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INFLUENCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE TRAITS ON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE OF MICROFINANCE BANKS IN KAKAMEGA COUNTY

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Abstract: **Review of literature on the relationship between organizational culture traits and competitive advantage revealed the need for further research in this area focusing on the microfinance industry. This study aimed at investigating the influence of organizational culture traits on competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County. The adaptability trait of organizational culture was adopted as the independent variable of the study while competitive advantage was the dependent variable. The study sought to test the null hypothesis which posited that cultural adaptability has no significant influence on competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County. The target population of the study consisted of managers, supervisors and support staff in all branches of Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT) and SMEP microfinance banks within Kakamega County. The data for this study comprised primary data sourced from 76 employees of the microfinance banks using questionnaires. The findings showed that organizational culture traits have positive and significant influence on the competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County thus rejecting the null hypothesis. The study recommended that microfinance banks should fully exploit organizational culture traits as drivers of competitive advantage in the industry.**

Keywords: **Organizational Culture Traits, Cultural Adaptability, Competitive Advantage.**

1. INTRODUCTION

Business organizations operate in a complex, diverse, uncertain and competitive environment where coping mechanisms require consistency between organizational culture and strategies chosen by the firm (Kibera, Musyoka & Owino, 2011). Resources can only offer an organization competitive advantage if they are helpful in confronting environmental threats, are rare in the competitive marketplace, and cannot be perfectly imitated or substituted for by competitors (Klein, 2008). Attaining a position of competitive advantage and enhancing a company's performance relative to its competitors are two of the main objectives that business organizations aim to achieve (Raduan, Haslinda & Jegak, 2010). Denison's model of organizational culture highlights four cultural traits that are crucial in determining the competitiveness of a firm (Pisano, 2010). These traits are: organizational mission which is an awareness of the reason for the firm's existence, adaptability which addresses a firm's awareness of the external demands and ability to address the demands, involvement which is about building a common sense of ownership and consistency which is about sharing a common sense of expectation within the organization.

Competitive advantage is achieved if competitors are unable to imitate the source of advantage or if no one conceives of a better offer (Barney, 1986). Corporate organizations which possess a strong positive culture like Google, Starbucks, Southwest Airlines or Wal-Mart appreciate that this culture is a true asset (Randle & Flamholtz, 2012). Unlike other resources that can be easily acquired by competitors, organizational culture is an enduring differentiating asset that uniquely positions firms in the market and instigates provision of superior customer value (Owino & Kibera, 2015).

Organizational culture positively influences policies and strategies implementation among commercial banks in Kenya and hence creating a competitive advantage against the competitors (Oduol, 2015). Possession of a strong organizational culture that enhances reconfiguration and deployment of organizational resources is a key success factor in the microfinance industry (Kibera et al., 2011).

1.1 Statement of the Problem:

Strategic management scholars (Rogers, 2006; Klein, 2008; Ehtesham, Muhammad & Muhammad, 2011; Dadzie et al., 2016) have ranked culture as one of the top most organizational resources that contribute to competitive advantage and firm effectiveness. Many institutions struggle to create competitive advantage for failing to understand the environment within which they operate, they lack a sense of common ownership or they have not concretized their guiding principles (Denison, Janovics, & Young, 2006). AMFI (2014) data indicates that as of December 2013, 4 out of 9 microfinance banks were yet to break-even. Simply put, these institutions had not created shareholder value and were struggling to be competitive. Despite the importance of organizational culture as a resource that creates competitive advantage for firms, there is little empirical evidence (Ilie & Gavrea, 2004; Sadri & Lees, 2003). Notably, various studies undertaken on organizational culture have limited their scope to the relationship between organizational culture and performance (Kibera et al., 2011; Owino & Kibera, 2015; Oduol, 2015). To bridge this gap in literature, this study examines the link between organizational culture and competitive advantage among microfinance banks in Kenya.

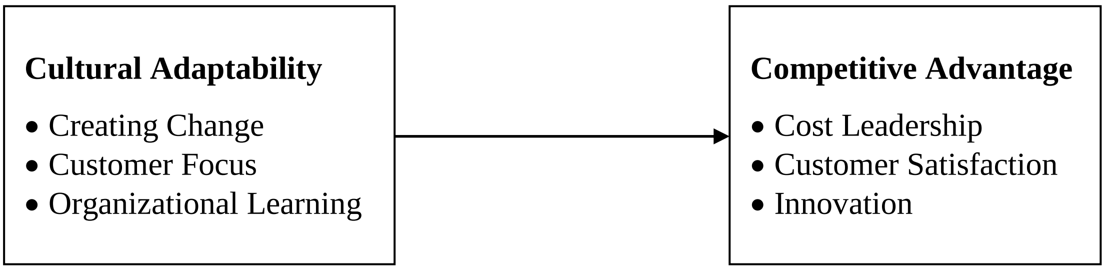
1.2 Research Objective:

The general objective of this study was to investigate the influence of organizational culture traits on competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework:

The adaptability trait of organizational culture was adopted as the independent variable of the study while competitive advantage was adopted as the dependent variable. This conceptual framework therefore presents the relationship between organizational adaptability and competitive advantage.



Independent Variables **Dependent Variable**

Figure 2.1: Conceptual Framework

2.2 Review of Variables:

2.2.1 Adaptability:

In a study on organizational culture and effectiveness, Fey and Denison (2000) noted that adaptability is the most important dimension of organizational culture with respect to overall firm performance and profitability in the Russian Context. Creating change is about the capacity of employees to read the environment and react to the changes thereof (Denison et al., 2006). Adaptability entails translating the demands of business environment into action given the understanding that organizations exist as open systems in environment that is complex and uncertain (Amah, 2012). Adaptability can be measured in three ways; creating change, customer focus and organizational learning (Pisano, 2010). Customer needs is all about understanding the needs of the clienteles and striving to meet those needs (Tariq & Aslam, 2011). This is where value is created for the customer making them want to stay despite appeals by other organizations offering same line of products. Organizational learning is about creating an environment that allows innovation and risk taking as well as knowledge sharing across the organization. Ironically, organizations that are well integrated are often the most difficult ones to change (Ahmad, 2012).

2.2.2 Competitive Advantage:

In order to achieve competitive advantage, firms need to constantly focus on the identification of differential product strategies, building or reshaping core competencies, acquiring unique technologies, and accumulation of intellectual property, all of which can be harnessed to make the company successful in a highly competitive marketplace (Srivastava, Franklin & Martinette, 2013). Differentiation is perceived as one of the drivers of competitive advantage (Dirisu, Oluwole & Ibidunni, 2013). Differentiation is when a firm or brand outperforms rival brands in the provision of a feature(s) such that it faces reduced sensitivity for other features (Sharp & Dawes, 2001). While there are numerous ways to differentiate brands, identifying meaningful product-driven differentiators can be especially fruitful in gaining and sustaining a competitive advantage (Dirisu et al., 2013). The objective of the cost leadership strategy as a source of competitive advantage is to become the lowest cost producer in the industry (Wang et al., 2011). Firms that succeed in cost leadership often have the following internal strengths: Skill in designing products for efficient manufacturing, high level of expertise in manufacturing process engineering, efficient distribution channels (Hemmatfar, Mahdi & Marziyeh, 2010). In the focus strategy, a firm aims to differentiate within just one or a small number of target market segments. The special customer needs of the segment mean that there are opportunities to provide products that are clearly different from competitors who may be targeting a broader group of customers (Hemmatfar et al., 2010).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design:

A Research Design is a presentation of the plan, structure or strategy of investigation, which seeks to obtain or answer various research questions (Shuttleworth, 2008; Lesage, 2009; Fubara and Freshwater, 2006). Descriptive survey research design was employed in the study. This design is important when the study wants to take out a sample and then describe the population on the basis of sample analysis (Kothari, 2004). The study tested causation between the variables involved.

3.2 Target Population:

Population would be described as the entire group of people, events and things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). The target population of the study consisted of managers, supervisors and support staff in all branches of Kenya Women Finance Trust (KWFT) and SMEP microfinance banks within Kakamega County. The study thus targeted a total of 105 respondents, 65 from KWFT and 40 from SMEP.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique:

Sample size could be described as the number of items to be selected from the population to constitute the desired sample for a given study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). A sample size of 105 employees was considered for this study. A census was carried out so that all the employees in the two microfinance banks, both managerial and support, were targeted. Census survey is a complete enumeration of all items in the population (Kothari, 2004). This sampling technique is useful when the target population is small.

3.4 Sampling Frame:

According to Kothari (2004), sampling frame is a presentation of all the elements in the population from which the sample is drawn. In this research the sampling frame is the 2 microfinance banks in Kakamega County that are members of the Association of Microfinance Institutions (AMFI). These are listed in the table below:

Table 3.1: List of Microfinance Banks in Kakamega County

Number	Name of Microfinance	No. of Branches	No. of Staff
1	KWFT MFB	2	65
2	SMEP MFB	3	40
TOTAL			**105**

3.5 Data Processing and Analysis:

The data collected in the study was guided by the research objectives. Both descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were used to analyze data. Descriptive statistics was mainly used to analyze responses. Inferential statistics showed the relationship between the variables under study. Inferential statistics include regression and correlation. Data collected was coded to facilitate analysis. Data entry, storage and analysis was done using Scientific Package for Social Sciences (SPSS).

3.6 Model Specification:

To determine the influence of organizational culture traits on competitive advantage the regression model below was adopted;

$Y=\beta o+\beta_1 X_1+\varepsilon$

Where;

Y = Competitive Advantage

βo = Constant Term

$X_{1,}$ = Adaptability

ε = error term

4. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Response Rate:

In this study, a total of 105 questionnaires were administered, 76 were successfully completed by the respondents which is a response rate of 72.4% of the total questionnaires.

4.2 Descriptive Information on Demographics:

The results on demographic information are shown in Table 4.2

Table 4.2a: Descriptive Information on Demographics – Position

Position	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Managers	7	9.2
Supervisors	17	22.4
Support Staff	32	42.1
Others	20	26.3

From Table 4.2a, majority of the respondents were support staff (42.1%) and were followed closely by other unspecified staff (26.3%), 22.4% were supervisors and managers were only 9.2%.

Table 4.2b: Descriptive Information on Demographics – Years Worked

Years Worked	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
0-2	16	21.1
3-5	39	51.3
6-9	17	22.4
Above 10 years	4	5.3

From Table 4.2b, majority of the respondents had been in their organization for between 3 and 5 years as shown by 51.3% (39) and less than 2 years were 21.1% (16) while above 10 years were 5.3%.

4.3 Descriptive Analysis of the Variables in the Study:

Descriptive analysis included an assessment of cultural adaptability and competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kenya. The statements were anchored on a five point Likert-type scale ranging from 5=Strongly Agree to 1=Strongly Disagree and respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed to the statements. Descriptive measures included percentage, frequency, mean and standard deviation. Mean is a measure of central tendency used to describe the most typical value in a set of values. Standard deviation shows how far the distribution is from the mean.

4.3.1 Cultural Adaptability:

To measure Cultural adaptability, a set of ten statements were formulated. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent of agreement with each of the Cultural adaptability statements. The pertinent results are presented in Table 4.3:

Table 4.3: Descriptive Analysis of Cultural Adaptability

Description	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDV
There is high level of flexibility in the organization.	11.84% (9)	6.58% (5)	28.95% (22)	42.11% (32)	10.53% (8)	3.32	1.13
The organization responds well to competitors and other changes in the business environment.	10.53% (8)	17.11% (13)	13.16% (10)	48.68% (37)	10.53% (8)	3.31	1.19
New and improved ways to do work are continually adopted in the organization.	6.58% (5)	11.84%(9)	26.32% (20)	43.42% (33)	11.84% (9)	3.4211	1.06161
Attempts to create change in the organization is usually not met with resistance	9.21% (7)	25% (19)	31.58% (24)	26.32% (20)	7.89% (6)	2.98	1.10
Different parts of the organization often cooperate to create change	5.26% (4)	17.11%(13)	28.95% (22)	39.47% (30)	9.21% (7)	3.30	1.03
Customer comments and recommendations often lead to changes in the organization	6.58% (5)	13.16%(10)	34.21% (26)	38.16% (29)	7.89% (6)	3.2763	1.01454
Failure is viewed as an opportunity for learning and improvement in the organization.	7.89% (6)	17.11%(13)	22.37% (17)	40.79% (31)	11.84% (9)	3.31	1.13
Innovation and risk taking are encouraged and rewarded in the organization.	5.26% (4)	13.16%(10)	35.53% (27)	39.47% (30)	6.58% (5)	3.28	0.96
Learning is an important objective in the organization	7.89% (6)	11.84%(9)	22.37% (17)	38.16% (29)	19.74% (15)	3.50	1.17
This organization is very responsive and changes easily.	7.89% (6)	7.89% (6)	26.32% (20)	44.74% (34)	13.16% (10)	3.47	1.07

From Table 4.3, the results revealed that 42.11% (32) and 10.53% (8) agree and strongly agreed that there is high level of flexibility in their organization. 48.68 % (37) of the respondents affirmed that their firms respond well to competitors and other changes in the business environment. Majority of respondents were in agreement that new and improved ways to do work are continually adopted in the organization of which 43.42% (33) agreed and a further 11.84% (9) strongly agreed. 26.32% (20) agreed and 7.89% (6) strongly agreed that attempts to create change in the organization is usually met with resistance. Regarding different parts of the organization cooperating to create change, 39.47% (30) and 9.21% (7) agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Similarly, 38.16% (29) agreed and 7.89% (6) agreed that Customer comments and recommendations often lead to changes in the organization.

More than half of the respondents agreed that failure is viewed as an opportunity for learning and improvement in the organization of which 40.79% (31) agreed and 11.84% (9) strongly agreed. The results further revealed that 39.47% (30) and 6.58% (5) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that innovation and risk taking are encouraged and rewarded in the organization. The results showed that more than half of the respondents were in agreement that learning is an important objective in the organization of which 38.16% (29) agreed and 19.74% (15) strongly agreed. Lastly, it was revealed that 44.74% (34) and 13.16% (10) agreed and strongly agreed that there organization is very responsive and changes easily.

4.3.2 Competitive Advantage:

To measure Competitive advantage, a set of ten statements were formulated and administered. The respondents were asked to indicate the extent of agreement with each of the Competitive advantage statements. The pertinent results are presented in Table 4.4:

Table 4.4: Descriptive Analysis of Competitive Advantage

Description	SD	D	N	A	SA	Mean	SDV
The clients are always proud of our products and services	9.21% (7)	5.26% (4)	10.53% (8)	52.63% (40)	22.37% (17)	3.736	1.147
The firm delivers products and services that meet customer requirements and expectation	6.58% (5)	3.95% (3)	9.21% (7)	57.89% (44)	22.37% (17)	3.855	1.028
The customers commend our exemplary product quality	1.32% (1)	5.26% (4)	22.37% (17)	48.68% (37)	22.37% (17)	3.855	0.874

Clients have a low switching cost of products to competitors	6.58% (5)	31.58% (24)	19.74% (15)	30.26% (23)	11.84% (9)	3.092	1.168
Customers are loyal even when there is a price change	3.95% (3)	14.47% (11)	23.68% (18)	39.47% (30)	18.42% (14)	3.539	1.076
Our customers always come back for more purchase	2.63% (2)	10.53% (8)	19.74% (15)	46.05% (35)	21.05% (16)	3.723	1.001
The company has being constantly looking at market dynamic which has enable it to achieve market leadership	7.89% (6)	6.58% (5)	18.42% (14)	47.37% (36)	19.74% (15)	3.644	1.115
The company has continually focus on cost drivers which has enabled it to achieve Cost Leadership	3.95% (3)	14.47% (11)	22.37% (17)	39.47% (30)	19.74% (15)	3.565	1.087
Superior Customer Service	3.95% (3)	13.16% (10)	26.32% (20)	44.74% (34)	11.84% (9)	3.473	0.999
The firm has been always on top of industry as for innovative products/Processes is concerned	5.26% (4)	7.89% (6)	21.05% (16)	43.42% (33)	22.37% (17)	3.697	1.071

From Table 4.4, more than half of the respondents 75% confirmed that the clients are always proud of the organization's products and services. Similarly, more than half of the respondents were in agreement that the firm delivers products and services that meet customer requirements and expectation of which 57.89% (44) and 22.37% (17) agreed and strongly agreed respectively. Regarding customers commending the firm's exemplary product quality, 48.68% (37) agreed with 22.37% (17) strongly agreeing. The results also indicate that 30.26% (23) agreed and 11.84% (9) strongly agreed that clients have a low switching cost of products to competitors. Further, 39.47% (30) and 18.42% (14) of the respondents agreed and strongly agreed respectively that customers are loyal even when there is a price change. Similarly, 46.05% (35) agreed and 21.05% (16) strongly agreed that their customers always come back for more purchase.

The results further revealed that 47.37% (36) agreed and 19.74% (15) strongly agreed that their firms constantly looks at market dynamics which enables the firms to achieve market leadership. Similarly, 39.47% (30) and 19.74% (15) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that their company continually focuses on cost drivers which enables the firms to achieve cost leadership. On superior customer service, majority of the respondents were undecided whether they are offering superior customer services with a mean of 3.4737 and standard deviation of 0.99965. 44.74% (34) of the respondents agreed and additional 11.84% (9) strongly agreed. Lastly, 43.42% (33) and 22.37% (17) agreed and strongly agreed respectively that the firm has been always on top of industry as for innovative products/Processes is concerned.

4.4 Inferential Statistics:

4.4.1 Cultural Adaptability and Competitive Advantage:

4.4.1a Correlation between Cultural adaptability and Competitive advantage:

The Pearson correlation analysis was used to investigate the relationship between Cultural adaptability and competitive advantage. The results are as shown in are Table 4.5

Table 4.5: Correlation between Cultural adaptability and Competitive advantage

		Cultural adaptability	**Competitive advantage**
Cultural adaptability	Pearson Correlation	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)		
	N	76	
Competitive advantage	Pearson Correlation	.593**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	76	76

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

In assessing the effect of cultural adaptability on competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County, the results revealed a coefficient of correlation (r) as 0.593**. The results indicated that the relationship between cultural adaptability and competitive advantage is positive, strong and significant ($P<0.05$). This means that increase in cultural adaptability would result to increase in competitive advantage.

4.4.1b Regression Results of Cultural Adaptability and Competitive Advantage:

Regression analysis was used to tell the amount of variance accounted for by one variable in predicting another variable. Regression analysis was conducted to find the proportion in the dependent variable (competitive advantage) which can be predicted from the independent variable (Cultural adaptability). Table 4.6 shows the analysis results.

Table 4.6: Regression Results of Cultural Adaptability and Competitive Advantage

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	.593[a]	.352	.343	.56679

ANOVA						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**Df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	Regression	12.922	1	12.922	40.223	.000[b]
	Residual	23.772	75	.321		
	Total	36.694	76			

The results revealed a coefficient of determination (r^2) of 0.352. Meaning cultural adaptability can explain 35.2 % of the variance in competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County. The adjusted r square attempts to produce a more honest value to estimate r square for the population. The F test gave a value of $F(1, 75) = 40.223$, $P<0.01$, which was large enough to support the goodness of fit of the model in explaining the variation in the dependent variable. It also means cultural adaptability is a useful predictor of competitive advantage. Therefore, the linear regression results indicated that there was a statistically significant positive relationship between cultural adaptability and competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County hence rejecting the null hypothesis which posited that cultural adaptability has no significant influence on competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County.

These findings agree with Fey and Denison (2000) who found out that the adaptability trait proved to be the most important dimension of organizational culture with respect to overall firm performance and profitability in a Russian context. This is also asserted by Pisano (2010) who notes that adaptable organizations are driven by their customers, take risks and learn from their mistakes, and have capability and experience at creating change.

5. FINDINGS

The findings revealed that cultural adaptability had a positive and significant influence on the competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kenya. This implies that as a firm becomes more adaptable to culture, its competitive advantage increases. The result also indicates that cultural adaptability is a significant predictor of the competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kenya. Results from the likert scale revealed that the majority of the firms have high level of flexibility; new and improved ways to do work are continually adopted, different parts of the organization often cooperate to create change and customer comments and recommendations often lead to changes in the organization.

5.1 Conclusion:

The study concluded that cultural adaptability influences competitive advantage in a significant and positive manner. This suggests that increase in cultural adaptability would result to increase in competitive advantage of an organization. Enhancing adaptability in various ways such as adopting new and improved ways of working in the organization and different parts of the organization cooperating to create change will see microfinance banks outdoing others in the industry.

5.2 Recommendations:

This study recommends that the management of Microfinance banks create a conducive organizational culture that enables for adaptability. This can be achieved by ensuring there is high level of flexibility within the organization which allows employees to be innovative and take risks so as to respond well to competitors and other changes in the business environment.

5.3 Suggestion for Further studies:

The study limited itself to the influence of organizational culture traits on competitive advantage of microfinance banks in Kakamega County. The study recommends further research using other dimensions of culture apart from the organizational culture traits used in this study so as to establish how such dimensions could influence competitive advantage of microfinance banks. Secondly, since the study was a census, a methodological variation is recommended where case study design can be undertaken to bring out more targeted findings in each MFB.

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