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EVALUATION TECHNICAL EXPERTISE AND STRATEGY PERFORMANCE OF LOCAL NGOs IN UGANDA.

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ABSTRACT

This article deepens debates on quality of localization considering that the strength of a self-regulating organization such as local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) should be seen by the extent to which evaluation technical expertise is applied as part of strategy discourse. In this paper, application of evaluation technical expertise was examined based on skill sets including techniques, technology and technical management oversight that are needed to ensure effective tracking of strategy and actions against approved goals and targets are executed. In most developing countries, poor performance of local NGO strategies has in the past been blamed on poor uptake of evaluation technical expertise(skillsets).

The main goal of this study was to examine the relationship between evaluation technical expertise and strategy performance of local NGOs in Uganda. The study used a cross sectional study design using mostly quantitative survey methods. The study drew 349 participants comprising of field workers, mid-level staff and executives from local NGO from all parts of Uganda. The study found that there was positive correlation between evaluation technical expertise and the study constructs of fund stability ($r=.219^{**}$) community satisfaction ($r=-.220^{**}$) and timelines($r=-.166^{**}$). This study concludes that the correlation is positive but the extent to which it influences strategy performance is still weak. The study recommends the use of sub regional peer support mechanisms by NGO forums and voluntary associations coupled with additional incremental annual self-assessment ratings to address the weakness in evaluation technical expertise.

KEYWORDS: Evaluation technical expertise, Strategy Performance, localization, NGOs

INTRODUCTION

The exponential growth in the roles and expectations from local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in development theory and practice discourse comes with increasing demand for better



articulation of competencies including not only local knowledge but also in evaluation technical expertise [1]. Over the last 20 years, international donors have put greater emphasis on organizational development with a strengthened evaluation technical expertise of local NGOs at the heart of most interventions [2]. Influential donors such as the Bill gates' foundations have consistently argued that aid effectiveness should be viewed by the way it is perceived, given, and evaluated [3]. Local NGOs benefits from the impressive assumption that their programming offers better prospect of aid success in development cooperation compared to the government counterparts [4]. The main consistent reason has been attributed to advantages over government when it comes to cost, technical expertise, and fast reach to marginalized communities [5].

This Ugandan case study presented in this article remains a classic example for local NGO sustainability considering that there is a rapid evolution of two distinct aid delivery models involving either local NGO delivery or the market led private contractor arrangement whose strengths are often periodically subjected to periodic due diligence requirements including evaluation expertise as a basis for donor retention.

Local NGOs weaknesses in optimizing evaluation expertise is associated with small size and lack of strategic experience despite years of continuous donor investment in capacity development (Bras, 2012; Howorth, 2010). Recent localization scholars have acknowledged that local NGO in developing counties have technical gaps in articulation of roles, functions, and capacity against the expectation of stakeholders [6].

In this paper, evaluation technical expertise was conceptualized as a set of skills including techniques, technology and technical management oversight that are needed to track strategy performance and actions against approved goals and targets. It draws from earlier organizational evaluation studies that recommended evaluation technical expertise as a precursor for organizational survival [7,8]. In this paper evaluation expertise constructs were examined in relation to the strategy performance constructs of fund stability, community satisfaction and timeliness.

LITERATURE REVIEW

This study recognizes that there is growing pressure on NGOs to develop acceptable performance standards for their strategy progress tracking. It also acknowledges that there greater prioritization of technical expertise and skills as an efficient means by the NGOs define their merit, worth and significance [9, 10].

It is becoming more and more important that NGO leaders should deploy technical expertise in evaluation to ensure usage of tools and technical skills in handling evaluation function of the



organization. In a study conducted by Martinson [11], leveraging technical skills in an open system like an NGO requires organizations to utilize more technology in the period of rising scarcity of competent professionals.

Although technology is widely touted as an area of evaluation expertise, an ethnographic study conducted in Sri Lanka among the community multimedia centers found that the skill sets of managers in understood that local ecology of local NGOs requires technical expertise in evaluating options [12].

Technology awareness is a key determinant for program performance. In a study conducted on the role of upper management control of new product development, it was found that having viewpoints on technology adaptation and use from an experienced professional within an organization is critical in attaining strategic performance and utility [13]. This finding shows that for a team to be technically aware and sound, they need to have right skills controlled by a dedicated manager. It also means that technical skills must be continuously harnessed through leadership which will help in making sure such skill sets are applied at the right time. The practical implication of such technological savviness for an emerging national NGOs are demonstrated in acquiring advanced statistical software, creating online dashboards and cloud-based data management [14].

An NGO, just like an individual, is more effective when it has both the qualitative and the hard facts to make decision and to adapt. Studies conducted by higher education by Clarke [15] found that having an inhouse technical staff capacity to undertake qualitative and quantitative studies is a prerequisite for successful internal and external evaluation supervision by external agencies. The study showed that for any success, evaluation team within the organization must be technically composed. It also means that avenue for trainings on evaluation.

Technical expertise has also been discussed in the NGO policy cycle to embody skills in making sure that every person within the organization is encouraged to participate in the evaluation process. Research recommendation from Gene [16] concurs that the process to guide and facilitate stakeholders' participation must be informed by sound technical works and technical quality in order to motivate others to participate. This study demonstrated that technical skill in evaluation is critical for attainment of better evaluation practice. Although its deduction are implied for the NGO sector, not much is known about the magnitude of technical skills demonstrated by the NGO staff and managers in their day today management of the strategy.

Having a practical skill in evaluation is an important dimension of evaluation expertise that does not only brings imagination into reality but also creativity in action. In a handbook recommendation to practitioners, Philips [14] recommended that for an effective measurement of performance to be



achieved, focus must be on continuously assessing team competency on technical and hard skills. The handbook recommendation considered that the main thrust of the expected skills on evaluation team should be periodically reviewed though internal capacity needs assessment. Although this recommendation appears to be applicable to the NGO sector, not much is known about the extent to which the leaders' priorities on periodic capacity assessment and training skills for their evaluation staffs.

In summary, the literature reviewed in this section showed that having evaluation technical skills, technological skills and leadership is fundamental for achieving the better strategy performance. The literature concurs that understanding the ecology of evaluation landscape in the organization and participation of staff in continuous skill development is fundamental.

METHODOLOGY

This study used a mixed methods approach, featuring secondary data review and majorly quantitative and qualitative methods. The assessment involved the use of structured and non-structured interview approaches covering heads of the non-governmental organization, managers, and staff. This design is deemed appropriate as it involved a study of respondents across a wide spectrum of geographical locations which can scientifically represent a population's view needed for the deciphering the study outcomes [17].

In terms of Epistemology, this research drew from the coherent theory of truth which holds that empirical facts needs to be coherent as a set. Proponents of coherent theories posits that there are acceptable community facts about systems which may not be automatically accepted as truth because of various conditionalities of the system [18]. This framework guides in the design of both quantitative and qualitative the sampling framework to ensure results are validated from multiple sources. On the philosophical foundation of the research, the research utilized the Pragmatist philosophical foundation.

According to Kelly et. al. 2020, pragmatic approaches are important in organizational research because it recognizes interconnectedness of knowledge and experience which are contextually relevant and useful for NGO programs. This philosophical foundation suited the research because strategy evaluation is practiced in different organizations with different approaches, different layers of staff and different stakeholders with different interpretation to the approaches.

For quantitative methods regarding the relationship between evaluation practices methods and the performance constructs, the study applied cross sectional study design to collect a one-off information from respondents spread in different geographical areas. These methods have been selected because they help to understand the behaviors in the context while providing options for further examination



of relationship between the different study constructs [19].

POPULATION AND SAMPLE

According to Mugenda and Mugenda [20], a study population refers to the entire set of individuals or entities from which the research findings is based. In this research, the general population were all active non-governmental organizations who have valid license from the national NGO registration bureau from 2017 to 2021. The entire organizational study population were drawn from 14000 registered national local non-governmental organizations with a staff population of 29,000 individuals [21].

Conversely, the applicable sample size was determined as 379 respondents which were to be spread across the different four regions in Uganda.

This chose to sample a total population of 60 organizations drawn from a cluster of 15 organizations in each of the four regions of Uganda. Using a two staged sampling procedure, organizations were identified and this was followed by additional categorization of respondents in the layers of executive, managers, and field staff.. An average of 7 participants were drawn from the selected organizations per region. Ahlstrom 2005 justified this sampling method in the interest of coherent national just strategies and policies.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative data analysis methods were be used in this study. Quantitative data analysis involved use of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics to analyze the different segments of questions. Descriptive statistics were be generated via graphs and tables. For measuring strength of relationships, cross tabulation of the research variables was analyzed and tested against the hypothesis using Pearson product moment correlation and regression analysis.

RESULTS

The key elements of evaluation technical expertise constructs were analyzed using the Likert scale scores. NGO staff were asked to answer to what extent they agree with the statements listed which were related to your organizations' evaluation practices? Respondents were guided to use the following scales: 1=Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Not Sure 4=Agree, 5=Strongly Agree to grade their answers. Responses on multiple variables from the sampled population were computed and measured in terms of mean responses. The table 1.1 presents descriptive statistics which were generated from NGO staff responses.

NGO staff responses.

Table 1.1: Mean score evaluation technical expertise variables

| Evaluation Technical expertise/skills | Mean(N) | Std. Deviation |
|---|----------------|-----------------------|
| B2.1 There is a skilled staff responsible for strategy evaluation | 3.61 | 1.214 |
| B2.2 Evidence sense making sessions are organized for technical | 3.79 | 1.266 |
| B2.3 Strategic actions are based on documented evidence | 4.03 | 1.073 |
| B2.4 Internal technical evaluation skills are periodically | 3.65 | 1.274 |
| B2.5 Departments have key performance indicators | 4.14 | 1.020 |
| B2.6 Indicators are summarized into a dashboard for managers | 3.61 | 1.270 |
| B2.7 Outputs from evaluations are technically well supervised | 3.74 | 1.155 |
| B2.8 Evaluation evidence is shared in an internal platform | 3.77 | 1.159 |
| B2.9 Evaluation evidence is shared in an external platform | 3.34 | 1.342 |
| B2.10 Evaluation evidence is used for external advocacy | 3.77 | 1.117 |
| B2.11 Data is safeguarded from internal manipulation. | 3.86 | 1.242 |

Source: Researchers computation based on primary data, 2023

In the table 1.1 above, the overall mean scores tended towards agree options. The nearest score towards strongly agree score were on the extent to which departments have performance indicators, strategic documentation based on documented evidence and data safeguard from manipulation.

The findings above imply that there was gradual improved perception on the use of evaluation technical expertise. Challenging areas deduced from this finding are around external sharing of evaluation, sense making sessions and the use of dashboards. These are emerging dimensions in evaluation technical expertise which tended to be perceived to be unclear or unknown for many respondents.

The dependent variables in this study focused on strategy performance aspects of community satisfaction, fund stability and timeliness. NGO staff were asked to reflect on their experience and score what factors had defined the strategy performance in their organization. Study participants used the scales as follows: 1-Not at all, 2-Small Extent, 3-Moderate Extent, 4-Great Extent, and 5-Very great extent. Responses on multiple variables from the sampled population were computed and measured in terms of means(averages) scores for each response. The table 1.2 below presents descriptive statistics which were generated from NGO staffs' responses.

Table 1.2: Mean score strategy performance variables

| Fund Stability | Mean(N=349) | Std. Deviation |
|--|--------------------|-----------------------|
| C1.1 Attracting new streams of grants | 3.24 | 1.044 |
| C1.2 Maintaining donor relationship | 3.80 | 1.022 |
| C1.3 Delivering programs within the budget | 3.63 | 1.022 |
| C1.4 Saving costs | 3.28 | 1.092 |
| C1.5 Meeting audit requirements. | 3.57 | 1.025 |
| C1.6 Management supervision directives | 3.56 | .962 |
| Community Satisfaction | | |
| C2.1 Reaching more marginalized community | 3.73 | 1.041 |
| C2.2 Innovation towards beneficiary wellbeing | 3.48 | 1.035 |
| C2.3 Addressing competition by rival entity in the | 3.22 | 1.059 |
| C2.4 Acceptance of the organization by the | 3.75 | 1.028 |
| Timeliness | | |
| C3.1 Capability to deliver service as and when | 3.73 | 1.004 |
| C3.2 Delivering program within agreed time | 3.70 | .993 |
| C3.3 Responsiveness to opportunities within time | 3.70 | .979 |

Source: Researchers computation based on primary data, 2023

Findings from the table above shows that all strategy performance variables of fund stability, community satisfaction and timeliness were rated between the mean scores of 3.2-3.8, this implies that the respondents were more inclined to rate the variables as moderate extent and great extent.

Under the study variable of fund stability, respondent scores of saving costs and attracting new streams of funding were mostly rated as a moderately reaching marginalized community was also rated towards a great extent scale and this resonates with the ever-increasing demand of leaving no one behind which is articulated in the sustainable development goals.

Maintaining donor relationship was rated high and this implies local NGOs tended to value constructive engagement with the donors compared to making efforts in gaining community acceptance. Similarly, under the study variable of community satisfaction respondents mostly rated addressing competition by rival entity in the community on moderate extent scale.

All other dimensions under timeliness were more included to a great extent. The finding implies that majority agreed that timeliness is a factor of great influence for the performance of strategic actions. The mean scores above 3.5 in the result above implies a favorable perception towards prioritizing it

to a great extent. None of the mean scores were skewed towards the score of 2 or 5, and this implies that there were slow but progressive favorable opinion towards achieving the dependent strategy variables indicated in the study.

CORRELATIONAL ANALYSIS

This study sought to establish the relationship between evaluation and strategy performance among local NGOs in Uganda. This is analyzed and interpreted using the data from Table 1.3 and secondary data review results.

Table 1.3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation results (N=349)

| | Technical Skills | Fund stability | Community satisfaction | Timeliness |
|------------------------|------------------|----------------|------------------------|------------|
| Fund stability | .219** | 1 | | |
| Community satisfaction | .220** | .662** | 1 | |
| Timeliness | .166** | .675** | .702** | 1 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). * . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Source: Researchers computation based on primary Data, 2023

This objective of this study sought to establish the relationship between evaluation technical expertise and strategy performance among local NGOs in Uganda. This is also analyzed and interpreted using the data from Table 4.6 and secondary data review results. At the proposal stage, the study had hypothesized there was a positive correlational result between evaluation expertise construct and all the strategy performance constructs. The results above show that were consistent weak positive correlational scores between evaluation technical expertise and strategy performance variables of fund stability ($r=.219^{**}$) community satisfaction ($r=.220^{**}$) and timelines($r=.166^{**}$). The study findings further points to the fact that there were emerging positive strategy performance influence from evaluation expertise in the local NGO fraternity in Uganda.

The study strengthens the wider arguments that expertise without predictable funding sources poses challenges to sustained initiative. While the overall the mean scores of evaluation technical expertise variables were positively skewed towards the agree scores, the strategy performance variables were

mostly rated as moderate extent. These results underscore the perceived slow progressions towards improved strategy performance based on evaluation expertise. Therefore, since all the study construct p value ($p = 0.000$) is less than the alpha value $\alpha = 0.05$, ($0.000 < 0.05$), the hypothesis is accepted. There is a positive relationship between evaluation technical expertise and strategy performance.

Further regression analysis was conducted to determine if evaluation planning had a significant impact on strategy performance. Results are presented in the table below.

**Table 1.4: Regression analysis between evaluation technical expertise and strategy performance
Model Summary**

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|-------|-------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|
| 1 | .226a | .051 | .048 | .66950 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Technical expertise

Source: Researchers computation based on primary Data 2023

Table 1.5 ANOVAa

| Model | | Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|
| | Regression | 8.346 | 1 | 8.346 | 18.620 | .000b |
| 1 | Residual | 155.537 | 347 | .448 | | |
| | Total | 163.883 | 348 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Technical expertise

Source: Researchers computation based on primary data, 2023

Table 1.6 Regression Coefficients

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients Beta | t | Sig. |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|-----------------------------------|--------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | | | |
| (Constant) | 2.824 | .181 | | 15.609 | .000 |
| 1 Technical expertise | .204 | .047 | .226 | 4.315 | .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Strategy performance

Source: Researchers computation based on primary Data,2023

Results above shows that the proportion of variance which is the R squared(R²) is 0.051. This shows that evaluation technical expertise explains 0.51% of variation in strategy performance of local NGOs. It means evaluation technical expertise does have a small fraction (1 out of 20) of contribution to strategy performance.

Similarly, the strength of relationship between evaluation technical expertise and strategy performance was found to be positive as shown by the beta coefficient at ($\beta = 0.226$). This means that evaluation technical expertise indeed does influence strategy performance positively. Although the correlation had found a weaker relationship among the study constructs, further regression, ANOVA and the coefficient analysis shows that evaluation technical expertise does predict positively strategy performance with a probability of $P < 0.051$ ($R^2 = 0.051$); $F(18.620) = 2.824$ and $\beta = 0.226$.

DISCUSSION

The research question of this article was ‘What is the relationship between evaluation technical expertise process and strategy performance of NGOs in Uganda?’ As shown in the correlational analysis in table above, there was a positive correlation between evaluation technical expertise the independent variable (strategy performance) constructs of fund stability ($r = .219^{**}$) community satisfaction ($r = .220^{**}$) and timeliness ($r = .166^{**}$).

The findings above imply that the perceived evaluation technical expertise does enhance strategy performance in terms of improving fund stability, community satisfaction and timeliness. The findings confirm the prescribed expectation of an open system that leverage technical skills [11]. The findings also reject the previous argument that lack of managerial awareness on evaluation technical expertise negatively influence performance [13]. NGOs were on course to adapt standards owing to various donor requirements which had made it mandatory to adapt to acceptable technical standards.



The positive findings between evaluation expertise and strategy performance constructs also implies that local NGOs were already investing in necessary technical skills and expertise. This finding supports the argument of Clarke [15] who posited that inhouse technical expertise is a strong predictor of performance.

Study Conclusions and Recommendations

In this paper, the findings established that there was a weak positive correlation between evaluation technical expertise and strategy performance. The findings are in concurrence with expectations from open systems like NGOs. This is because they are usually expected to competitively leverage technical skills for improved efficiency. The weaker relationship findings suggest that NGOs were not consistent and coherent in building both inhouse and external technical capacity which could shape their strategy performance.

The result also showed that NGO executives were less aware of the key techniques and technology for evaluation which could shape their performance. According to Bonner et. al [13], a stronger managerial technology awareness is a key determinant of performance.

The findings imply that NGO managers and executives were not having diverse skill sets needed effectively execute their strategies. This study concludes that evaluation technical expertise in does positively influence the strategy performance of local NGOs in Uganda.

This study recommends that weakness in evaluation technical expertise should be addressed by tagging incremental rating based on improvement of technical expertise. Independent consultants, NGO board and NGO forums should encourage peer rating mechanisms process to share evaluation expertise. Large scale donors such as USAID, FCDO and UN agencies that contract significant number of local NGOs should provide standardized technical skill development in line with the local NGO strategy frameworks. Local NGOs should be encouraged to invest in improving their evaluation technical expertise though recruitment of competent staff and continuous training.

Conflict of Interest Declaration

The authors declares that this is their original work and that this study was not funded by any local or international organization throughout the assessment and reporting. We fully declare that there was no conflict of interest.

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