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CLOSING THE DIGITAL DIVIDE:
DEALING WITH DRUCKER'S 'RESPONSIBILITY GAP' IN AFRICA
KENYA ANTICIPATES THE ICT/KM FUTURE WITH ENTHUSIASM
BY GUY ST. CLAIR

KEY POINTS:

1. Current examples of unprincipled behavior in corporate and organizational management seem to imply a moral weakness in society
2. Peter Drucker asserted that managers have a moral obligation to avoid the "responsibility gap" and embrace social responsibility
3. In Kenya, managers and leaders are joining together to provide youth with strategic learning and training in ICT/KM
4. NGOs, the Kenyan government, development and humanitarian organizations, the international business community, and local businesses are working together to achieve this goal
5. These initiatives exemplify Drucker's assertion: management's task is two-fold: to achieve organizational effectiveness and to contribute to the common good.

Key Words: Kenya, information and communication technology, ICT, knowledge services, knowledge management, KM, knowledge development and knowledge sharing, KD/KS, social responsibility, labor force, "digital villages," management, young people, Peter F. Drucker, Information Africa Organization.

The seemingly unending reports of unprincipled behavior in our social institutions is making us all nervous. What's going on? Can things really be as bad as all that?

Maybe so. When some of society's most important and most influential institutions are revealed to be doing the things we are reading about, it's very hard not to be shocked—and disappointed. And looking the other way becomes more and more difficult. If our religious institutions and the powerful financial firms are giving in to temptation and ignoring their social responsibilities, is good still being done? Where?

The questions are rhetorical, of course, and one does not have to look far to see that Peter Drucker's leadership and advice for avoiding what he called the "responsibility gap" has been—and continues to be—heard and observed in the management community at large. Much is being done, and, yes, our global society is better off because leaders and management executives are continuing to hear—and follow the tenets of—Peter Drucker's good advice.

To my way of thinking, one of the best examples is what is happening with ICT (information and communication technology) and KM (knowledge management) in Africa. This is a subject I am currently giving a great deal of attention to, and readers who visit the SMR International site regularly will recall a

recent e-Profile (January, 2010) describing the Information Africa Organization and two of the organization's leaders. In that essay, IAO's Executive Director William Mibei and the Vice-Chair, the Hon. Rev. Moses Akaranga, were characterized as people who are committed to bringing ICT and KM skills to the young people of Kenya.

Why are they and their IAO colleagues doing this? The answer is simple: to ensure that Kenya has young people ready to move into the ICT/KM labor market when they are needed. When international corporations come looking to set up shop in Kenya, looking for congenial locations to do their work, IAO wants to be sure Kenya's youth have the skills and knowledge to be hired. It is not a complicated scenario, and it demonstrates that right from the get-go, Africa's own management leaders are heeding Mr. Drucker's great message.

As long ago as 1973, in the preface to his still-engaging *Management: Tasks, Responsibilities, Practices*, Mr. Drucker asserted that the management task goes beyond achieving organizational effectiveness. Such success is unquestionably the management *raison d'être*, but it is only one "piece," if you will, one side of the management mission. The other critical element in the management portfolio is the manager's and the organization's responsibility to society, to the common good. Indeed, Drucker put it better than anyone since: "if the managers of our major institutions, and especially of business," he wrote, "do not take responsibility for the common good, no one else can or will."

It was an important and—not surprisingly, for the time—a somewhat innovative assertion, this bid to have organizational and business leaders look beyond their established role in the workplace. But it made sense. Today, in Africa, the idea that management must do more than simply meet the established organizational objective can be seen in many different fields of interest and work areas, and there really isn't any other discipline—that I've been able to identify—that is having the impact of the interest being generated in strategic learning and training for ICT and KM.

Much of that impact is described in the May 10 issue of *EContent*, in an article ("Kenya Builds Digital Villages and Lays the Foundation for a Brighter Future") in which the point is made that the "train-the-young-people-in-ICT-and-KM" bandwagon is moving forward, and at a very fast pace. In my own work, it has been extremely gratifying to see the number of organizations that are looking to work with young people to help them develop ICT/KM skills. Obviously my attention is focused mostly on IAO, since that is where I focus my volunteer energy, but a number of other nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are doing work in this area as well. Many of these efforts are described in the *EContent* story, and I'm particularly taken with one idea, the development of so-called "digital villages," community learning centres that are springing up throughout the country. In the villages, local schoolchildren are able to learn new skills and have the opportunity to interact with other students, even with other young people in different parts of the world, thanks to the internet. One of the beauties of these establishments is the localization of the effort, enabling young people to learn about ICT and KM/knowledge services without having to travel to distant urban areas.

In those urban areas, though, different kinds of training and development initiatives are being put forward for Kenya's youth. Established by managers and leaders of the many development and humanitarian organizations on the ground in Kenya and working along with local citizens to shape the digital skills of youth, these initiatives are making a difference. One such effort, recognized for its success, is the work of the Partners and Youth Branch of the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-HABITAT) in Nairobi. This three-tiered programme begins from the premise that its mission is to develop youth friendly policies, and with its One-Stop Centre for Youth, its Moonbeam Training Centre, and the Opportunities Fund for Urban Youth, UN-HABITAT is doing its part to see that Kenya's youth have access to the training they require for securing their future.

At another part of the youth "picture"—and particularly gratifying to learn about—is the KM presence in the curricula of several of Kenya's academic institutions. Indeed, one of the earliest surprises for a knowledge services specialist arriving in Kenya is to learn about the attention given to KM at many different academic levels. Currently three universities have offerings in KM, spearheaded by administrative leaders in the post-graduate programme in Agricultural Information and Communication Management (AICM). Both Egerton University and the University of Nairobi in Kenya (and Haramaya University in Ethiopia) have programmes, and while these initiatives are still in the early stages, developing course content and building capacity for staff to teach in the programme, they are well on the way to institutionalizing the teaching of KM as a substantive element of graduate education. The value of this direction was made clear in the report of the recent Global Conference on Agricultural Research for Development (GCARD 2010). An important conclusion of the conference, the report notes, is that "the main focus of agricultural research for development was the satisfaction of technological and knowledge needs of research-poor small holder farmers and producers to improve productivity, livelihoods, and quality of life the world over…. agriculture is becoming increasingly knowledge intensive with agricultural production now a knowledge-based industry."

In Kenya's local university-level KM programmes, these initiatives have the potential to provide a model for other subject areas as well as in agricultural development. Course syllabi describe how KM directly influences farming practices, and it is not difficult to substitute other activities for "farming practices." Already at the local level there is much discussion about how KM would be of value in health sciences studies, and the architecture and buildings faculties of some institutions seem to be interested in moving in this direction as well. Certainly many of the objectives of the courses (such as learning about theories of knowledge, identifying the implications of a knowledge economy, and capturing, formalizing, organizing, and distributing knowledge to end-users) are all end-results valuable in almost any line of work. It is fair to predict that KM will be showing up in other academic disciplines sooner rather than later. There's just too much at stake for it not to happen.

In addition to establishing curricula in ICT/KM at the learning institutions and the initiatives of the development and humanitarian organizations, businesses are making the point that ICT/KM is important to the economic life of the country. The long list of commercial organizations helping move Kenya's ICT/KM youth training initiatives forward is impressive, and the *EContent* article identifies several international names, among them Microsoft East Africa and World Bank. And not to be left out, some of the local telecommunication names are there as well (Safaricom, Telkom Kenya, and Zain), obviously expecting to be part of this effort. The Kenyan government, too, through its Ministry of Education and Ministry of Information and Communications, is a major player, and it will be interesting to see how all these different organizations, with their different agendas, will establish a collaboration base to ensure the success of strategic learning and training for ICT and KM/knowledge services.

Is it all part of a global programme to close that responsibility gap Mr. Drucker warned us about? I'm enough of an idealist to think it is (or perhaps to *wish* it so), simply because—at this point in history—we have surely learned that anything else will just not be good enough. As Drucker put it, in management the emphasis is not on management skills, tools, and techniques. It is not even on the work of management. It is on the tasks. Here's the master's take on management:

> For management is the organ, the life-giving, acting, dynamic organ of the institution it manages. Without the institution, *e.g.*, the business enterprise, there would be no management. But without management there would also be only a mob rather than an institution. The institution, in turn, is itself an organ of society and exists only to contribute a needed result to society, the economy, and the individual. Organs, however, are never defined by what they do, let alone by how they do it. They are defined by their contribution.

Surely that thought-construct, that process, is the driver for managers who are "doing more." They are determining that *their* contribution—in addition to organizational effectiveness—is nothing less than sharing their management strengths to see that organizations other than their own succeed. And if those organizations are positioned to make a contribution that makes life better for the people with whom we all have our social contract—as with ICT/KM training in Kenya—the responsibility gap is indeed closing or, if not closing all the way (we are, after all, just human beings, with all those frailties that come with being human), the gap is at least narrowing.

On the other hand, my idealism—particularly with respect to such topics as ICT and KM/knowledge services, is tempered with a strong dose of realism. I see good things happening, as I've reported here, but I am also very aware—in these early days—that there are flaws. Corners are cut, the profit motive more times than not interferes with service delivery and, not to put too fine a point on it, the ICT infrastructure is sometimes allowed to be very spotty. Customers find out very early that when things stop working, no one at the other end of a telephone line (if the telephone is answered) cares very much, so we have to curb our enthusiasm for success with ICT/KM training for the youth with a tiny bit of concern about whether they will simply give up when they become discouraged by lack of service or a lack of interest on the part of the service providers.

Will they give up? Probably not, for ICT and KM/knowledge services are still a lot of fun for young person. Case in point: one young man I met—very far out in the "up-country" of Kenya—was very articulate in expressing to me that training isn't really necessary. We got on the subject because I let him spend a few minutes with my little netbook. He knew about them (of course—all young people know about them, even in Kenya's up-country!) but he had never had an opportunity to play with a netbook. He was (there is no other way to describe it) *transfixed.* As we spoke together about what a person could do with a little netbook, the conversation turned to training and strategic learning.

He wasn't interested. He stated quite honestly (and I'm quite sure he believed this) that if he had the tool—the netbook—he would learn how to use it. And he was sincere—he wasn't hinting for me to give him my netbook. He was simply making the point, and arguing it very well, that he would not require training. He could train himself.

Perhaps. Quite frankly, if that's the kind of enthusiasm we can find in the youth, then let's give them the netbooks and let them go at it.

But truth to tell, for them to be hired on as ICT/KM staff in the international corporations and organizations, ICT/KM strategic learning and training will be required. The technology is too good and too well developed to be mastered by amateurs (no matter how well-meaning). While the amateurs can have fun, to earn their livings and do their best work, they will require training.

Providing that training is what Kenya is seeking to do. With the help of Mr. Drucker's sincere and well-motivated management experts, Kenya will get there.

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