

Psychological Empowerment and Competitiveness of Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State

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Abstract: *This study investigated the relationship between psychological empowerment and competitiveness of Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State. A cross-sectional survey research design was adopted for the study. The unit of data generation was the organization and the corresponding level of analysis was macro-level. Consequently, the population of the study consisted of five operational plastics manufacturing companies in Rivers State. However, four managers were chosen from each of the five companies to represent their organizations, giving rise to a total of twenty respondents. A well-structured questionnaire was used as the instrument of data collection for the study. The data was analyzed using an inferential statistical technique with SPSS version 25.0 at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. Spearman's rank order (rho) correlation coefficients and p-values were calculated in order to ascertain the nature and direction of the proposed associations and for testing the stated hypotheses. The empirical findings revealed a positive significant relationship between psychological empowerment and measures (flexibility, innovation and timeliness) of organizational competitiveness. The study therefore concluded that there is a positive, significant relationship between psychological empowerment and competitiveness of plastics manufacturing companies in Rivers State. Finally, the study recommended that a sense of psychological empowerment should be fostered within plastics manufacturing firms by providing staff members with opportunities to meet their desire for competence, relatedness, and autonomy while working on interesting projects that present a satisfying level of challenge and increased responsibilities. This is necessary for their effective functioning and well-being and leads to increased organizational competitiveness.*

Keywords: *Psychological Empowerment, Organizational Competitiveness, Flexibility, Innovation, Timeliness*

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations are fervently seeking ways to fulfill their business desires and gain a competitive edge, as the business arena is filled with numerous uncertainties that organizations and

entrepreneurs must deal with (Obiekwe, Zeb-Obipi & Ejo-Orusa, 2019). Rapid technological advancements and global competition have altered the competitive environment in which the majority of companies operate (Ateke & Kalu, 2016). These changes in the business environment have forced organizations to review their management strategies in order to remain competitive in today's turbulent economy. Thus, forward-thinking companies are continuously on the lookout for reliable strategies that will assist them in navigating these turbulent situations and establishing a sustainable, clear competitive advantage over their competitors. The modern business environment is highly competitive and, as a result, the concept of competitiveness has gained much attention in recent business literature (Kingsley & Asawo, 2020; Shakirah & Shah, 2020).

Competitiveness is a relative and multidimensional concept (Ateke & Kalu, 2016), yet Akpotu, Asiegbu and Tamunosiki-Amadi (2013) suggest that competitive abilities are those distinct characteristics that enable a business venture to compete or amplify its desire to compete. Thus, competitiveness refers to a firm's distinct resources and capabilities that enable it to compete effectively within its sector (O'Sullivan & Abela, 2007) and expands its ability to sustain and strengthen its market position. Competitiveness ensures renewed or completely new approaches to achieving set goals and serves as a catalyst for creativity (Kambhampti, 2006), just as rivalry forces companies to explore new methods of increasing their production and expanding their business scope (Ricupero, 2004). Firm competitiveness has been a subject of discourse in business parlance, as business environments become more turbulent and complex (Roman, Piana, Lozano, Mello & Erdmann, 2012).

Due to the rapid growth and advancements in this competitive era, employees must respond quickly and flexibly to organizational changes (Jose & Mampily, 2015). The competitive environment of business necessitates psychological empowerment of employees. This requires individuals to take initiative for improvement, stimulate innovation and creativity, and promote maximum participation in order for the organization to operate efficiently and effectively (Baird & Wang, 2010; Meyerson & Dewettinck, 2012). Thus, the organization's continued viability and competitiveness is ensured (Baird & Wang, 2010). Employees who are innovative, creative, able to adapt to changes, efficient and proactive are always looked for by a competitive organization. These attitudes are engraved on an employee who is psychologically empowered (Aghaei & Savari, 2014). This has also been agreed with by previous researchers such as Spreitzer (1995); Spreitzer and Quinn (1999) and Zhang and Bartol (2010), who believe that psychological empowerment is the solution to workers being innovative, creative and always active in the organization.

Even though there is a volume of empirical studies on organizational competitiveness, the existing evidence suggests that research in this area is promising. Previously, organizational competitiveness has been characterized by being investigated in order to ascertain its relationship to other variables, such as knowledge management (Antonova, 2010), conflict management (Okoro, Okonkwo, Eze, Chigbo & Nwandu, 2010) and talent management (Kingsley & Asawo, 2020). However, this study distinguished itself from others by associating organizational competitiveness with psychological empowerment, on the grounds that organizations are believed to achieve competitiveness through psychological empowerment.

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the relationship between psychological empowerment and competitiveness of Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State. With respect to this purpose, the following objectives were drawn for the study:

1. To analyze the relationship between psychological empowerment and flexibility in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.
2. To examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovation in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.
3. To evaluate the relationship between psychological empowerment and timeliness in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

Based on the above objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the relationship between psychological empowerment and flexibility in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovation in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between psychological empowerment and timeliness in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State?

The conceptual framework showing the relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational competitiveness is displayed in Figure 1.

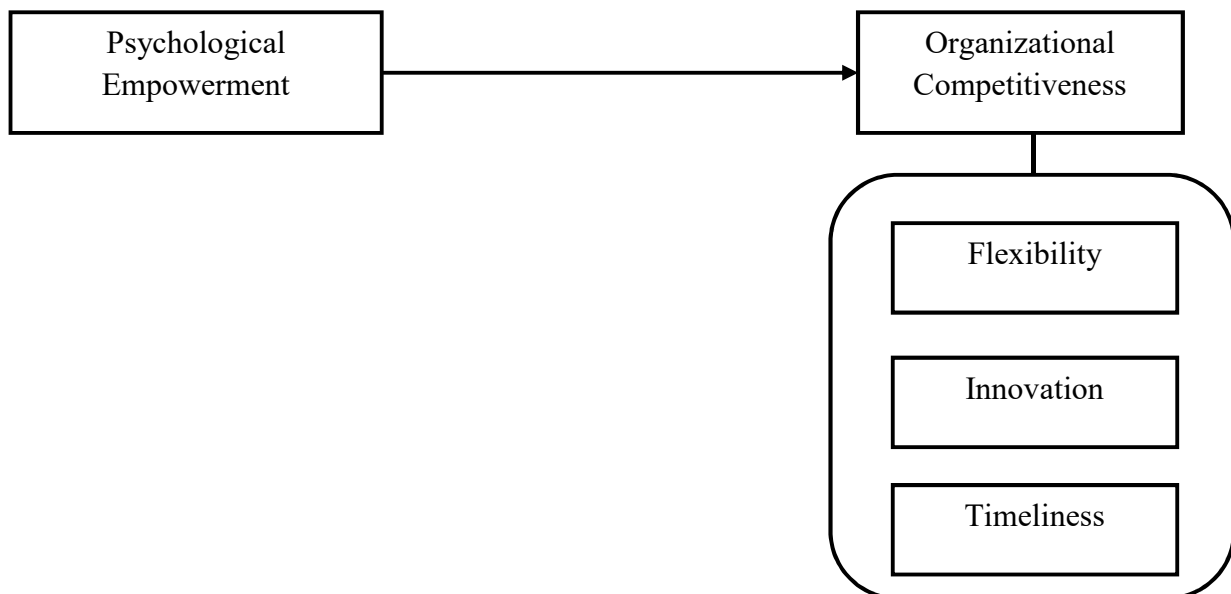


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework of Psychological Empowerment and Organizational Competitiveness.

Source: Desk Research, 2021.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Foundation

The theory of empowerment, self-determination theory, and resource-advantage theory of competition served as the theoretical underpinnings for this study and helped to explain the relationship between the study variables.

Theory of Empowerment

According to Kanter's (1993) theory of empowerment, if an organization is built in such a way that empowers people and provides access to job-related empowerment possibilities, the structure has a beneficial effect on employees and their performance at work. On the other hand, an organizational structure that lacks empowerment and access to job-related empowerment possibilities will have a detrimental effect on employees and their performance at work.

Self-determination Theory

Ryan and Deci (2000) developed the self-determination theory, which asserts that humans have three inherent needs that are necessary for their effective functioning and well-being: the desire for competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The Self-determination theory is predicated on the premise that human beings are active, growth-oriented organisms that are naturally inclined toward the integration of their psychological aspects into a unified sense of self and toward integration into broader social systems (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Resource-Advantage Theory of Competition

Hunt (1995) proposed this theory, which was derived from the resource-based view of the firm. Implicit in this theory is the notion that a firm's competitive advantage is generated by resource heterogeneity and that a resource's worth to a firm is measured in terms of its capacity to generate competitive differentiation and so improve performance outcomes (Hunt, 2000).

The Concept of Psychological Empowerment

The surge of interest in psychological empowerment coincides with a period of rapid change and global competition that necessitates employee initiative and innovation (Baek-Kyoo & Ji, 2010). Psychological empowerment refers to increased intrinsic motivation manifested in a set of four cognitions reflecting an individual's orientation to his work role: *meaningfulness* refers to the value placed on work judged in relation to an individual's own ideals or standards, *competence* refers to an individual's belief in his/her capacity to perform a job with skill, *self-determination* refers to an individual's belief concerning the degree of choice they have in initiating and performing work behaviors, and *impact* refers to the extent to which an individual believes he can influence outcomes at work (Aksel, Serinkan, Kiziloglu & Aksoya, 2013; Spreitzer, 1995). In a nut shell, psychological empowerment in an organization basically has to do with the employee's mindset or psyche, especially in relation to his role in the organization. Many refer to this state of mind as psychological empowerment (Spreitzer, 2007; Thomas & Velthouse, 1990).

Psychological empowerment considers intrinsic motivation within individuals' mindsets to be the primary driver of empowered action, rather than external managerial procedures (Dee, Henkin & Duemer, 2003). The psychological standpoint considers the employees' personal experience of their work as a unique cultural experience (Vacharakiat, 2008). Psychological empowerment

focuses on the belief that employees have about their role in relation to the organization. Psychological empowerment refers to the belief that motivates an individual to take an active role in controlling and influencing his or her job (Shakirah & Shah, 2020). Psychological empowerment is connected to employees' perceptions, which has an impact on their work attitudes and behaviours. They believe that behavior is the key to the organization's success. These employees are optimistic about communicating creative and innovative ideas in the face of difficulties in the organization (Stander & Rothmann, 2009). It is concerned with employee motivation and determination to successfully complete their work. The psychological empowerment characteristic of employees also enables employees to have professional judgment in solving unexpected problems (Spreitzer, 1995; Wang & Lee, 2016).

The Concept of Organizational Competitiveness

In literature, competitiveness has been described as a multidimensional and relative concept that changes with context and time (Nachiappan, Gunasekaran, Yu & Ning, 2014), which means that there is no generally accepted definition of competitiveness. At present, it is often used in different contexts, meaning different things to different researchers. According to Wilfred, Matoke, Yegon and Egessa (2014), organizational competitiveness refers to its ability to create more economic value than other competing firms. Organizational competitiveness relates to continuous presence in markets, profit making, and the ability to adapt production to demand. A company is said to be competitive if it is dynamic, able to respond to changes with versatility and flexibility (Houshang & Babakhanianb, 2015), innovative, and able to create economic value faster than its competitors (Wilfred et al., 2014). The organization that seeks to build competitive advantage has to well manage its core processes and resources -human, operations, technology and financial (Sadegh, Senin & Tourani, 2015) and strive for low cost leadership.

A firm's competitiveness is its economic strength against its rivals in the global marketplace, where products, services, people, and innovations move freely despite geographical boundaries (Chao-Hung & Li-Chang, 2010). Competitiveness is the ability to produce goods and services that meet the test of international competition. Furthermore, Schwab (2013) defined competitiveness as the set of strategies, policies, and factors that determine the level of productivity of an organization. According to Kareska and Marjanova (2012), competitiveness can be viewed from different perspectives, such as macro-competitiveness, which involves inter-country or inter-industry relations, and micro-competitiveness, which is at the organizational level and is the ability of an organization to participate and win in the field of global or local offers of particular products or services. However, Bris and Sorell (2015) believe that competitiveness is not about short-term growth, nor is it about competition. Rather, competitiveness is about the ability to generate sustainable long-term value. According to them, competitiveness does not necessarily equate to competition because companies can become more competitive by working together, for example, by achieving synergies through trade, technology, and processes, which in turn help their competitiveness and allow them to grow.

The measures of organizational competitiveness used in this study are flexibility, innovation, and timeliness, which were derived from the research of Kingsley and Asawo (2020); Roman, Piana, Lozano, Mello and Erdmann (2012).

Flexibility

Flexibility is the primary capability that enables organizations to deal with environmental variations, since it enables them to be more sensitive to change. According to the literature on organizational change, flexibility is one of the dynamic qualities that organizations use to deal with change (Wright & Snell, 2008; Zajac, Kraatz & Bresser, 2000). Flexibility has been characterized as an organization's capacity to change its policies, methods, or procedures rapidly and easily in response to the environment's diverse and changing demands (Rowe & Wright, 1997 cited in Madhani, 2013). Flexibility is a strategic organizational quality that enables organizations to shift quickly and effectively while incurring minimal restructuring costs. As a result, organizational responsiveness is predicated on the concept of flexibility (Antonio & José-Mara, 2009). According to Madhani (2013), organizational flexibility encompasses a range of distinct types defined by a collection of resources, procedures, and managerial functions.

Innovation

Innovation has been defined in several different ways in the literature. It is not only defined as the conceptualization of a new or significantly improved product or service, but also as the successful introduction of new methods, techniques, practices, or new or altered products and services (Ertürk, 2012). Innovation can also be considered as a process in which employees' knowledge and valuable ideas are transformed into new forms of added value for the organization and its stakeholders (Dasgupta & Gupta, 2009). Innovation entails identifying novel methods of accomplishing tasks and adjusting to public (customer) demand (Anyanwu, 2013). According to Kiveu (2017), innovation is important for companies to develop their processes, products/services, marketing, and organizational structures in order to remain competitive.

Timeliness

Organizations are formed when the task to be performed exceeds the capabilities of a single decision maker. Even when a single person can complete the task, he may not be able to produce a satisfactory response within the time limits imposed by the task. Timeliness is defined here as an organization's ability to respond within an allotted time. Timeliness is one of the crucial elements of decision-making (Ohia & Gabriel, 2019). If an organization cannot make a decision in a timely manner, the organization may lose out on customers, profits, and so much more. Having people within the organization that can make timely decisions that are relevant and in the best interest of the organization is vital to the continued success of the organization. Givoly and Palmon (1982), cited in Ohia and Gabriel (2019), argued that timeliness is a vital factor in determining the usefulness of financial information, customer information, and environmental information.

Psychological Employment and Organizational Competitiveness

Psychological empowerment is an effective approach to developing human resources to boost the competitive advantage of an organization. It is a process of improving perceptions of self-efficacy among organizational members to take an independent, autonomous decision on how to deal with a particular scenario (Lee & Koh, 2001, cited in Dhruba & Sunita, 2017). Psychological empowerment is generating a stage in which motivational constructs manifest in cognitions reflecting an employee's orientation to his or her job roles (Laschinger & Finegan, 2015; Dhruba & Sunita, 2017). It evaluates the extent to which employees think that they are free

to exercise their own initiative and judgment in executing their jobs (Thomas & Velthouse, 1990). It is a powerful management tool, which is used to exchange the shared vision that the group hopes to realize into common goals.

Furthermore, existing research clearly confirms, both theoretically and empirically, that there is a relationship between psychological empowerment and organizational competitiveness. Researchers express in their separate conclusions that highly committed employees feel self-motivated, highly spirited, and intensely focused on their assigned responsibility (Crystal-Jeanne, 2010; Flohr & Host, 2000). Given the empirical views of psychological empowerment and organizational competitiveness, the following hypotheses were outlined for examination:

H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between psychological empowerment and flexibility in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between psychological empowerment and innovation in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between psychological empowerment and timeliness in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional survey design, a type of quasi-experimental research. Additionally, the study was conducted in a non-contrived setting. The population of the study consisted of the five (5) operational Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State that are registered with the Manufacturing Association of Nigeria, Rivers/Bayelsa State Branch (Manufacturers Association of Nigeria [MAN], 2020). However, given that this study is domiciled at the macro level of analysis, the study only concentrated on staff members of the companies in the managerial cadre. Therefore, four (4) managers were chosen from each of the five (5) operational plastics manufacturing companies to represent their organizations because they are intellectually and officially qualified to give more accurate data needed for the study. The primary data was collected using a self-administered questionnaire that was designed in a multiple choice format with a 5-point Likert scale, which enhanced simplicity in being understood by respondents. The research questionnaire was validated using the content validity technique while its reliability was tested using Nunnally's (1978) Cronbach's alpha at a benchmark of 0.7 as a minimum criterion. The test showed coefficients of psychological empowerment, flexibility, innovation and innovation as 0.997, 0.916, 0.931 and 0.850 respectively. The data were analyzed using an inferential statistical technique with SPSS version 25.0 at a 95% confidence interval and a 0.05 level of significance. Spearman's rank order (rho) correlation coefficients and p-values were calculated in order to ascertain the nature and direction of the proposed associations and for testing the stated hypotheses.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Correlation Matrix for Meaningfulness and Measures of Organizational Competitiveness

			PSYCHO_ EMPOW	FLEXIBILITY	INNOVATION	TIMELINESS
Spearman's rho	PSYCHO_ EMPOW	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.880**	.912**	.892**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000	.000
		N	20	20	20	20
	FLEXIBILITY	Correlation Coefficient	.880**	1.000	.972**	.905**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000	.000
		N	20	20	20	20
	INNOVATION	Correlation Coefficient	.912**	.972**	1.000	.952**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.	.000
		N	20	20	20	20
	TIMELINESS	Correlation Coefficient	.892**	.905**	.952**	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.
		N	20	20	20	20

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

Source: Research Data, 2021

Table 1 presents the Spearman's rank order correlation test result of the three previously postulated research questions and bivariate hypothetical statements as follows:

Research Question 1: What is the relationship between psychological empowerment and flexibility in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State?

With respect to the relationship between psychological empowerment and flexibility, the study reported a positive correlation coefficient value (rho) of .880** which confirms that the relationship is positive and very strong.

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between psychological empowerment and flexibility in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

The test of significance showed p-value = .000 < 0.05 between psychological empowerment and flexibility. That is, the p-value of .000 obtained is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (Ho₁) earlier stated was rejected and the alternate accepted, and restated that there is significant relationship between psychological empowerment and flexibility in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

Research Question 2: What is the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovation in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State?

With respect to the relationship between psychological empowerment and innovation, the study reported a positive correlation coefficient value (rho) of .912** which confirms that the relationship is positive and very strong.

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between psychological empowerment and innovation in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

The test of significance showed $p\text{-value} = .000 < 0.05$ between psychological empowerment and innovation. That is, the $p\text{-value}$ of .000 obtained is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{02}) earlier stated was rejected and the alternate accepted, and restated that there is significant relationship between psychological empowerment and innovation in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: What is the relationship between psychological empowerment and timeliness in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State?

With respect to the relationship between psychological empowerment and timeliness, the study reported a positive correlation coefficient value (ρ) of .892** which confirms that the relationship is positive and very strong.

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between psychological empowerment and timeliness in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

The test of significance showed $p\text{-value} = .000 < 0.05$ between psychological empowerment and timeliness. That is, the $p\text{-value}$ of .000 obtained is less than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_{03}) earlier stated was rejected and the alternate accepted, and restated that there is significant relationship between psychological empowerment and timeliness in Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings indicated a positive significant correlation between psychological empowerment and competitiveness of Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State. The study's findings indicate that psychological empowerment has a significant positive effect on the competitiveness of Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State. This means that the more psychologically empowered staff members are, the more competitive the Plastics Manufacturing Companies will be.

The findings of this study corroborate Kahreh's (2011) research on the effect of employee empowerment on firms' ability to sustain a competitive advantage in Iran's financial services sector. His study found that empowerment of employees has a significant positive effect on competitive advantage and also on the primary components of competitive advantage for firms operating in the services sector. Additionally, the current study corroborated the work of Flohr and Host (2000). Employee empowerment, according to Flohr and Host (2000), results in increased organizational effectiveness and employee well-being. Additionally, they claimed that empowerment has been shown to increase efficiency and lower costs on an assembly line in a transmission plant. Additionally, empowerment of employees results in increased job satisfaction, involvement, loyalty, performance, and faster service delivery to customers, all of which contribute to the organization's competitiveness.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The idea which necessitated this study was to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and competitiveness of Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State. From the data generated and analyzed, the purpose of the study was achieved as it was empirically discovered that a strong positive and significant relationship exists between psychological empowerment and the measures of organizational competitiveness which include flexibility, innovation and timeliness. The study therefore concluded that there is a positive significant relationship between psychological empowerment and competitiveness of Plastics Manufacturing Companies in Rivers State.

Based on findings, the study recommends that a sense of psychological empowerment should be fostered within plastics manufacturing firms by providing staff members with opportunities to meet their desire for competence, relatedness, and autonomy while working on interesting projects that present a satisfying level of challenge and increased responsibilities. This is necessary for their effective functioning and well-being and leads to increased organizational competitiveness.

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