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PROPELLERS OF ORGANISATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY IN HOSPICES IN SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract: Hospices operating in the non-profit sector are experiencing organisational sustainability pressures, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, while the population of patients who are terminally ill and requiring palliative care is increasing, the resources required to render this noble service are depleting, so much so that some hospices have closed. The situation raises profound organisational sustainability concerns, and this serves as the motivation for this generic qualitative study to investigate the propellers of organisational sustainability in South African-based hospices operating in the non-profit sector. Data was collected through interviews with twelve senior managers from different hospice organisations. The data was then analysed using Thematic Content Analysis (TCA). Subsequent results reveal that a cocktail of factors, including transparent communication, visionary leadership, a strategic disposition, improved service quality, a strong corporate culture, a diversified revenue base and committed staff, propel organisational sustainability among hospices. Conversely, the COVID-19 pandemic-enforced lockdowns and the rampant emergence of many NPOs impede the sustainability prospects of the hospices. With these insights, this study contributes to the organisational sustainability discourse from a uniquely South African perspective, given the dearth of research in this area, particularly in the context of developing economies.

Keywords: Hospice, non-profit organisations, organisational effectiveness, propellers, sustainability.

Introduction

Non-profit organisations (NPOs) are important in providing care for vulnerable members of society, especially against the backdrop of the severe constraints faced by state-owned providers of similar services (Singh & Mthuli, 2020). This position is supported by Radbruch *et al*. (2020), who stated that access to Palliative Care (PC) remains inadequate or non-existent in certain parts of the world. This fact notwithstanding, whenever PC is offered at an appropriate level, it makes a significant and meaningful contribution to patients and their families (Berry *et al.,* 2020).

To fill the void left by profit-seeking organisations and provide quality PC services, non-profit hospices must employ highly skilled healthcare professionals at relatively high costs. Consequently, to finance their activities, non-profit hospices employ Funding Models (FMs) that typically rely heavily on external donor funding, internal fundraising activities and the generosity of the public (Bocquet *et al.,* 2020). It would seem that funds raised through these sources remain insufficient. This observation is reinforced by Maboya and McKay (2019), who argued that despite the challenges facing NPOs, the inadequacy of funds remains pre-eminent. In the specific South African context, Mahilall and Swartz (2021) contended that the fundraising challenge would become even more intense in light of the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath. It is against this reality that many non-profit hospices currently face a genuine threat of closure. The closure of hospices will have severe consequences for patients. In addition, it would mean that the services they provide, which help reduce trauma and the emotional strain faced by families of terminally ill patients would be unavailable. Furthermore, the resultant job losses due to the closure of the hospices would increase the already high level of unemployment and catalyse a catalogue of

collateral social ills that would not augur well for the South African state.

Buoyed by a desire to contribute towards the prevention or mitigation of the threat of business closure, this study sets out to provide insights regarding the propellers of organisational sustainability in non-profit hospices, cognisant of the reality of the unique COVID-19 pandemic era. Additionally, the study is poised to enrich the ongoing academic discourse that stems from the growing research interest around sustainability in the broader NPO sector, with a focus on South Africa, given the paucity of extant research literature undertaken within the context of a developing country. To this end, the study seeks to find answers to the research question regarding the specific factors that contribute to the sustainability of hospice organisations operating in the non-profit sector.

Literature review

Palliative Care (PC) is an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problems associated with a life-threatening illness through the prevention and relief of suffering and by addressing any other associated issues (HPCA, 2022). Owing to the scourge of HIV/AIDS and other life-threatening diseases in South Africa, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of people who could benefit from PC (Campbell *et al.,* 2021). Arguably, this would be the case, especially among people from less affluent income groups. Despite this problem, there remains a general lack of understanding of the role of hospices in providing PC. One of the troubling fallouts of this fact is that as many as 60% of all patients who require palliative interventions are reluctant to use the service because of misperceptions about hospices and a phobia relating to death-related conversations (Berry *et al*., 2020). This situation may be amplified in the context of African countries, such as South Africa, given the huge socioeconomic and health disparities in the country as noted by Wearne *et al.* (2021).

Undoubtedly, PC significantly alleviates suffering (Sleeman *et al*., 2019). Against this backdrop, the value of an effective PC plan cannot be over-emphasised. As an integral part of PC, the benefits of supportive home-based care have been well documented and the value of patient and healthcare professional partnerships promoted (Kahveci *et al.,* 2020). While the 'how and when' aspects of PC may be the subject of debate, it is indisputable that such treatment lends itself to the shared goal of improving patients' quality of life (Radbruch *et al*., 2020). The provision of good PC, however, requires the creation and collaboration of a trained multi-disciplinary team (Smith *et al.,* 2022). This task can be an expensive endeavour. Due to the high costs of assembling and maintaining such a unit, among others, incurred for PC delivery, the organisational sustainability of non-profit hospices has become a concern. This knowledge is instructive because of resource-related challenges aggravated by the inequitable distribution of PC resources (Johnston *et al*., 2019). This is evident across providers of this service, principally between those in the profit-seeking sector such as some businesses operating through nursing practice codes and those in the non-profit sector, like hospices.

Despite this, NPOs continue to provide PC services to the segments of the population that are most desperately in need of them and who are often ignored by the profit-seeking sector, primarily due to affordability challenges. Given that South Africa has a high demand for PC services, researchers like Inderlall and Naidoo (2021) and Wearne *et al*. (2021) opine that PC is mostly provided by NPOs as opposed to recognised state hospitals. Interestingly, Moon and Shugan (2020) observed competitive interactions between profit-seeking organisations and NPOs in the delivery of medical services. This sentiment is echoed by Erramy and Ahrouch (2021), who stated that NPOs could expand and grow their services without necessarily affecting the collaboration between themselves and their profit-seeking counterparts, such as some businesses operating through nursing practice codes that also offer PC and directly invoice patients or their medical schemes.

Faced with pressures not limited to financial constraints, hospices must identify and leverage a variety of propellers that could contribute to their ongoing sustainability. The stakeholder cohort is an important catalyst for organisational success (Osei-Kyei & Chan, 2018; Santoro *et al.,* 2020; Bischoff, 2021). Besides this, organisational effectiveness could also enable sustainability (Holbeche, 2018; Nwauche, 2021; Abdullah *et al.,* 2021). Additionally, the role that corporate culture can play in the sustainability of an organisation has been acknowledged (Ilyas *et al.*, 2020; Oliveira *et al.,* 2021; Dell *et al.,* 2022). For an organisation to continue to operate, there is a need for astute financial performance (Dell *et al.,* 2022; Ilyas *et al.,* 2020; Oliveira *et al*., 2021). Extant literature also contends that staff are a critical variable in the overall equation of the continued operation of an organisation (Nogueira *et al.,* 2020; Montorio-Archer, 2021; Slatten *et al.,* 2021). Cognisant of these assertions by different scholars, the factors of stakeholders, organisational effectiveness, corporate culture, financial performance and staff could engender the sustainability of hospices in South Africa.

Stakeholders

The evolution of the non-profit sector has seen NPOs develop more structured business operations with a broader pool of stakeholders who directly affect the organisation's functioning (Hitt *et al.,* 2017). Despite many stakeholders wielding influence over NPOs and their sustainability, the patient remains the most important stakeholder in the hospice's service. However, the role of the NPO's Board of Directors cannot be discounted. Consequently, Garcia-Rodriquez *et al.* (2021) contended that the composition of the board is by no means random and board members have a notable stakeholder role to play in organisational sustainability.

According to Sleeman *et al*. (2019), government agencies constitute a critical stakeholder cohort as they engage NPOs to deliver services, such as PC, on their behalf. As a testament to the role of government, in 2020, PC was included in the National Referral Policy for South African Health Services (Luyirika *et al.,* 2022). Though government partnerships embody potential funding challenges for NPOs, an associational value accrues to both parties through higher visibility that translates to a societal endorsement (Cantele *et al.,* 2020). It is against this background that Lozano and von Haartman (2018) declared that the reputation of an organisation is of extreme importance. This fact is arguably so because good standing enables the acquisition of the all-important social licence to operate within a community with an assurance of cooperation.

Organisational effectiveness

In their pursuit of sustainability, NPOs must strive to balance their social mission with the need for commercial viability. This is because, without sufficient resources, the continued pursuit of a noble social mission would be compromised. Sustainability, a concept defined as the ability to endure and survive, is closely related to the notion of effectiveness and, thus, should be embedded in attaining organisational goals (Iwu *et al.,* 2015). In addition to a recognition of the good cause that NPOs serve, Maboya and McKay (2019) noted that donors are motivated to support NPOs partly because of a conviction that they are flexible and efficient. Singh and Mthuli (2020) emphasised the importance of organisational effectiveness in NPOs by arguing that an NPO cannot sustain itself if it cannot deliver on its envisaged social mission.

Corporate culture

Amidst the ongoing debate around the need for organisational sustainability, Cantele *et al.* (2020) asserted that it is becoming commonplace for organisations to embed at least an element of sustainability into their organisational culture. Organisational culture is a multi-faceted phenomenon shaping an organisation's daily activities, driven further by organisational commitment. According to Pinho *et al.* (2014), organisational commitment

is based on the sense of loyalty an employee has towards the organisation (organisational loyalty), how the employee identifies with the organisation (organisational identification) and the level at which the employee engages with the organisation (organisational involvement).

Odor (2018) supported the notion that culture relates directly to core organisational values, which underpin the decision-making and behaviour within an organisation. These values will likely have organisational sustainability implications for NPOs in South Africa that provide PC. Furthermore, it is a fact that NPOs thrive when their organisations are aligned with the markets and, notably, when organisational culture plays a significant role in creating this favourable market orientation (Pinho *et al.*, 2014).

Financial performance

The operations of hospices appear to be constrained by inadequate funds. While the sources of funds may differ, in South Africa, government funding is only accessible to NPOs who meet very stringent application criteria relating to fiscal adherence, service delivery outcomes, and the provision of credible governance oversight. For many NPOs, the requirement to conform to a long list of onerous registration criteria is arduous as not all NPOs have the resources to incorporate required governance structures within their organisations. Due to this, they are automatically excluded from applying for government funding opportunities.

A funder like the National Lottery or the Lotto has specific projects which it funds and often the provision of PC does not feature in its calls for proposals. Additionally, the success of receiving funding from Lotto is linked to the quality of the grant proposal presented. Due to the inadequacy of funds, most hospices as NPOs are unable to employ the services of professional fundraising grant proposal writers. This hurts the quality of grant proposals generated by hospices and the success rate that attends such applications.

It is noteworthy that strategic decisions often emerge because of the changing funding landscapes and associated internal factors that have the potential to promote organisational sustainability (Lozano & von Haartman, 2018). Luyrika *et al.* (2022) stated that one way to achieve this practice across the African continent is for national governments to finance PC services through national budgets and for donors to provide more support for PC integration. This backing does not seem to be happening, so Sarker and Rahman (2018) advocated that NPOs should adopt a self-supporting strategic management approach to improve their financial performance. This recommendation suggests a direct relationship exists between implementing such a strategic management approach and the financial performance of NPOs.

Therefore, Maboya and McKay (2019) maintained that certain elements of financial uncertainty in NPOs could be alleviated by adopting a more strategic management approach, which would inevitably enhance overall performance. It is against this background that Singh and Mthuli (2020) declared that NPOs need sustainable FMs to support their activities to remain functional. Consequently, commercial activity, as a means of revenue generation in the NPO sector, is becoming more popular and funding generated from these commercial endeavours is set to become a growing source of income (Omura & Forster, 2014). In the equation of organisational sustainability, the contribution that a self-befitting FM can make cannot be over-emphasised (Cantele *et al*., 2020).

Staff

In the specific context of Sub-Saharan Africa, Straeuli *et al.* (2022) observed that organisations that offer PC are overwhelmed with resource limitations, particularly understaffing, which negatively affects their performance and sustainability prospects. This human resource constraint has contributed to additional levels of complexity in the provision of PC (Mahilall & Swartz, 2021). In the quest for sustainability in the broader realm of social

entrepreneurship, Erramy and Ahrouch (2021) stated the importance of staff to build competitive advantage within organisations. If this claim is valid, only NPOs with sufficient quantity and quality of human resources may survive. On a similar note, Iwu *et al.* (2015) insisted that employee motivation and growth can fertilise organisational sustainability, which has heightened the premium on people management.

Methodology

This study has been conducted according to the constructivist philosophical paradigm because it aims to improve the understanding of the phenomenon being studied through the experiences or accounts of those who participated. The reliance on this paradigm has encouraged using a qualitative research method that, according to Cresswell (2012), enables the purposeful exploration of a central phenomenon while gaining a thorough understanding of the interviewed participants' perspectives about a research problem (Mack *et al.,* 2005). Therefore, a generic qualitative research design was chosen because Singh and Mthuli (2020) suggested that it is appropriate for seeking an in-depth understanding of the study participants' opinions and attitudes.

The target population for this study were senior managers working at organisations in South Africa that are accredited as non-profit hospices by the Hospice Palliative Care Association of South Africa (HPCA). To select participants, a non-probability sampling method, specifically a homogenous sampling strategy, was employed to identify the organisations and the individuals who would participate in the study. The homogenous sampling strategy allows the creation of a small group of units that share similar characteristics. The key informant technique was utilised and this process implies that only senior managers knowledgeable about issues related to the organisational sustainability of the hospices they oversee, would participate in the study. Semi-structured interviews were employed because these enabled the researchers to further probe the study participants' opinions. While the units of analysis for the study comprised the non-profit hospices, the units of observation were the senior managers within these NPOs. Details of the selected participants are summarised in Table 1.

An interview guide aligned with the research questions was developed based on knowledge gained from the review of extant literature. The data collected through the interviews were analysed using the Thematic Content Analysis

Table 1: Summary details of participants

Participant Tag	Job Title	Company Identification Number	Years of Work in the Hospice Sector
P1	General Manager	C1	3.5 years
P2	Chief Executive Officer	C2	5 years
P3	Head: Social Services	C3	10 years
P4	Chief Executive Officer	C4	14.5 years
P5	Chief Executive Officer	C5	11 years
P6	Chief Executive Officer	C6	20 years
P7	General Manager (Acting)	C7	21 years
P8	General Manager	C8	5 years
P9	Chief Executive Officer	C9	12 years
P10	Chief Executive Officer	C10	12 years
P11	Chief Executive Officer	C11	6 years
P12	Chief Executive Officer	C12	20 years

(TCA) technique on Atlas—ti9 software. The analytical process involved identifying, organising and interpreting themes that emerged from the data. Initial familiarisation with the data was achieved by listening to the recordings while reading the transcripts simultaneously. Inductive codes were created during the initial data interpretation activity, followed by combining those inductive codes with a priori codes generated from the reviewed literature.

To achieve trustworthiness, the researcher ensured that the proposed study met the four criteria Polit and Beck (2012) identified: Credible, dependable, confirmable and transferable. The research findings were credible because they reflected the true perspectives and individual responses of the interview participants. Dependability was achieved by thoroughly describing the research methodology used. To ensure confirmability, the researchers conducted the interviews in a manner that discouraged preconceived bias so that the responses were a true reflection of the opinions of the interviewees. Transferability was achieved by fully describing the contextual factors that affected the study.

Results and Discussion

This study's main theme, 'Propellers of Organisational Sustainability in Hospices in South Africa', comprised five subthemes: Stakeholders, organisational effectiveness, corporate culture, financial performance and staff. A summary of the sub-themes and associated elements that participants utilised as a pivot for their discussions is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of sub-themes, elements and participants who commented on them

		Participant's number												
		1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**Total**
1.	**Stakeholders**													**7**
	Elements													
	a. Communication			√	√									2
	b. COVID-19 lockdowns		√						√					2
	c. Competition	√		√							√			3
2.	**Organisational effectiveness**													**14**
	Elements													
	a. Innovativeness		√		√	√			√			√		5
	b. Leadership					√					√			2
	c. Strategic approach	√				√						√		3
	d. Service Quality		√	√								√	√	4
3.	**Corporate culture**	√		√								√	√	**4**
4.	**Financial performance**													**4**
	Revenue diversification			√				√			√	√		4
5.	**Staff**													**5**
	People management	√	√				√	√				√		5

The table links the individual participants to the interview extracts related to specific elements in the identified subthemes presented in this section. Additionally, the research expands upon these subthemes by discussing and referencing direct quotes from the senior managers who participated in the study.

Stakeholders

While donor relations ranked highly amongst study participants, it was evident that they were equally concerned with broader stakeholder relationships. Concerning the stakeholder sub-theme of the study, the senior managers of hospices who participated in the study identified communication issues, lockdowns due to COVID-19 and competition as being central to the quest for improved relationships that will help to ensure the sustainability of their hospices. Stakeholder relationships can be nurtured by effective communication, so participants insisted that to further the prospects of sustainability of the hospice, communication with stakeholders always needed to be transparent. This is possible because of the implications that transparency has for trust between the hospice and other parties in its universe of stakeholders. According to the participants:

P3: *"I think there, there are times that stakeholders pull in different directions but through honest communication, all parties can gain a better understanding of what needs to be achieved; this way we can achieve a more coherent alignment of stakeholder contributions to our vision."*

P4: *"... one thing that we've found that we needed to do was a lot more inclusive and transparent communication, across the board; you know, from top to bottom. We have therefore increased our reporting, open communication and relationship-building as we strive for the sustainability of the business."*

The participants, as mentioned above, confirmed that effective communication with stakeholders is a critical element in the quest for sustainability. The participants appear to understand the ramifications of open communication for the health of stakeholder relationships, and this outcome is in harmony with the findings made by Lee (2022) who examined collaborative value-creation between NPOs and businesses.

The importance of carefully managing relationships with donors, particularly those who can affect the functioning of an organisation, was highlighted by Hitt *et al.* (2017). Unfortunately, the health protocols foisted upon organisations and the public by the COVID-19 pandemic, such as social distancing, encumbered the management of stakeholder relationships in South African hospices and adversely affected the drive for organisational sustainability.

Nursing care requires hands-on clinical interventions with patients and restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic substantially limited the way nurses were able to interact when providing care to terminally ill patients. Additionally, in the PC setting, face-to-face meetings between the psycho-social teams, the patient and the patient's extended family and loved ones are typical. The social distancing requirements characteristic of the COVID-19 pandemic hampered the frequency and mode of these meetings. Further, bereavement requires people to console one another, sometimes by hugging and holding one another. These natural human responses to death and dying that bring some levels of comfort were discouraged and so they were significantly reduced because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Indeed, 7 of the 12 participants argued that the lockdown restrictions imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic had hurt their ability to sustain meaningful stakeholder relationships that have had a substantial 'knock-on' effect on their organisation's sustainability. According to some of the participants:

P2: *"I think, you know, not a single one of us in this global society has not been affected by COVID. For us, it has affected all the wonderful plans we had in place. The idea of generating income for the hospice by*

holding fancy events, which have proven to be great money spinners, has now been completely put on hold."

P8: *"… so when I alluded to COVID being a factor, well it certainly is now and has been as well for the last 18 months or however long. It did impact on our relationships and performance ability, seriously, not only with our existing partners but also our resource base in terms of service delivery."*

Moon and Shugan (2020) highlighted the ability of NPOs to mobilise resources quickly through donors. In South Africa, participants suggested that a plethora of NPOs have emerged, and all are vying for the same pool of donor funding. Invariably, this practice has impacted the overall sustainability of NPOs and, more specifically, hospices. The competition for support has become intense and deflated the assistance (financial and non-financial) received by hospices. The emergence of so many competitors seeking similar support for 'noble' causes has affected the extent of attention that each hospice receives from stakeholders, and this limitation endangers the sustainability of hospices. Concerning the speed of emergence of other NPOs and the widespread competition for support from stakeholders, interviewees opined that:

P1: *"The other thing was the increased number of NPOs, you know, jumping up left, right and centre in South Africa. So, even in our small towns, this has had an impact on the support such as donations that our hospice receives for the PC service that we provide."*

P10: *"There are so many churches, schools, crèches and other organisations that are working in the non-profit sector to improve society. All these organisations have no option but to tap into the same stakeholder pool in search of assistance and this makes stakeholder relationship-building so difficult."*

These positions described above illuminate the influence of communication, environmental nuances like the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns and existing levels of competition on building healthy stakeholder relationships that would foster organisational sustainability in the studied hospices. The opinions canvassed by participants are consistent with Lozano and von Haartman (2018) who declared that organisational reputation, possibly stemming from good stakeholder relationships, is critical, particularly in NPOs, compared to other organisations.

Organisational Effectiveness

Due to the changing economic climate, hospices demonstrate their awareness of the need to be more innovative in fashioning effective solutions. The interviews with the study participants revealed that hospices are alive to the reality that they must consistently deliver results, even with limited resources in an ever-changing social environment. The situation is exacerbated in South Africa because of the vast degree of socio-economic inequalities, whose resultant effect is that many people in the society cannot afford PC from organisations in the profit-seeking sector. The pathway for achieving desired levels of organisational effectiveness in the studied hospices is that of expending efforts on improving innovativeness, organisational management, planning and provision of quality clinical services. About the element of innovativeness as a catalyst for sustainability, interviewees said:

P2: *"So, we would like to specifically strengthen our telehealth approach as an innovative way to continue to serve our patients."*

P4: *"I mean, you know, we constantly need to adapt and be creative to be more effective at what we do to remain relevant going into the future."*

P5: *"… we've got to keep looking for new opportunities. You've got to look at doing things differently to remain reliable and relevant in this space."*

P8: *"I think there may be opportunities right in front of us that we're not seeing and so creativity, innovation and out-of-the-box*

thinking, all come into the equation if our organisation must survive."

P11: *"We had to come up with more creative and innovative plans to improve our performance in terms of delivery of service to patients as this assures our continued existence."*

According to Maboya and McKay (2019), since NPOs are flexible organisations, they are endowed with the potential for appreciable levels of innovativeness. This feature is evident among the South African hospices that participated in this study, given that their senior managers testified that as organisations, they could adapt to the exigencies of the environments in which they operate in a bid to deliver desired results with important social implications. Additionally, about the theme of organisational effectiveness, the interviewees stressed the need for effective leadership as a critical propeller of sustainability by suggesting that:

P4: "*...., leadership support for using strategic management principles, the adoption of positive attributes and sound corporate governance enhance chances of NPO sustainability."*

P10: *"We can, as leadership, be visionary and ensure that there are proper policies, procedures and mechanisms in the organisation that will contribute to its sustainability."*

Concerning the broad theme of organisational effectiveness, the study participants identified the need to emphasise organisational planning from a strategic perspective. Adopting a strategic perspective while planning helps the organisation anticipate and adequately prepare for the future, thus enhancing its chances of sustainability. This position resonates with the thoughts of Singh and Mthuli (2020), who stated that NPOS must strive for organisational effectiveness as a sustainability propeller because if an NPO is to deliver on its social mission, it must be sustainable. In the specific case of the hospices that participated in the study, senior managers pushed the case for a strategic approach to planning by suggesting that:

P1: *"For me, the main, the biggest part of sustainability is that all actions towards ensuring it, should be based on strategic organisational planning."*

P11: *"So if I look at our strategic plan, the objectives that we must reach have to be crystal clear, otherwise we will just be floating around without direction especially when there are no long-term projections."*

Bowen (2014) describes PC delivery as a complex and multi-faceted process. However, the success of this practice is typically based on the level of service quality that the caregiving organisation can deliver. While service quality may have several dimensions, the hospices appear to be most concerned about rendering their services in a manner that meets, at a minimum, the expectations of their patients and other stakeholders. The interviewees described their mandate in various terms, often with a simplified view and through the narrow prism of service delivery. This simplified approach inevitably contributes to the conflict between the competing interests of pursuing a 'noble' social mission, the desire to satisfy a kaleidoscope of expectations and the need for a commercially sound and sustainable approach. Focusing on the service quality element of the organisational effectiveness theme of the study, the participants contend that in the context of their respective hospices:

P2: "*Our aim is very simple, to constantly and continuously provide five-star palliative care to patients as quality is an overarching consideration for the sustainability of the business."*

P3: *"We insist that excellent quality of service must be provided on a clinical level; this is the barest that we can do for terminally-ill patients, their families and their friends."*

P11: *"In very few words, we see ourselves as a service-delivering organisation and so this is what is paramount."*

P12: *"The quality of the work that we deliver as a hospice is crucial; in fact, I would say it is, very high on my agenda."*

While the importance of the broad theme of organisational effectiveness has been identified in the extant literature, in the specific context of South African hospices that participated in the study, four critical elements underpin the sustainability of their organisations. From the perspective of the senior managers interviewed for the study, the four elements of organisational effectiveness that lend themselves to the continued survival of South African hospices are the elements of innovativeness, leadership, strategic approach and service quality.

Corporate Culture

Cherian *et al*. (2021) related culture directly to core organisational values and, in turn, to behaviour within the organisation. Concerning the study theme of corporate culture, analysis of the data collected through the interviews did not generate any elements. This result implies that the interviewees generally perceived corporate culture as a mono-construct or felt no need to highlight any component aspects of the corporate culture in their hospices.

Instructively, striving to become a culture-conscious organisation is a worthy endeavour. According to Pinho *et al*. (2014), culture plays a significant role in an organisation's market orientation, resulting in a competitive advantage that, in turn, should foster sustainability. The study found that aspects of corporate culture such as organisational loyalty (P1, P12), organisational identity (P3) and organisational involvement (P11) were evident in the hospices. Concerning the theme of a veritable corporate culture as an antecedent for organisational sustainability, participants stated that:

P1: *"As I said, these nurses have been here for a very long time, so you can say that they are very connected with the organisation and the work it does in providing PC."*

P12: *"I would say 80% of our home-based carers have been with us since 2003 when I trained them and this helps to keep the organisation going."*

P3: *"I think we need to develop our culture so that it filters through to all staff members no matter their roles and help them see how they fit into the bigger picture as this would help the organisation become sustainable."*

P11: *"…teamwork is an important part of our culture because we believe in starting together and ending together, and without teamwork, we won't be able to deliver the services on the big scale we do. So, our staff know that they've got a voice and that's important for me as it aids organisational survival."*

Financial Performance

Interviewees articulated the importance of diversifying revenue streams and the need to be more self-reliant, particularly in an uncertain and dynamic economic environment. According to one of the participants:

P3: *"So, at the moment, we're relying on those unpredictable sources from where we can get funds and one would almost want to tip the scale and say, we shouldn't be relying on them. We need to be self-reliant."*

As a means of revenue diversification and self-reliance, all 12 participants operated retail charity shops with varying degrees of success. P11 indicated that the hospice's retail shop was performing so poorly that it only opened once a week. Similarly, the hospice organisation P10 works for closed their shop altogether because of poor performance. Contrastingly, P7's organisation is enjoying a positive experience in the retail sector. The unique situation of each hospice informed the perspectives of interviewees who opined that:

P7: *"Our shops' income has increased by about 25% over the last three years…. which is quite nice as it is helping us stay afloat as a business."*

P10: *"We did have a charity shop, but because of lots of problems, we've closed it down*

and this amounts to a reduction in the funds that we need to continue to provide PC"

P11: *"Due to capacity and patronage issues, only once a week do we open the charity shop to the public as we seek additional resources to stay functional"*

These thoughts suggest that the need for exploring other revenue sources by hospices is well-recognised. Understandably, Oliveira *et al.* (2021) raised awareness around the increasing recourse to commercial activities within the NPO sector because these events enable the generation of additional revenue. The findings of this study that show the inclination of hospices in South Africa towards revenue diversification synchronises with the position of Ye and Gong (2021) who maintained that revenue diversification in an organisation would alleviate the effects of external financial volatility and enable organisational sustainability. On a similar note, Maboya and McKay (2019) proposed a combination of income generation, diversification and self-funding models, blended with commercial activities, for NPOs, rather than an overreliance on donor funding or government grants.

Staff

All participants admitted that their staff were contributing towards their organisation's sustainability, particularly referencing the value that comes with their years of experience in the industry. Huang (2021) maintained that staff are important assets of any organisation and this fact cannot exclude the NPO sector. From the view of the study participants:

P1: *"Our patient care manager, for example, has been here for over 20 years. So, we have a wonderful, very strong team carrying this service for a long time."*

P2: "*We need effective succession planning for sustainability reasons, but it is not often possible to implement."*

P6: *"…organisational sustainability comes from the staff (whether it be volunteers or full-time staff) feeling that they're part of something which is of great value."*

P7: *"Towards the issue of organisational sustainability, we are constantly on the lookout for training and developmental opportunities as this would equip our staff better for the future."*

The above opinions voiced by the interviewed senior managers reveal the extent to which hospices viewed their staff as important to their organisations. There is a recognition that the continued existence of the hospice is inextricably linked to the staff complement at its disposal, several of whom are volunteers. This finding is understandable given the human touch that is an essential part of the PC that hospices provide.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Characteristically, as with most research endeavours, this study has some limitations. The organisations canvassed in this study were all HPCA-accredited hospices and non-profit organisations offering various forms of PC. While this seeming homogeneity could have contributed to the advancement of similar opinions in certain subthemes, the fact that not all hospices in this study offer identical clinical services could equally have led to a variation in the thinking of participants. Additionally, this study investigated the perceptions of senior hospice managers and not the views of donors or hospice patients and their families. To overcome these deficiencies, it is recommended that future studies should be undertaken with participants drawn from a group of hospices that offer identical PC services. Furthermore, it is suggested that future studies simultaneously investigate the propellers of organisational sustainability from the perspective of the management of hospices, donor organisations and the patients who receive services from hospices.

Conclusion

This study was to determine the propellers of sustainability in non-profit hospices in South Africa. Participants unanimously acknowledged the importance of healthy stakeholder relationships to organisational sustainability. In their unique circumstances, however, reference was made to the importance of honest and transparent communication with stakeholders that would breed trust. It is interesting that, although the study originally sought propellers of sustainability, for the sub-theme of stakeholders, the participants highlighted two inhibitors of the sustainability of hospices: Lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic and increased competition. Lockdowns linked to the COVID-19 pandemic hindered face-to-face relationship-building endeavours, while increased competition was linked to the rapid emergence of similar organisations that tap into the finite pool of donors in the NPO environment.

Regarding the sub-theme of organisational effectiveness, the study's findings revealed that all hospices placed a premium on organisational effectiveness as they strive for sustainability. The elements of innovativeness, leadership and a strategic approach to business and service quality were considered propellers of sustainability in the unique hospice environment in South Africa. Additionally, the study showed that a culture that encourages teamwork and increases staff commitment augurs well for the organisational sustainability of hospices. The importance of this practice is partly because such cultures allow individuals to take personal responsibility for the work that they perform. Concerning the staff sub-theme, the study participants highlighted staff members as major contributors to organisational sustainability. In terms of financial performance, the study found that the diversification of revenue sources and a measure of self-reliance for operational finance would help the studied South African hospices remain in business in the future. Of concern was that the participants indicated that their hospices have a low success rate in recovering funds from the medical aid schemes for services rendered to patients. This deficiency is increased by the limited inclination of hospices to exploit the commercial component of medical service delivery.

This study bears important theoretical and practical implications for the quest for improved hospice sustainability. Given the paucity of research in this area from a developing country perspective, this study affirms that hospice sustainability is aided by many factors that lie inside and outside the hospice. Consequently, the study sets the tone for meaningful academic discourse that pivots on both the internal and external factors of the organisational sustainability of hospices. From a practical perspective, managers of hospices should invest in driving a healthy corporate culture that includes recognising staff contributions and establishing effective stakeholder engagement mechanisms to maintain their hospices' functionality over time. Furthermore, the importance of their giving attention to issues of organisational effectiveness and the financial health of the hospice cannot be over-emphasised.

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