC puts in so much to train staff that is national and incentive and within a short time the staff leaves and creates a gap. So we find ourselves training every now and then.”
The representative of the partner organization also mentioned that at some point the high staff turnover at IRC became a matter of concern to the other partner organizations and that it was even discussed at the Heads of Agencies’ Coordination Meeting in Kakuma.

IRC was able to address this issue through by paying more attention to the needs of their staff as was outlined in their strategic objective aimed at attracting and retaining competent staff. A testimony to the success of this approach is provided by the representative of a partner organization who says:

“The other thing is that previously there was a very high staff turnover especially among the doctors and the administrative team that at point was so worrying... at one point I remember even it became an issue of discussion in the heads of agency coordination meeting and that was not good but now it is stable.”

ii. Reduced funding: this was another challenge that was consistently mentioned in the interviews. It was mostly attributed to donor fatigue and the voluntary repatriation of Southern Sudanese refugees following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the SPLM and the Government of Sudan in January 2005. As a result, IRC faced the challenge of meeting its growth and expansion objectives in the background of budget cuts.

To counter this challenge, the IRC embarked on intensive fund raising and advocacy through media campaigns on the plight of refugees in Kakuma and especially to dispel the notion that Kakuma was a Sudanese refugee camp that no
longer needed attention since the refugees had left. According to the IRC Program Coordinator in Kakuma,

“Response to the challenges especially on the issue of funding was one involving the media, there was a lot of advocacy on the situation of the camp and trying to show to the world that Kakuma was not just a Sudanese refugee camp but also a Somali refugee camp and with time there was some response from the donors”

iii. Finally, there was the challenge of low staff participation even when efforts were made by senior management to encourage their involvement. According to one key informant in this research, employees needed several reminders to make their contributions to the strategic planning and implementation process. This was mostly attributed to the slow pace of assimilating the process especially since this was the first time that IRC was developing a strategic plan. It was reported that staff participation in the development of the 2010-2015 strategic plan was markedly better than during the process for the 2008-2010 strategic plan. One research participant actually pointed out that one of the successes of the 2008/10 strategic plan was in getting staff to start thinking strategically.

“To a large extent it was successful in that it succeeded in having staff thinking strategically and this was reflected now in easier participation in the formulation and easier uptake of the new strategic plan.”

Most importantly, the strategic lessons learnt in the formulation and implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP were incorporated into the development of the 2010/15 CPSP.
Views of partner organizations representatives

Even though the CPSP 2008/10 was not formally communicated or shared with partners, the effects are being seen and felt all the same.

A partner reported noticing a change in the staff morale at IRC and also commended the administrative changes which resulted in the recruitment of a health professional to head the Kakuma program which is predominantly health but had been for a long time been headed by people who were not health professionals.

“...the fact that the Program Coordinator being a medical person and doing administrative work...this is somebody that is focussed on issues of treatment and... managing the health team and is more responsive...That also I see as a big improvement in terms of reorganizing the systems of the organization.”

There is also a positive feedback from the community with regards to the responsiveness of the IRC staff to the needs of the community and their presence in the community through the community outreach network is being felt.

“...more on the side of beneficiaries because at times I sit in the community leaders meeting where we get feedback from the beneficiaries...one thing I have heard myself from the beneficiaries’ mouth is that IRC has improved in their pickup...when they call the ambulance the time of calling and the time of picking has tremendously improved and that...they are happy.”

Summary of findings

In conclusion, it is worth noting that the development of the IRC Kenya 2008/10 CPSP was done through an elaborate and thoroughly consultative process involving
all cadres of staff as well as experts on matters strategy. This resulted in better
ownership among the implementing staff so that even though this was the first
strategic plan for the organization, the implementation process proceeded
fairly smoothly.

Secondly, it is apparent from the data collected that the implementation of the CPSP
was associated with changes in organizational structure, organization culture and
organizational technology that were viewed largely as having contributed positively
to the implementation process.

Lastly, IRC faced challenges in the implementation process but was able to respond
to the challenges as they came across them. Guided by the 2008/10 as a road map,
IRC remained focussed on its strategic objectives even as they responded to the
challenges both expected and unforeseen.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSIONS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The IRC Kenya 2008/10 CPSP had among its goals growth and expansion through adaptation to their operating environment in order to meet the needs of the beneficiaries and ensure operational excellence. This is in line with O’Reagan and Ghobadian (2002) who see a strategic plan as a deliberate attempt by organizations to alter their strength relative to their environment “in the most efficient and effective way” (p.418).

Formulation and strategy

According to Pacios (2004, p.260), a good strategic plan should answer three questions: what is the actual position of the organisation?; what does the organisation want to achieve?; and, what must the organisation do to achieve it? In the case of the IRC, all these questions were addressed in the recommendation of the technical advisor on strategy.

Clausewitz, Machiavelli and De Jomini (2007, p78) observe that “everything takes a different shape when we pass from abstractions to reality”. There is therefore need for regular analysis of the operating environment so that strategy can be adapted accordingly. By designing a strategic plan with quarterly reviews as well as ongoing monitoring through reports and updates from the field, IRC was able to make adjustments as called for by the environmental circumstances. This, according to Goldsmith (1995), is one of the 5 generic tasks of strategic management.
There was general agreement among the participants that there was adequate consultation and participation of staff. This is in concurrence with Fogg’s call for “intimate and enthusiastic involvement of all members” as a key requirement for successful implementation of strategy (1994, p3).

The involvement of partners in the formulation and implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP was found to be wanting despite the fact that one of the objectives of the CPSP was on improving partnerships.

Organizational learning

Organizational learning is organization’s ability to adapt its goals to the operating environment. Senge (1990) and Argyris (1999) both agree that individual learning is the basis of organizational learning. Organizations need to provide a conducive environment for the conversion of the individual knowledge to organizational knowledge. Senge prescribes three conditions for successful conversion of individual knowledge to organizational knowledge: a conducive organizational structure; tools and guiding technology; and, a fundamental shift in the mindset of the people.

Organizational structure

Structure can either facilitate or impede the implementation of strategic plans (Hong, 1999; Khosrowpow, 1995). In the case of the IRC, the restructuring process in line with the CPSP played a key role in helping with the achievement of the objectives. A significant majority of the participants in the study including both IRC employees and
a representative of partner organizations agreed that the structural changes had a positive impact on the implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP. The sector approach, for instance, through which technical sector heads were recruited to provide leadership helped in ensuring operational excellence.

Equally important was the effect of the structural changes in empowering staff to make key decisions involving their program work at department level. Decentralizing decision making to program employees allowed for faster and better response to changes in the operating environment especially when, as in the case of the IRC, the employees were clear on the overall goals of the CPSP.

Organizational culture

Schein (1992) defines organization culture as the basic underlying assumptions that influence the way organizations interact with and respond to their dynamic environment. In the CPSP, the IRC deliberately attempted to change aspects of the organization culture by putting more emphasis on partnerships with the host community and other organizations. Having this approach entrenched in the CPSP gave partners and host communities increased importance in the eyes of the organization. In effect, this impacted on how the organization and its employees value members of the host community as well as partner organizations. As a result, through better collaboration, IRC was able to expand their programs and increase their visibility in the background of reduced funding due to the budget cuts.

The other aspect of organization culture that IRC worked on was the program focus. The CPSP shifted the focus of operations to the beneficiary with positive effect as
evidenced by positive feedback from partners and the refugee community representatives.

Technology

Technology has a direct impact on information sharing and knowledge management. Hill and Jones (2010), note that technology enables organizations to react faster and effectively to changes in the environment. To achieve the goals of operational excellence and growth and expansion, effective communication was pivotal for the IRC. To this end, IRC invested in computers and in increasing access of employees to internet connection. All staff were assigned email addresses and email became the preferred mode of communication. This ensured speedy transfer of information for effective decision making. The drafts, as well as the final CPSP were shared through emails as explained by the staff who participated in the study.

Challenges faced in implementation

1. Slow change in mindset of staff - staff were slow to adopt strategic thinking especially since this was the first time IRC was developing and implementing a CPSP. The IRC was able to overcome this challenge by persistently referring to the CPSP at all official fora and mainstreaming the strategic objectives in the performance objectives of managers.

2. Reduced funding attributable to donor fatigue as well as the voluntary repatriation of the Southern Sudanese refugees. IRC managed to overcome this challenge through partnerships with the host community and other organizations as well as increased media advocacy and fundraising efforts.
3. The effects of high staff turnover were mitigated by enhancing capacity building of staff to prevent discontinuation of implementation in events of departure of key staff. Having review of HR policies as a strategic objective also went a long way in stemming the high staff turnover.

Conclusions

The IRC did a commendable job in the implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP. Of the 5 strategic objectives, there was agreement among the senior management staff interviewed that above 80% was achieved in terms of implementation success. Considering that this was the first time the IRC had developed a CPSP in its 20 year history of operations in Kenya, this was no mean achievement.

Based on the objectives of this study, the conclusions are as follows:

1. The IRC undertook a consultative and all-inclusive strategy formulation process. This ensured that there was acceptance and most importantly, that the objectives reflected the reality on the ground.

2. To facilitate effective implementation of the strategic plan, the IRC put in place organization learning systems including efficient organizational structure, appropriate communication technology and an enabling organizational culture.

3. All the systems put in place largely had positive impacts on the implementation of the 2008/10 CPSP.

4. The IRC faced major challenges in the implementation process but were able to respond positively and in time to most of them.
Recommendations

1. IRC should endeavour to involve the partners more in the formulation and implementation of strategic plans especially since relationships in the NGO sector tend to be more complementary than competitive.

2. At the end of CPSP implementation process, the IRC should conduct an end-of-implementation evaluation which would provide an objective assessment of the implementation process. Such an assessment should get views from within and external to the organization including partners, refugee beneficiaries and the host community.

3. Even though employees and senior management reported that the implementation was monitored and regularly evaluated, no documentation was supported to show that this had indeed happened. In future, it is recommended that the IRC documents the monitoring and evaluation process as well as any resultant changes in the implementation process.

Gaps in the study

1. The researcher was only able to interview a representative of a single partner organization out of 4. Two of the target organizations refused to be interviewed citing organizational policy against commenting on the work of partners while in another partner organization, a high turnover among senior staff meant there was no one in a position to be interviewed.
Recommendations for further study

The researcher recommends follow up studies on the role of organizational learning in the implementation of strategies and proposes case studies of multiple-case design involving other international NGOs.
References


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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent form

CONSENT FORM – KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

Effect of organizational learning on strategy implementation: a case study of International Rescue Committee (IRC) - Kenya

Researcher: Samora Otieno

This consent form should give you a basic idea of the research study, and the expectations of you as an interview participant.

Overview

I am a Master’s student at Daystar University. For my Master’s thesis I am conducting a case study on IRC’s implementation of their 2007-2010 strategic plan in order to document the challenges they faced, how they overcame them and how successful they were in the implementation process. I am particularly interested in how the organization used learning systems to overcome the challenges. This information will be shared with other organizations so that they can hopefully learn from the lessons of the IRC in implementing their own strategies. You are invited to participate in an in-depth interview as a key informant because of your role in the implementation process as an employee of IRC, a refugee beneficiary or an employee of a partner organization.

Your Participation

For this study, you will be asked to discuss your experience of how IRC implemented their strategies and how successful you think they were. I will be taking notes during the interviews.
The interview will last approximately 30 minutes. I will ask you several prepared questions. There may be some questions that you do not want to answer, in which case you are free to decline.

Besides the prepared questions, there may be new ideas that you would like to add. Please feel free to share these comments.

Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal

You are free to choose not to participate in this research. Even after you sign this consent form you can withdraw at any point during the study. During the interview you may choose not to answer a particular question being asked. Please note that if you withdraw from the study, the researcher may still use the information collected before you changed your mind.

Confidentiality

All personal information collected in this study will remain confidential. Key informants will be identified by code numbers and will not be named in the study’s final report. All information collected will be destroyed when the study is completed.

Questions

Please feel free to ask about anything you don't understand and to consider your donation of information and the consent form carefully – as long as you feel is necessary – before you make a decision.

Authorization

I have read this form and I have decided to voluntarily participate in this research study as described above. The general purpose of this research and what my
participation involves have been explained to my satisfaction. By signing below, I give permission for the information I share in the interview to be used as outlined in this form. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time. My signature also indicates that I have received a copy of this consent/authorization form.

Key Informant: ----------------------------- Signature ------------------ Date: ---------

Signature of Researcher / person obtaining consent

-------------------------------------------------- Date: -------------------------

If you have more questions about this project research, you may contact the Researcher at:

samora-otieno@yahoo.com or 0733 – 605853
Appendix B: Questionnaire

Effect of organizational learning on strategy implementation: a case study of International Rescue Committee (IRC) – Kenya

My name is Samora Otieno, a Master’s student at Daystar University. For my Master’s thesis I want to investigate how organizational learning affects implementation of strategic plans. The questionnaire should take about 15 minutes to fill in. Your responses to this questionnaire will be treated confidentially. Your cooperation is highly appreciated.

Background Information of respondent(s)

Date: ........................................................ Year of employment: ....................

1. Did you play any role in the formulation of the IRC 2007/10 strategic plan?
   ■ Yes
   ■ No
   If Yes, please explain your role ........................................................................................................

2. How was the final strategic plan communicated to you?
   ■ In a group forum
   ■ Individually (verbally or via mail)
   ■ Not communicated
   ■ Other
   (explain)........................................................................................................................................

3. Did you play any role in the implementation of the IRC 2007/10 strategic plan?
   ■ Yes
   ■ No
   If Yes, explain ................................................................................................................................
4. Was the IRC strategic plan associated with changes in the following areas?

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>If Yes, Provide examples</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Organization chart e.g. creation of new positions</td>
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<tr>
<td>2 Employee empowerment on decision making</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 Reporting structure in the organization</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Modes/methods of communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Speed of information transfer</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6 Storage and sharing of new information</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Status symbol of key personnel</td>
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<tr>
<td>8 Noticeable change in informal relationships/communication</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9 General ways of doing things around the organization</td>
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5. What was the effect of the changes above on the implementation of the strategic plan?

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<th></th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>No effect</th>
<th>Negative</th>
<th>Not sure</th>
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<tr>
<td>1 Change in the organization chart</td>
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<td>2 Employee empowerment on decision making</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Modes/ methods of communication</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Speed of information transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Storage and sharing of new information</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Status symbol of key personnel</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Noticeable change in informal relationships/communication</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>General way of doing things around the organization</td>
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</table>

6. How were individual ideas and experiences shared with others in the organization? (More than one box can be checked)
   - [ ] Through regular review meetings
   - [ ] Through group emails from individuals
   - [ ] Through communication from management
   - [ ] Not shared
   - [ ] Don’t know

7. How were operational day-to-day decisions on implementing the strategy made?
   - [ ] Employees made their own decisions within a given framework
   - [ ] Decisions were made at department level with employee participation
   - [ ] Decisions made by senior management with no employee input
   - [ ] No idea

8. What challenges did the IRC face in implementing the 2007/10 strategic plan?
   ........................................................................................................................................
   ........................................................................................................................................

75
9. How did the IRC respond to the challenges you have mentioned in (6) above?
....................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................

10. On implementation of the strategic plan,

___

___

☐

11. Any other comments you may want to make?
....................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................

12. Any questions regarding this project?
....................................................................................................................................
....................................................................................................................................

Thank you for taking time to fill in the questionnaire.
Appendix C: Interview guide

Effect of organizational learning on strategy implementation: a case study of International Rescue Committee (IRC) – Kenya

Introduction: Name, Position, length of service/employment

For IRC employees:
1. What role did you play in the formulation of the 2008/10 strategic plan for the IRC?
2. How was the final strategic plan communicated to the various stakeholders?
3. What role did you play in the implementation of the 2008/10 strategic plan for the IRC?
4. Did the strategic plan result in any changes in the following areas? How did the changes impact on the implementation of the strategic plan?
   a. Organizational structure
   b. Technology e.g. telecommunication, equipment, processes e.t.c.
   c. Organizations ways of doing things and interactions with partners or beneficiaries
5. What challenges did the IRC face in implementing their strategic plan?
6. Was the implementation of the IRC strategic plan successful in terms of achieving milestones and the desired social impact?

1. In what areas have you partnered/worked with the IRC?
2. Were you aware of the IRC 2008/10 Country Program Strategic Plan? If so, how did you know about it?
3. In your opinion, have there been any noticeable differences in operations or programs that can be attributed to the implementation of the CPSP?
4. Any changes in relations with partners or beneficiaries?
5. Any other comments?

Thank you for your time.

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Appendix D: Budget

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Descriptions</th>
<th>Amount (Kshs)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Stationery (2 rims of printing paper @ Kshs. 500 each)</td>
<td>1,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Binding (Thesis Proposal x 6 @ Kshs. 50 each)</td>
<td>300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Binding (Final document x 6 @Kshs. 300 each)</td>
<td>1,800.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Telephone Communication</td>
<td>5,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Data analysis</td>
<td>7,500.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Research assistants</td>
<td>5,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Contingencies</td>
<td>4,400.00</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25,000.00</td>
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Appendix E: Research approval – Daystar University
Appendix F: Research approval – National Council for Science and Technology
### The Strategic Objectives

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<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>To optimize program impact through development of core competencies (Health, Livelihoods, Governance &amp; Rights) based on IRC’s experience and anticipated needs, which will enhance IRC’s reputation as a leading INGO in Kenya.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>To achieve operational excellence through robust systems, effective monitoring and strong staff capacity.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>To increase our impact, visibility and program sustainability through the finalization and implementation of a partnership framework.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>The IRC’s ability to attract, develop, and retain the highest quality staff is strengthened by increasing the human resource capabilities at the country office level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>To raise IRC’s profile to increase our stability and influence within Kenya.</td>
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</table>
# Appendix H: Projected results

## Projected Results - Year 1

1. Success strategies developed and prototyped. Strategies are cohesive, complementary and inclusive of cross-cutting issues (battleshipformation, contextual analysis, research, DARE systems).
2. Funding strategies developed for each core competency.
3. Partnership mapping completed to identify key partners.
4. Relationships established with 50% of key partners.

## Projected Results - Year 2

1. 100% of projects are designed according to sector strategy guidelines.
2. EBC is presented in and included in key policy areas in our core competency sessions.
3. 50% of funding strategies validated.
4. Additional funding sources in new areas of operation secured.

## Year 2

1. Improved accuracy, timeliness and effectiveness of operations department.
2. External audits reveal fewer findings.
3. Internal audit conducted by IBC reveals a >90% rating for excellence on the Quality of Internal Control processes.
4. 100% of new projects are assessed using IBC guidelines.
5. Relationships established with 100% of key partners.
6. Partners call IBC for new project partnerships or funding opportunities.

## Year 3

1. Advocacy priorities implemented.
2. Media strategy implemented.
3. Networking strategy 90% completed.
4. Stakeholder mapping reviewed.
5. IBC is used in media twice every quarter.
## Support and Accountability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Objective</th>
<th>What</th>
<th>Who</th>
</tr>
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</table>
| **Objective 1 – Develop core competencies to become an INGO leader** | Support for:  
- Development of sector plans  
- DM&E: technical support  
- Communications plan  
- Cross border programming development | RD & DRDP, REL, Respective TUs, RMM, Business & Grants Unit |
| **Objective 2 - Operational excellence** | ✓ Review/Analyze current systems  
✓ Checklist developed and implemented | RD, DRDO, Finance Technical Advisor |
| **Objective 3 – Partnership** | Support for:  
- Partnership tools  
- Operational implications review | DRDO & DRDP, TUs |
| **Objective 4 – Corporate Objective** | Support for:  
- HR tools  
- Development of inclusive HR management systems | DRDO, HR |
| **Objective 5 – IRC Profile** | Support for:  
- Media Strategy  
- Advocacy & Presentation Tools | RMM, Business & Marketing Unit |